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Redevelopment and the Politics of Place in Bayview-Hunters Point

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**Redevelopment and the Politics of Place in  
Bayview-Hunters Point**

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Bayview-Hunters Point, a neighborhood in southeastern San Francisco, has played a central role in San Francisco's urban growth and its tradition of progressive social movements, and has occupied a key site within broader regional and global geographies of people and power. In the 1960s, as the area became a predominantly African-American neighborhood, dominant representations increasingly depicted Bayview-Hunters Point as separate and distinct from the rest of the city, usually articulated through cultural or racial differences. These representations emerged even as Bayview-Hunters Point residents began building strong political organizations that struggled with city agencies to improve the neighborhood. Today's redevelopment discourse builds on these older racialized ideas of Bayview-Hunters Point through the notion that the area needs to be culturally or socially integrated with the rest of the city. This discourse affects the redevelopment process in terms of what kinds of development projects are prioritized and how they are constructed. Bringing the political history of Bayview-Hunters Point – both as a social landscape and as an idea and set of meanings – to bear on contemporary redevelopment debates supports the argument for greater justice and civic responsibility on the part of city agencies in this process.

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## **Introduction**

In 1963, the writer James Baldwin visited Bayview-Hunters Point, a neighborhood in the southeast corner of San Francisco, and made a short film. Baldwin interviewed the area's growing number of African-American residents about their experiences of racism in the city, documenting the lives of people faced with limited job opportunities, a threatening police presence, industrial toxicity, and substandard housing and public infrastructure. Driving into the neighborhood at night, Baldwin gazed from his car window and, commenting on the marginalization of the place and its inhabitants in a city known for its liberal ideals, said, "This is the San Francisco America pretends does not exist" (KQED 1963).

Decades of official and media reports have represented Bayview-Hunters Point as existing apart from the rest of San Francisco, despite the formative contribution of its denizens to the city's economic growth and political histories. The area's built and social landscape has been confined within the notion of an "inner city" that, as Steven Gregory argues "has served as the dominant trope for representing the urban black experience in the post-civil rights era" (1998, 5). As expressed by a 1987 planning document, "[Bayview-Hunters Point] is part of San Francisco, yet it is not typical of San Francisco" (San Francisco Planning Department 1987, 22). This distinction between the Bayview-Hunters Point and "San Francisco" emerged alongside the increasing segregation and impoverishment of African-Americans and other racial minorities in the southeast sector, indicating how ideas of place- far from simple, neutral descriptions- are entangled in US racial formations (Gregory 1998, Self 2003, Davila 2004).

This paper argues for re-imagining the place of Bayview-Hunters Point within San Francisco urban history, foregrounding the ways the area has been integral to, rather than separate from, San Francisco's political economy and its tradition of progressive social movements. As a commercial hub and a shipyard – a place of many comings and goings – Bayview-Hunters Point was for a long time a nodal point within urban, regional, and global circuitries of people and power. I show how the Bayview's<sup>1</sup> industrial landscape and working-class residents formed a key part of the economic base of the city and region. Even as manufacturing and other working-class jobs left the area, especially after the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard shut down in 1974, Bayview-Hunters Point served as a dumping ground or sink for toxic industries<sup>2</sup>, such as a power plant and a massive sewage treatment plant, also housing hundreds of brownfields and other post-industrial toxic “hot spots.” These land uses have materialized through Bayview resident's disproportionate experience of environmentally-related health problems – a set of deadly but often unrecognized relationships to the broader urban and regional economy.

Since the 1960s, powerful representations have depicted the Bayview as fundamentally distinct from the rest of the city, binding the area's physical decay, poverty, and other urban problems together with a perceived cultural and racial difference. These representations reinforced the marginalization of the place and its inhabitants even as Bayview activists were struggling to hold city agencies accountable for discrimination and systemic neglect of their neighborhood. Indeed, during the 1960s, Bayview residents began forming strong political organizations, influencing city politics and engaging in regional and state-wide anti-poverty movements. This dynamic shows how ideas of place are political, and that part of understanding

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<sup>1</sup> I switch between Bayview-Hunters Point and “the Bayview” as it is often called.

<sup>2</sup> The word “sink” is in reference to Joel Tarr's book, *The Search for the Ultimate Sink: Urban Pollution in Historical Perspective* (1996).

the relationship between place and power is to identify “the ideological labors that place is made to perform” (Nassy-Brown 2005, 31).

The place of Bayview-Hunters Point within San Francisco history and geography is very much at stake in the present moment, as the area is in the midst of a number of large-scale development projects with far-reaching effects. While the social and economic struggles of many Bayview residents have remained remarkably similar to those of the 1960s, today the Bayview is at the center of San Francisco politics, and the meaning of the place – to its denizens, to city politicians, real estate developers and other potential investors – is changing. The former Hunters Point Naval Shipyard and thousands of acres of the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood are currently two of the largest redevelopment projects in the city’s history. The environmental remediation of the toxic shipyard is the most expensive naval-led restoration project in the country (although it is contracted out to a number of private companies), and it lays the groundwork for a private home developer, Lennar Inc., to build 10,500 housing units, commercial and business park spaces, and potentially a new football stadium – a \$2 billion dollar development project (Lennar Urban 2011).

Tax-increment financing from these profit-generating projects will ostensibly go to fund community-development programs like workforce training, and the project promises thousands of jobs to current Bayview residents, who struggle with unemployment levels over twenty percent<sup>3</sup> (Arce 2010). However, as a recent Civil Grand Jury report notes, the policy of local hire on Hunters Point construction projects “seems to have been largely ignored” (Civil Grand Jury 2011). Moreover, the largest industry in the future Bayview-Hunters Point will most likely be in the “greentech economy”, such as at the proposed climate change think tank center on the

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<sup>3</sup> Unemployment is close to fifty percent among the African-American population (Arce 2010)

shipyard or the three million square feet of “clean” tech research and development space planned for the shipyard development project (Civil Grand Jury 2011, Lennar Urban 2011). Current Bayview residents are unlikely to get many of these jobs.

In short, much is at stake in this period of transformation. An expanding white collar sector, which is part of an longer transition away from industrial jobs toward service sector work in San Francisco since the 1970s (Fainstein 1983), promises very little future employment to most Bayview residents, who are leaving the city in large numbers, priced out of their homes and unable to find jobs.<sup>4</sup> Many residents fear they will be displaced through a process of gentrification, and the steady decline in the city’s African-American population appears as evidence that this is coming to pass. As Willie Ratcliff, the editor of the *SF Bayview* newspaper and a former shipyard worker and migrant from Texas, said to me in his offices on Third Street, the main commercial artery of the Bayview, “Are you going to build something over there [pointing to the direction of the shipyard] or are you going to take care of these people over here with some of that money?”<sup>5</sup> He raises questions as to who actually benefits from today’s redevelopment plans and whether the livelihoods of current residents are further marginalized through these projects.

In this charged context, ideas of place and histories of its present cannot be separated from the politics of redevelopment and different visions of what the future of Bayview-Hunters Point ought to look like. For example, although most Bayview residents will not be able to afford homes at the new shipyard development, Lennar Inc. and the city’s planning department celebrate the area’s African-American presence through careful historical sections in reports and urban design features planned for the shipyard development. Lennar includes “Afro-centric”

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<sup>4</sup> See “Black Population Drops to 3.9% in San Francisco” (Lyons 2011), and “Report of the San Francisco Mayor’s Task Force on African American Out-migration” (2009).

<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise attributed, all quotes are from interviews.

design elements in its master development plan (Lennar Urban 2008) and promises an “International African Marketplace” as part of the community benefits agreement. On its website, one of the highlighted mock-ups of the newly developed shipyard is a set of thatched-roof huts, with a tribal-esque aesthetic [see fig. 1], ostensibly celebrating the *African* heritage of the Bayview’s black residents, ignoring the more recent history. Most black San Franciscans or their older family members migrated from the South, escaping slavery and Jim Crow to labor at the Hunters Point Shipyard during World War II.

Lennar’s designs are an example of “marketing culture for economic development” in ways that favor “ethnicity cleansed from ethnic memories and politics”, which Arlene Davila has linked to neoliberal urban development projects in El Barrio/East Harlem (Davila 2004, 11). Davila explores the “Latinization” of El Barrio/East Harlem in New York City, but her observations also elucidate some of the complex dynamics within Lennar’s uses of Afro-centric design plans at the shipyard. Indeed, the Lennar development project is much like the neoliberal wave of city building that Davila and others identify across the country (Gandy 2003, Davila 2004, Hackworth 2007, among others) in favoring privately, rather than publicly, financed community development and construction projects, and in which profits trump social equality. In this context, culture becomes a marketable industry, even as it is at the same time a meaningful set of social practices and identities [see fig. 1]. The issue, as Davila writes, “is the meaning of the ostensible ‘Latinization’ of U.S. cities when the displacement of Latino populations is simultaneous and even expedited by this very process” (2004, 2). This problem is likewise confronted in Bayview-Hunters Point today.



Fig. 1 – Design for Hunters Point Shipyard (Lennar Urban 2011)



In the following pages I first explore some of the Bayview's historical connections, looking at key moments in nineteenth and twentieth century history and emphasizing the many ways that the Bayview and its inhabitants have been important to the economic, social, and political life of San Francisco, as well as within regional and global political geographies. My anchoring point is WWII, as I foreground the importance of militarization to urban growth patterns and social histories in San Francisco and the Bay Area region. This selective history relies on primary documents and secondary sources from the San Francisco Public Library (SFPL) and the National Archives in San Bruno. The second section highlights the emergence of strong political organizations in Bayview-Hunters Point in the 1960s, contrasting their struggles to make the Bayview a better place to live with the simultaneous rise of ideas of the place as different from and socially marginal to the rest of the city. This section draws from city planning reports and news media sources from the SFPL and the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. The last section of the paper reflects on the role of historical memory in the current moment of urban change. Through the paper I include observations from current residents from interviews

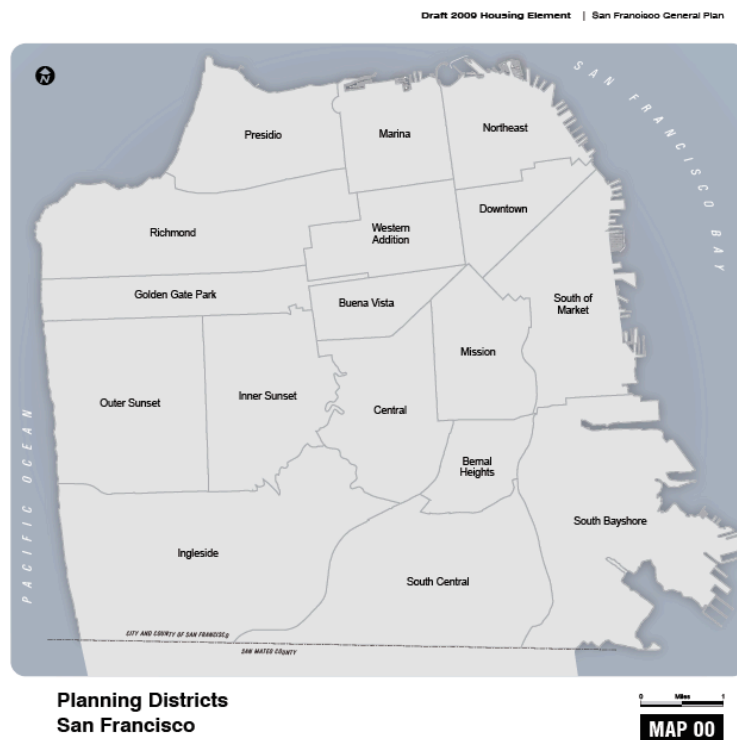
conducted as part of fieldwork for my broader dissertation project on environmental politics in the Bayview.

## **Historical Geographies**

Bayview-Hunters Point occupies the southeastern portion of San Francisco, with the Hunters Point Shipyard jutting out into the San Francisco Bay, a feature that earned it the name “Beacon Point” from seventeenth century Spanish explorers (see fig. 2). As a term commonly used to designate the area as a geographical unit, the hyphenated phrase “Bayview-Hunters Point” emerged only in the 1960s. Prior to that, residents tended to refer to the names of smaller neighborhood units, such as Silver Terrace, Hunters Point, Bayview, and Bret Harte (Kelley and Verplanck 2010). For decades city planning reports referred to the area as the “South Bayshore”, and only in 2010 changed its official name to “Bayview-Hunters Point”, responding to pressure from neighborhood activists.

Fig. 2

San Francisco Planning Districts<sup>6</sup> (San Francisco Planning Department Online Map Library 2011).



## Industrialization and the Military

As Roger Lotchin (1992) argues in *Fortress California 1910-1961: From Warfare to Welfare*, urban development in twentieth century California became deeply entangled with militarization and the growth of defense-related industries in the West, beginning after the Spanish-American war. Indeed, as US political and commercial interests adopted imperial ambitions in Asian regions, particularly the Philippines, the Bay Area became strategically

<sup>6</sup> Bayview-Hunters Point is still referred to here as “South Bayshore”

important to US military interests. In the 1920s, the region became known as “the American Singapore”, referring to the British base for securing its imperial and commercial presence in Asia (Cherny and Issel 1981, 63).

Bayview, Hunters Point and surrounding areas became a key site within this expanding geography of war and commerce. As Gray Brechin (2006) argues in *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*, the South of Market area, of which Bayview and Hunters Point were a part, had become a center of heavy industry after the Gold Rush, particularly from the large number of foundries that supplied mining equipment to the Sierra Nevadas and to mining operations across the globe. In the late nineteenth century many of these industries turned to weapons production and shipbuilding, particularly after the Spanish-American War (Brechin 2006). The Hunters Point dry docks, built in the late 1860s with funds from “Comstock king” William Ralston (who made his fortune in the Comstock Lode) became an important part of this war-related industrialization. As the largest dry dock on the West Coast, it was purchased by the Navy in the 1920s and leased to Pittsburgh-based Charles Schwab’s Bethlehem Steel Company, which by that time occupied a large swath of the southern waterfront. After the bombing in Pearl Harbor the Navy reclaimed the Hunters Point shipyard (Brechin 2006, Kelley and Verplanck 2010).

For San Francisco elites after World War I, defense-related industrialization in the South of Market area, and in Hunters Point in particular, was essential to the stability of the city’s economic growth. By the early twentieth century, industrial development in the Bay Area had shifted away from the city to suburban areas in East and South Bay, where land was cheaper and the working class less organized (Walker 2004). Indeed, by the 1920s, as Cherny and Issel (1981) argue, San Francisco civic boosters, responding to growing labor radicalization in the

city, turned toward tourism and the military as economic growth strategies (Cherny and Issel 1981, 63). The Civic League of Improvement Clubs and Associations in San Francisco submitted a report to the US Congress in 1920 making a case for Hunters Point to be the new operating base for the Pacific Fleet, arguing that “circumstances dictate that in the interest of the welfare of San Francisco and its future development the entire community must utilize all of its energy to secure the selection of HUNTER’S POINT” (Civic League Report 1920).

Just as the dry docks were a center of ship-building in the US West, Butchertown, a designated area for meat packing and related industries along the waterfront, just north of Hunters Point, dominated the regional economy of cattle and meat-related products. It was the largest meat-packing district west of Chicago, and sent its products to markets across the country (Iglar 2001). Both meat packing and ship repair industries benefited from the lack of urban development and the relative distance from downtown San Francisco<sup>7</sup> (this distance largely because of poor transportation). The lack of transportation between the area and downtown San Francisco also meant that most residents, who by the late nineteenth century were primarily Southern European emigrants from Italy, Portugal, and Malta, worked manual labor jobs in local industries, such as in slaughterhouses, at the shipyards, and on truck farms (Kelley and Verplanck 2010, 65). However, the industries and real estate in the area were owned by some of the wealthiest capitalists in San Francisco, such as William Ralston; Irving Murray Scott, who owned Union Iron Works, one of San Francisco’s largest industrial operations and maker of warships; and banker and oil magnate William Crocker. It was also the site of national companies, like Pittsburgh-based Bethlehem Steel and the cattle company Miller & Lux, with broad geographies of capital circulation (Kelley and Verplanck 2010, Brechin 2006).

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<sup>7</sup> This was particularly the case for Butchertown, an area which in the words of one city health inspector, produced “the most revolting and noisome of effluvia” (Iglar 2001, 142).

The first city zoning ordinance, in 1921, concentrated heavy industry in the Bayview and Hunters Point areas, solidifying its growth as an industrial zone. As the city's zoning policies developed over the course of the twentieth century, the area became a patchwork of residential and industrial land parcels, many of these located directly next to each other, facilitating the high rates of industrial-related illness that residents of the area have suffered until this day. Only today, in the context of large-scale residential and commercial development, is the planning department reevaluating these zoning policies (San Francisco Planning Department 2010).

As recently as 1973, an economic development study for the Hunters Point shipyard highlighted qualities beneficial for heavy industry, writing that "San Francisco cannot allow such prime land on the shores of the Bay, handy to freeways for trucking and deep water for shipping, with an abundant labor pool ready, go to waste" (Alioto 1973). Thirty years later, the planning department instead emphasizes qualities that make for a desirable residential and commercial environment, writing that "South Bayshore has many positive features: a varied topography, a shoreline, a warm and sunny climate, a small pedestrian-oriented building scale, and at times a certain charm to its unkempt character" (San Francisco Planning Department 2010). The problem, it goes on to lament, "is that many of its positive features become overwhelmed by such things as unattractive building features, intrusive truck and automobile traffic, and 'blank' spaces of vacant land that lack definition" (San Francisco Planning Department 2010). Much of what is today understood as "blighting factors" or as underdeveloped space in Bayview-Hunters Point contain long histories. These spaces are the products of industrial development which was facilitated by the state and which supported the urban and regional economy for a long time.

## World War II and the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard

World War II brought profound changes to the physical and social landscape of the Bay Area, as military bases and related industries expanded in Hunters Point and other places around the Bay, including Richmond, Vallejo, Martinez, Oakland, Alameda, and Treasure Island. Known as “boomtowns”, tens of thousands of new jobs opened up in the surge to supply a wartime arsenal (Archibald 1947). These industries drew on large numbers of African-Americans still escaping Jim Crow laws in the south, in fact redirecting the “Great Migration” from northern industrial cities like Chicago and Detroit to the West Coast (Broussard 1993). The shipyard eventually became San Francisco’s largest industrial employer – on the eve of its closing in 1974, an economic development report put out by the Mayor’s Office estimated a loss to the city’s economy of \$313 million (Alioto 1973).

Because of jobs created by the naval shipyard, between 1940 and 1945 San Francisco’s African-American population increased by over 600% and constituted one-third of the shipyard’s 18,000 workers in 1945 (Broussard 1993, 4). Residential discrimination in the city increased during the war years, and most African-American newcomers moved to the Fillmore District or to Hunters Point (Broussard 1993). One of these emigrants, today the famed poet Maya Angelou, recalls the Fillmore as “San Francisco’s Harlem” in her memoir *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Yet despite the well-known progressivism of San Francisco, particularly its storied labor history, from Angelou’s perspective this idea of the place rang hollow. As she recollects, “San Francisco would have sworn on the Golden Gate Bridge that racism was missing from the heart of their air-conditioned city. But they would have been sadly mistaken” (2003 [1969], 213). Her lament was confirmed by the displacement of thousands of African-Americans from the Fillmore District during the urban renewal projects of the 1960s (and many moved to Bayview-Hunters

Point). Angelou's experiences also echo the interviewees of James Baldwin's film, who speak strongly about their experiences of racism in Hunters Point in the 1960s. As one black man said into Baldwin's microphone, "They talk about the south, the south is not half as bad as San Francisco. The white man, he's not, he's not taking advantage of you out in public like they doing down in Birmingham. But he's killing you with that pencil and paper brother" (KQED 1963).

The Hunters Point Shipyard also emerged as a focal point within the expanding geography of military nuclearism around the US and the globe. In 1945, the first atomic bombs set sail for Japan from the shipyards, and nuclear waste came home to Hunters Point in 1946, after the famed Able and Baker explosions at the Bikini Atoll. Many of the seventy-nine warships irradiated in those South Pacific explosions were decommissioned at Hunters Point, where radioactive materials were unloaded and dumped into landfills on site or out to sea (Davis 2002). Experimentation with decontamination of those warships led to the Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory (NRDL), which operated on the base until 1969. The NRDL became, with its toxic landfills, part of an emerging national nuclear industry, as its scientists rotated among and shared experimental data with other centers of nuclearism, such as Lawrence Livermore Lab in Berkeley and Los Alamos in New Mexico.

In August of 2001, a former librarian at the NRDL paid a visit to the Hunters Point Shipyard Restoration Advisory Board (RAB), a community forum set up by Bayview activist Espanola Jackson in 1993 to monitor the Navy's environmental remediation of the shipyard. The librarian, Janice Gale, told the RAB audience of having surgery for the three tumors in her carotid artery, and went on to describe the lack of health and safety regulations for NRDL workers, which she connected to her cancers. She recalls starting her job at the NRDL in April of



1948, “and in September all of a sudden we had a badge and a Geiger counter so that when we left in the afternoon, we would pass the Geiger counter. But prior to that time, there was nothing, at least in that building.” Referring to the five months she spent working at the lab with little knowledge of its dangers and little oversight of her health, Gale told the RAB, “I think that’s a scandal and unfortunate” (Restoration Advisory Board 2001). The exposure to radiation from work on the shipyard is well-known to Bayview activists engaged in the oversight of the environmental restoration process on the shipyard today. They are, as one long-time activist told me, “the first round of deaths.” (He refers to the toxic exposures near the shipyard today as “the second round of deaths”).

The contaminated shipyard is a focal point within the broader geography of toxic waste in the Bayview. In 2004, a collaboration of a number of environmental justice groups in the area put together a report, “Pollution, Health, Environmental Racism and Injustice”, documenting 100 brownfield sites, 187 leaking underground fuel tanks, and more than 124 hazardous waste handlers regulated by the US EPA in the Bayview (Bayview Hunters Point Mothers Environmental Health & Justice Committee<sup>8</sup> 2004,5). The report concludes that Bayview-Hunters Point “occupies only 6% of the city’s total area...but shoulders most of the burden of San Francisco’s pollution” (BVHP Mothers 2004, 38).

This predominance of toxic land uses in the Bayview contributes to an environment where health problems are drastically more serious than in other parts of the city and even the state. Rates of cervical and breast cancer are double those for San Francisco as a whole, and hospitalization rates for congestive heart failure, hypertension, diabetes and emphysema are more than three times the state average (BVHP Mothers 2004). The area has the highest infant

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<sup>8</sup> Hereafter BVHP Mothers

mortality rate in California, despite the fact that San Francisco itself has one of the lowest infant mortality rates among comparable US cities (McCormick and Holding 2004). While zoning maps facilitated industrialization in the Bayview, this economic land use worked with a discourse of racial and cultural difference, as discussed below, in ways that sedimented industrial toxins in both land and bodies, producing both the significant health disparities and environmental justice activism in the Bayview today.

### **The Politics of Place**

In the 1960s, as many former Fillmore residents were moving to Bayview-Hunters Point, residents of European descent began moving out of the area, a mobility facilitated by federal programs, subsidies, and other incentives encouraging suburban homeownership, benefits systematically denied to African-Americans (Lipsitz 1995, Self 2003, Avila 2004). The 1970 US census shows that the white population in Bayview-Hunters Point declined by 59% during the 1960s (San Francisco Planning Department 1970). During this same decade the African-American population increased from 46% to 72% of the population in that area<sup>9</sup> (San Francisco Planning Department 1987). This demographic shift coincided with increasing unemployment, as the Navy, then the city's largest industrial employer, slowly shut down its operations. In 1968, unemployment in the Bayview was estimated to be 15%, compared with 4.4% in the Bay Area region (Bayview Hunters Point Model Neighborhood 1968).

During the 1960s, Bayview residents formed strong political organizations that struggled to alleviate the poverty and racism experienced by residents of the area. In 1964, President

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<sup>9</sup> The 1950 US Census shows that African-Americans were only 21% of the population in the Bayview even after the war, increasing to 46% by 1960 (SF Planning Department 1987).

Johnson declared the War on Poverty (WOP), and San Francisco's Economic Opportunity Office, established to bring WOP programs and funds to the city, was set up in September of that year. Prior to the political opportunities created by WOP policies, Bayview residents organized largely through church groups (Naval Facilities Engineering Command 2000). During the 1960s, Bayview activists engaged this new political landscape in an attempt to realize the promises of the WOP in San Francisco, and created their own political agendas. Some of these anti-poverty organizations included the Inter-Block Council, which coordinated nine block organizations throughout Hunters Point, and the Area Planning Board (APB), which approved all "poverty funded" programs in the area. The Bay Area Neighborhood Development Foundation in Hunters Point, also set up with federal funds, was a consumer protection service, and it supported older organizations like the Neighborhood Co-op Supermarket, a consumer cooperative that began in 1960 after Bayview residents targeted neighborhood retailers for discriminatory hiring practices and low-quality merchandise. Much of the political organizing at the time was led by a group of women known as "the Big Five"<sup>10</sup> because of their powerful role in city politics.

These and other groups struggled with what they saw as the city's unwillingness to implement anti-poverty programs and policies in a substantive way. As early as 1965, Bayview activist Willie Thompson had already penned "Enemy of the Poor: A Report of the Struggle of the War on Poverty in San Francisco", describing the ways San Francisco Mayor John Shelley's office had excluded Bayview residents from decision-making capacities regarding the city's anti-poverty policies and programs. Thompson's report shows how a Bayview-led city-wide coalition, Citizens United Against Poverty (CUAP) formed in reaction to Shelley's top-down anti-poverty approach. CUAP fought successfully to open decision-making roles to members of

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<sup>10</sup> The Big Five included Julia Commer, Osceola Washington, Ruth Williams, Rosie Williams, and Elouise Westbrook.

the city's four target areas<sup>11</sup>, trying to hold the city to the WOP standard of "maximum feasible participation." This included setting a policy that the majority of the city's EOC board would come from the target neighborhoods (Thompson 1965).

These organizations and others also worked to hold city agencies accountable to Bayview residents. They focused especially on the Housing Authority, which oversaw public housing developments in the area. In March of 1966, sixty Bayview residents packed a Housing Authority Commission meeting to protest the unfair eviction of a young tenant, Ollie Wallace, and his two-year old daughter from the Hunters Point housing units for rent delinquency. After the housing commissioner refused to comment on the eviction at the meeting, residents blocked him from leaving the room, while the chairman of Bayview-Hunters Point's Inter-Block Organization, George Earl, read a telegram of grievances from other tenants of the housing projects (*Spokesman* 1966a). Later that year, the Hunters Point Tenants Union led a successful city-wide rent strike against the Housing Authority, winning the right to strike for needed improvements in public housing as well as a quarter of a million dollars to renovate older parts of Hunters Point (*Spokesman* 1967). Another organization, the Bayview-Hunters Point Community Development Corporation, was formed in 1965 through the leadership of Osceola Washington, and it battled the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency during the late 1960s to include Hunters Point tenants in decisions regarding the redevelopment of those housing projects.

In short, Bayview activists asserted a strong presence in city politics, locating the source of their neighborhood's problems in downtown spaces like the Housing Authority Commission meeting or city hall. They saw the poverty and dilapidation of the built environment in the

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<sup>11</sup> The four target neighborhoods for anti-poverty programs in San Francisco were Bayview-Hunters Point, the Western Addition, Chinatown, and the Mission.

Bayview as a result of discrimination in broader city policies and agencies and fought hard to address this vulnerability through neighborhood organizations. These groups also engaged in national and state politics and formed alliances with other political movements across the state. In 1965, Bayview delegates traveled to Fresno to participate in the California Federation of the Poor convention and marched with Cesar Chavez's Delano Grape Strikers in the Central Valley. Bayview-Hunters Point newspaper *The Spokesman* ran ads throughout that spring and summer to collect food for the farm workers' strike kitchen (1966b). However, during the same time period, dominant representations of Bayview-Hunters Point, in official reports, news media and popular culture, depicted the area as isolated from the rest of the city, not as a result of economic or political inequalities as Bayview activists were arguing, but due to its perceived cultural and racial difference.

In 1969, during the famed "summer of love", the San Francisco TV channel KPIX 5 ran a five-part series on Hunters Point titled, "Our Home, The Ghetto". Written three years after the 1966 Bayview riots, which protested the murder of a 15-year old black teenager, Matthew Johnson, by a San Francisco police officer, and in the context of Bobby Seale and Huey Newton organizing against poverty and police violence across the bay in Oakland, the news series described itself as taking its viewer "inside the black community...here in Hunters Point" to investigate "a new culture of black brotherhood." As commentator Mike Lee informs the viewer,

This is something that has been brewing here in Hunters Point for some time, but has yet to make the headlines, perhaps because it has yet to make trouble. [...] But if you really want to know, you have to go down in their world, to meet them, talk about their problems, on their terms and in their language. And that is what we're going to do this week (KPIX 1969).

The KPIX series distinguishes Hunters Point through a racial discourse of fundamental difference. Mike Lee's idea of the neighborhood is of a separate "world" where he must take the racially unmarked viewer (presumably not a Hunters Point resident herself) in order to

understand reasons for the era's urban unrest. The inequalities experienced by Bayview residents are not linked to broader city policies, but explained through "cultural" differences and individual behavior, all located within Hunters Point itself. As Steven Gregory (1998) shows in *Black Corona: Race and the Politics of Place in an Urban Community*, this discursive separation between ideas of the "inner city" and "mainstream" American life, which emerged during the 1960s through "culture of poverty" explanations, and again in the 1990s around welfare reform debates, imagined places like Bayview-Hunters Point as discrete spaces, generative of their own social problems. KPIX commentator Mike Lee enacts this discourse through the notion of taking an ostensible "outside" viewer "inside the black community" a place understood as a container of cultural and racial difference (the "new" black brotherhood), and a (separate, discrete) world that one has to "go down" into. The viewer/voyeur of KPIX reporter Mike Lee's journey "into" the Bayview is not a neutral social position, but a (white) racialized subjectivity produced through the perceived "otherness" of Bayview.<sup>12</sup>

As Gregory argues, "This discourse of inner-city pathology popularized in the mass media, depoliticized the problem of black poverty and related social inequalities by locating their origins in the moral economy of the isolated 'ghetto' household, rather than in the political economy of the greater society" (1998, 6). In contrast to the KPIX series, in the aftermath of the events of 1966, Bayview activists had identified the lack of jobs, rather than an emerging urban sub-culture, as the underlying reason for the riots sparked by Matthew Johnson's murder (*Spokesman* 1966c). The problem of jobs was a structural problem with political solutions,

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<sup>12</sup> In 1972, the *San Francisco Chronicle* ran a similar five-part series on the area, written "for the benefit of curious outsiders" (Kelley and Verplanck 2010). The first article in the series, "Inside Hunters Point," and the fifth article, "Outside's Impact on Hunters Point", likewise articulate the binary Gregory identifies as the "inner city" and "mainstream America", which can be also thought as a gendered relationship between the neighborhood and city hall.

something the city eventually tried to address with the construction of the India Basin light industrial park in 1970<sup>13</sup> (*Spokesman* 1965b).

The concept of the Bayview as separate from the rest of the city, and where social problems, and in particular, racial difference, are located rather than where they articulate, also reverberates through decades of city planning reports. A planning report responding to the 1970 census data sums up its analysis of the “South Bayshore” by foregrounding the new racial composition of the area in conjunction with low income and low educational attainment, arguing for “the continuation of programs to deal with the specific needs of the South Bayshore community” (San Francisco Planning Department 1970, 35). This notion of the specificity of the Bayview was linked to ideas of racial difference, as seen in the Model Cities application of 1968, which includes “heavy in-migration of minority persons” in its summary on “the factors and forces which made Hunters Point the area of social and physical blight.” It also notes that “the poor, unable to fit into economic and social patterns of the larger city, had little respect for housing resources of the City... and they treated their property accordingly” (Bayview Hunters Point Model Neighborhood 1968, 3-4), linking the physical decay of the area with behaviors of its (otherwise racialized) residents.

A study titled “Issues Report for the South Bayshore Study Area” from 1987 likewise emphasizes that the area is still “isolated from the rest of the city”, explaining that this isolation is a consequence of its topography, “semi-developed character”, as well as its social and economic problems. The lengthy report details land use patterns, public health disparities, transportation and housing issues, and includes a particular section on the “Characteristics of the

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<sup>13</sup> Many Bayview residents rejected the India Basin redevelopment plan because, like many of the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s, Bayview residents had been excluded from the planning process. Activists argued for an alternative plan that involved co-operative planning, including the Bayview-Hunters Point Community Development Corporation and the Area Planning Board of the EOC, and broadened the redevelopment area to include the entire Hunters Point area, rather than the small section of India Basin (*Spokesman* 1965b).

Black Population”, that follows a general “Population, Social, and Economic Characteristics” section, reiterating the racial dimension of the Bayview’s isolation and difference. The report emphasizes poverty and perceived social deviances, such as increasing numbers of female-headed households<sup>14</sup>, yet remains silent on the area’s tradition of political activism, portraying the Bayview as socially and culturally deficient rather than politically capable and active. By linking race, social marginality, and the urban landscape, the planning report shows some of the complex and reinforcing dynamics between ideas of place and race (San Francisco Planning Department 1987).

This perception of Bayview-Hunters Point as a container of social and cultural difference also circulated through popular culture, as in a 1976 crime novel titled *Hunters Point*, described on the book cover as “an exciting tale of crime and pursuit, set against the background of San Francisco, London and the Riviera.” Despite its title, in the novel little takes place in Hunters Point besides the murder – Hunters Point is the scene of the crime, as well as where the novel’s few African-American characters live. The novelist, George Sims, sets the scene: “Today Hunters Point is an illustration of the urban sickness that has attacked the United States: roads leading to it pass through an industrial waste-land of disintegrating workshops and half-demolished factories, acres of old cars left behind when auto-wrecking firms went bankrupt, and empty lots strewn with concrete blocks, rusting wire, matchwood and piles of garbage” (Sims 1976, 37).

Although the landscape described by Sims is the product of a long history of industrial capitalism and political struggle, in the novel it is used to enhance the narrative of racialized

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<sup>14</sup> Alice O’Connor (2004) in *Poverty Knowledge: Social Science, Social Policy, and the Poor in Twentieth Century US History* writes that “an increasing psychological understanding of the family, and specifically of gender relations within low-income, particularly within black families...drew heightened attention to poor women’s reproductive behavior while ignoring their economic role. These ideas about gender relations, expressed powerfully in studies of the impact of the “mother-centered” or “matriarchal” family, were central to the culture of poverty theory developed by Oscar Lewis” (2004, 20).



crime and wrong-doing. Put differently, Sims' Hunters Point cannot contain the area's history of political activism nor the social history of its neglected landscape. Rather, its location within the novel as the scene of the crime shows what the area had come to symbolize in the dominant imagination at the time. Bayview-Hunters Point newspaper *The Spokesman* recognized this dynamic when it wrote in 1965, "Most of the news published about the Hunters Point-Bayview<sup>15</sup> community is not good news. Too often have Negro and other minority districts been victimized by negative publicity [...] emphasizing crime and other degenerate aspects" (*Spokesman* 1965a).

Jacqueline Nassy-Brown (2005) writes, "The very urge to make meaning out of the materiality of places- what they look like, feel like, and where they are, for example, and who occupies them, what social relations define them, and what processes unfold in them- is produced through an axis of power and subjectivity that we might call *place*" (2005, 9). More than simply matter or built form, "place" also articulates a set of social relations and meanings (Massey 1994). Baldwin's idea of an invisible "San Francisco" foregrounds the relations of racism and violence constitutive of the ostensibly progressive city, while the separate "world" described in the KPIX news series binds cultural difference with skin color and urban malaise, staying far away from city hall. Like other forms of power, such as race or class, ideas of places have histories, are fought over and identified with, and have power-full effects.

### **Redevelopment and Historical Memory**

When the city's planning department writes today that, "Historically it [the Bayview] has been the location of the City's heaviest industries, some of its poorest residents, and its greatest concentrations of public housing: characteristics that frequently placed it outside the mainstream

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<sup>15</sup> At this time, the two place names sometimes appeared in different order.

of San Francisco life” (2010, 1), it re-articulates the notion of the Bayview as socially different and distant from the rest of the city, this distance a consequence of the Bayview’s particular landscape (public housing, industrial development, poverty), rather than the city’s own policies.

It is unsurprising then, that redevelopment today is commonly portrayed as “integrating” Bayview-Hunters Point with the “rest” of San Francisco. For example, Kofi Bonner, vice-president of Lennar Inc, commented that the goal of the Hunters Point Shipyard development project is to “reconnect these areas to the rest of the city” (*San Francisco Chronicle* 2008). The Bayview Hunters Point Area Plan likewise writes that one of its goals is to “fully integrate Bayview Hunters Point into the economic and cultural fabric of San Francisco as a whole” (San Francisco Planning Department 2010, 8). The *SF Weekly*, using a term resonant with early to mid- twentieth century liberal racisms, describes the restoration of the Bayview Opera House as “uplifting” the area<sup>16</sup>, writing that the Opera House is a “bright spot” in the middle of “what is still considered a rough part of town” (Smith 2010). In conversation with Willie Ratcliff, publisher of the *SF Bayview*, I asked whether he considered redevelopment a form of integration. “Integrating how?” he responded, “if they want to integrate it into the rest of the city... they can make sure that people are getting jobs,” pointing to a more structural and political economic approach to redevelopment in the Bayview.

The planning department, the *SF Weekly*, and Lennar’s portrayals of the Bayview as culturally deficient in relationship to the rest of the city, build on older, racialized ideas of the place, as discussed in the last section. These depictions also lack an engagement with the area’s history and contribute to a tense and diverging set of ideas of how reinvestment in Bayview-

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<sup>16</sup> As Lee Baker (2010) writes in *Anthropology and the Racial Politics of Culture*, early twentieth century programs aimed at racial “uplift” targeted “any practices or customs Negroes performed that differed from some mainstream norm,” which “were all too often explained in terms of deviance or pathology or simply obstacles in the way of complete assimilation” (2010, 22).

Hunters Point ought to materialize, or in the words of Osceola Washington, head of the Bayview Hunters Point Development Corporation in 1965, “who is going to build what and for whom” (*Spokesman* 1965a). One controversial redevelopment project today that has sought to “integrate” the Bayview has been the new light rail laid down along five miles of Third Street, a project that included new street lamps, tree-planting, and public art (Gordon 2007). However, the construction project heavily impacted Third Street businesses, causing some to close down because of lack of sales (Gordon 2007). It also drew ire for not hiring Bayview workers, leading Bayview group Aboriginal Blackmen United (ABU) to shut down the construction process for two days in 2003 (Arce 2010). In the context of a declining African-American population in the Bayview, these forms of redevelopment led one long-time resident to say that “they’re fixing things up, but it isn’t for us” (McCormick 2008). This comment was echoed by another resident who, when I asked whether he felt the Third Street rail integrated the Bayview with the city, said the same thing, “Well, they didn’t build it up for us.”

Many Bayview residents express similar fears of displacement through the redevelopment process. One of the ways some activists have struggled against this process is by organizing around a local hiring bill for public works projects, which became law in December 2010. Legal advocacy group Brightline Defense worked on the policy with a broad coalition of groups, including Bayview job-advocacy organizations like ABU and Young Community Developers, the environmental group Arc Ecology and Visitacion Valley Community Development. ABU in particular staged protests at construction sites across the city, including a reservoir project in the western Sunset District and the Mission Bay biotech complex just north of Bayview-Hunters Point. In arguing for local hire in the Bay Area journal, *Race, Poverty and the Environment*, Brightline Defense director Josh Arce and union leader Utuma Belfrey referred

to the struggle for community hire during redevelopment projects in the early 1970s, when San Francisco labor groups signed a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) with Bayview community development groups stipulating that fifty percent of workers on Bayview public works projects would be Bayview residents. Arce and Belfrey also note that Bayview activists like Espanola Jackson and Oscar James, who had worked on the MOA in the 1970s, have continued to circulate the document during recent public meetings on jobs for the southeast sector (Arce and Belfrey 2010), bringing the Bayview's political history to bear on contemporary debates.

This paper likewise contributes to bringing less visible histories into the contemporary period of reinvestment and redevelopment. I first explored the various ways the area has been central to urban and economic growth patterns over time. I then argued that current redevelopment narratives draw on a longer history of racialized representations which have portrayed the Bayview as socially marginal and politically passive, despite the progressive political movements that have emerged in the area. This historical perspective has implications for thinking about current redevelopment priorities and politics, especially in understanding diverging ideas about development between the planning department and other city agencies, on one hand and many long-time residents, on the other. Current projects build on long-standing and tense relationships in which city agencies have discriminated against Bayview residents and down-played or outright ignored their capacities to organize and set their own political agendas. It makes sense, in this context, why many residents would fear displacement and feel that redevelopment is not “for them.”

In the dominant narrative of redevelopment, the Bayview's past isolation and underdevelopment necessitates these current projects, in order to integrate the neighborhood economically, socially, and spatially with the rest of the city. Yet while redevelopment projects

appear to address the poverty and racism experienced by many of Bayview's residents, particularly since WWII, in fact many of these class and racial relations are reproduced through the profit-driven development projects and the prioritization of new, market-rate housing and white collar job creation.

Recently, I asked long-time community activist Espanola Jackson, who worked on the state-wide welfare political scene in the late 1960s, organized elderly residents in the Tenderloin, and helped start the first People's Earth Day in the Bayview in 1991, whether she felt that Bayview-Hunters Point was separate from other parts of San Francisco. She replied, "That's a known fact, because the other communities don't know how we're suffering" (Jackson 2011). In Jackson's mind, what distinguishes the Bayview from other parts of the city are not its physical characteristics or demographic profile but its residents' experiences of exclusion and other forms of violence, implicitly implicating city agencies, structural processes like deindustrialization, and other forces and institutions that have affected the lives of Bayview residents. Her comment resonates with Doreen Massey's theory of place as an articulation of social relations, "stretched out" over multiple scales (1994).<sup>17</sup>

When I met Jackson for the first time, she was sitting in the back of a room at the Bayview YMCA on Third Street at a Wednesday night RAB meeting, peppering the naval representative with questions, still engaged after over four decades of community organizing both in the Bayview and across the city and state. The political commitments of this paper – towards an understanding of the shifting and contested meanings of Bayview-Hunters Point and

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<sup>17</sup> Importantly, Massey developed this argument in the context of late 1970s debates in Britain around (as she puts it) the "inner city problem", in which "the easy response of politicians was to look within the areas themselves for the cause of their malaise" (1994, 19). Rather, she argues that the social problems of individual places must be understood in the context of broader political geographies, in her case, deindustrialization and national-level economic restructuring.

in support of greater justice and civic responsibility in this period of reinvestment – are intended in solidarity with Jackson and others who have worked alongside her.

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