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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Somebody Blew up Oakland: Dispossession as a Praxis of Racial Ordering

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

In Sociology

by

Stephanie Delise Jones

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Ann Hironaka, Co-Chair
Associate Professor Damien Sojoyner, Co-Chair
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Professor Dylan Rodriguez

2022

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DEDICATION

To my family, friends and mentors who were the reason my flame stayed lit.

To Oakland, I miss you.

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I hope I make each of you proud.

All power to the people.

Shine baby shine.

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ABSTRACT

Somebody Blew Up Oakland: Dispossession as Praxis for Racial Ordering

by

Stephanie Delise Jones

Doctor of Philosophy in Sociology

University of California, Irvine, 2022

Professor Ann Hironaka, Co-Chair

Associate Professor Damien Sojoyner, Co-Chair

In this dissertation, I investigate the relationship between underdevelopment and Black geographies. I then explore the consequences of this relationship on the city of Oakland. From 2019 to 2021, I conducted 68 in-depth field interviews of Black Oakland residents who detailed the processes and mechanisms by which California housing policy contributed to the displacement of Black subjects. Building on the work of scholars of Black geographies, I have interrogated the myth of development and the relationship to the dispossession of Black geographies. I theorize how racial capitalism produces vulnerable populations through housing in urban areas. The empirical contribution of my research is to provide a framework for Black geographies as people are being displaced. The theoretical contribution is to provide a conceptualization for Black geographies existing through abjections and placelessness as understood through residents of Oakland.

I argue that the relationship between dispossession and refusal creates a distinct politic. In chapter two, I theorize the work of Moms for Housing to further understand Black knowledges of resistance to dispossession. Moms for Housing is used as a case study to highlight the many

theoretical implications of dispossession occurring in Oakland. In chapter 3, I use two interviews from developers to demonstrate the contradictions in what I call the mythology of development. In chapter 4, I walk through the geographic stories of 2nd and 3rd generation Oakland residents and demonstrate each of the ways they feel locked out of the city as a result of the urban changes. In chapter 5, I demonstrate how communities resist dispossession and disposability. The city of Oakland lacks proactive implementation of equitable housing policy. The lack of action by the city of Oakland puts the onus on everyday residents to organize against their landlords, employers and the state.

CHAPTER #1: Introduction

> "War is always a struggle in which each contender tries to annihilate the other. Besides using force, they will have recourse to all possible tricks and stratagems in order to achieve the goal."
> -Che Guevara 1961, *Guerilla Warfare*

Introduction

Robert Allen opens *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* with "The course of a social revolution is never direct, never a straight line proceeding smoothly from precipitating social oppression to the desired social liberation… The revolutionaries must contend not only with conscious reactionaries and counterrevolutionaries, but also with subtle social dynamics which act to stop or divert the revolution" (1992:1). The Right to Housing in any capacity is a long revolution fought throughout difficult decades to obtain suitable housing for every individual. The many efforts to deal with "housing the nation" have included political change diverting resources to develop, including and excluding different types of housing in particular areas. Black communities continue to fight for the right to obtain housing meant to sustain a good quality of life. Nonetheless, "the cheating of Black communities and homeowners continues to skew economic outcomes and shape racist housing policies" (Taylor 2019:23). In this dissertation, I explore how the mythology of development violently opposes other social visions for community within Black geographies. To do this, I capture the ways in which Black resistance has contested oppressive knowledge regimes.

Many scholars have already demonstrated how housing policy's capacity to deliver equitable material resources to every community is a myth. Taylor (2019) and Rothstein (2017)

show how legal victories against discriminatory housing actions during the civil rights movement were eviscerated to limit any enforcement by the federal government. For Peter Marcuse (1977), housing policy is much less a monolithic, progressive set of enforceable laws laid out by local, state and federal institutions, and more of a vision for what governments *can* create. As Marcuse (1977) states, even to claim the existence of housing policy is to propagate a myth:

> "the myth is that government acts out of a primary concern for the welfare of all its citizens, that its policies represent an effort to find solutions to recognized social problems, and that government efforts fall short of complete success only because of lack of knowledges, countervailing selfish interest, incompetence, or lack of courage" (36).

Widespread belief in this myth continues to hinder a meaningful engagement with obstacles to access quality housing. Challenging this myth demands alternatives to how the State currently distributes and maintains housing, and would require the government to act in ways that are not neutral to uneven geographies (see Rothstein 2017). Whether in concert with or in contestation to the needs of regional areas, the discourse of housing as a human right continues to reemerge. Thus, politics over housing will continue to highlight ways that political struggle is realized as new capitalist models require different methods of contestations.

Advancements by the many movements during the civil rights era to push forward laws intended to combat racial housing practices and contestations over geographies have reemerged throughout the 20th century. These movements along with the legislation introduced by the Truman, Roosevelt, Kennedy and Johnson administrations accumulate to form common understandings of where we are as a nation on housing as an issue.[1] However, alongside these legislative changes has been an undercurrent of revolutionary movements that have challenged

[1] Typically missing the stances and policy initiatives by Nixon, Reagan and Clinton administrations, which produces a liberal and progressive leaning in the collective consciousness of the U.S. stance on housing and discriminatory practices.

the way housing and economic oppression is understood through Black subjectivity. These instances of resistance have dared to show different modes of resistance to both capitalism and government policies that seldom can be relied on. They also demonstrate that Black contestations must adapt to new forms of violence created by racial capitalist regimes over time.

Black resistance to oppressive housing practices in the U.S. has been rearticulated throughout decades of struggle. Ella Baker worked with the Young Negro Cooperative League (YNCL) to develop co-operatives that included stores, restaurants and housing developments to combat economic hardships of the Great Depression in the 1930s ("Ella Baker Papers"; Payne 1995:82). William Patterson along with ninety-three other petitioners submitted a petition to the United Nations for the charge of genocide, which included the lack of suitable housing as evidence of economic genocide in Paris in December 1951 (*We Charge Genocide* 1970). The Black Panther Party, established in Oakland in 1968, outlined two of the following contestations in their 10 Point Program:

> 3. WE WANT AN END TO THE ROBBERY BY THE CAPITALISTS OF OUR BLACK AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES.
> We believe that this racist government has robbed us and now we are demanding the overdue debt of forty acres and two mules. Forty acres and two mules were promised 100 years ago as restitution for slave labor and mass murder of Black people. We will accept the payment in currency which will be distributed to our many communities. The American racist has taken part in the slaughter of our fifty million Black people. Therefore, we feel this is a modest demand that we make.
>
> 4. WE WANT DECENT HOUSING, FIT FOR THE SHELTER OF HUMAN BEINGS.
> We believe that if the landlords will not give decent housing to our Black and oppressed communities, then housing and the land should be made into cooperatives so that the people in our communities, with government aid, can build and make decent housing for the people.

Most recently, Ta-Nehisi Coates walked through three decades of racist housing policy in "The Case for Reparations" in 2014 (Coates 2014). These politics of refusal demonstrate the long

contention with the social and political structures that (re)construct and (re)define Black subjectivity through the geographies they engage.

Alphonso Pinkney (1984) in *The Myth of Black Progress* recalls the years after the momentous energy of the civil rights movement, which ushered in legal victories aimed at ending racial oppression. However, Black oppression was still apparent through educational, health and wealth disparities. Many urban sociologists in the 70s and 80s focused on studying the "underclass" in urban ghettos or the inner city. The academic and media construction of the "underclass" was based on the living conditions, resulting in social inequalities acutely felt by Black and poor Latinx and Asian residents as well as condemnation of perceived culture that resulted from both. For example, Massey and Denton argue that this "underclass" creates a cultural deviation from white middle-class norms. This cultural deviation is the result of high poverty matched with high levels of isolation. These conditions included heightened confrontation with police officers (Epp el al. 2014; Fridell and Scott 2005), high exposure to health hazardous materials (Morell and Magorian 1982) and failing political institutions (Vargas 2016; Bluestone and Stevenson 2000). Scholars have described the negative effects of these neighborhoods as lasting for multiple generations (Sampson 2019).

The shift of investment in the suburbs began in the 1940s. The state simultaneously invested in whiteness and divested in Blackness. Lipstiz (1995) demonstrates the institutional investment by the FHA and private lenders, "after World War II aided and abetted the growth and development of increased segregation in U.S. residential neighborhoods. [For example,] mostly white St. Louis County secured five times as many FHA mortgages as the more racially mixed city of St. Louis between 1943 and 1960" (373). The introduction of urban renewal projects also decreased the percentage of city housing for Black residents at a higher rate than for

whites (Lipstiz 1995:373). In the 1980s, under the Reagan administration, hundreds of billions of dollars were rerouted from social programs through the expansion of the defense industry, which ushered in an era of "military Keynesianism" (Marable 1983:xxiii).

Blockbusting, redlining and racial covenants, all of which blocked Black people from living within racially and income mixed communities, lead to what Massey and Denton (1993) call "the construction of the ghetto." They argue, "By 1970, after two decades of urban renewal, public housing projects in most large cities had become black reservations, highly segregated from the rest of society and characterized by extreme social isolation" (1993:57). Massey and Denton (1993) made their case that the American apartheid system emphasizing the barriers to spatial mobility was a result of the geographic isolation impeding social mobility of Black communities. These geographies impact the way people understand and interpret the subjects that exist within them. As Shabazz (2015) details for Chicago,

> "Restrictive covenants were the tactical and sociospatial tool that carved up the city's geography along racial lines, fostering deep and profound unequal distribution of resources based on color. Covenants only enabled Black/white physical separation by ensuring that neither racial group occupied the same social space, such measures also created inescapable invisible fences that made it impossible for Blacks to move" (41).

Shabazz reminds us that segregation was about more than discriminatory allocation of space. Rather, segregation is a mechanism that draws its power from the historically violent arsenal of property doctrines, designed to tie value to land and worthiness in the protection of whiteness. Shabazz' conceptualization of space, both impacted by and a product of many structural decisions that lead to space having a relationship with race, must be made explicit because it is the core of what the state must obfuscate in order to maintain its regime.

California is unique because of its discourse that limns liberalism and renders the historicization of racial spaces as deracialized. Liberal discourse dictates that California leads the rest of the nation with respect to race relations. Based on my data, I espouse scholars who complicate this discourse through the ontological relationship between having and being. As Massy and Denton demonstrated the construction of the ghetto to support their declaration of an American apartheid, Hosang (2010) looks specifically a California politics to argue the conditions of apartheid within the state. Hosang (2010) quotes Alexander Saxton in naming the California system of violence as "genteel apartheid" (5). He suggests that thinking about apartheid in post-World War II California "is to inquire into a system of meaning making and policy formation that constructed compelling ideas about the inevitability of racial hierarchy and segregation even as the formal structures of racial exclusion waned rapidly and ideas about an opportunity were publicly valorized" (Hosang 2010:8). Genteel apartheid addresses the paradoxes that exist in California's progressive political culture alongside violence, educational gaps, job inequality, segregation and dispossession of land. This is a much more accurate description of the position of Black subjects and Black geographies as they are within California. Today, many housing policies that reproduce racial inequality are couched in language of diversity, equity and inclusion.

In this dissertation, I challenge scholars and policymakers who perpetuate the idea that Black people are disposable simply as a consequence of natural, unintentional fluctuations in the housing market. Instead, I depict Black dispossession as an intentional process that occurs because of an ideological commitment to value private property more than Black life. Here, I reiterate a tradition of resistance, one that suggests that a community is defined by the people that live there, rather than by the buildings that can be bought and sold. My analysis goes beyond

neutrally observing land and population movement; I center a discussion of subjects versus objects, material relations and logics of disposability. When we approach housing inequality from the perspective of geography as it is conceptualized by routinely dispossessed people, we can appropriately interrogate the concepts or relationships that many academic fields have offered. I ground my work within a legacy of thinkers who appropriately connect discourses of land, people and social forces with people's lived experiences.

Key Terms in the Literature

In this section, I will walk through key terms that relate to race, capitalism and human geographic studies where social theorist have conceptualized different characteristics of the social world that inform subjectivity. I will summarize different cannons that have both informed my own work as well as the developing field of Black geographies. I engage each of these scholars throughout my own thinking of this dissertation.

Race and Geographies

As urban social theorists consider the many facets of what makes the city a "theater of social action and aesthetic symbol of collective unity," Black geographies maintain an urgency to embrace within our analysis burning down buildings (Mumford [1937] 2003:93; also see Shabazz 2018). Human geographers did not consider the experiences offered by Black subjects until the 1960s, leaving Black knowledges out of focus for the field and the collective understanding of how race and geographies ensnare each other (McKittrick 2006; Eaves 2017; Vasudevan and Kearney 2015; Tyner 2006). Black sociologists formulated the basis for how social theorists began to take seriously the knowledge Black subjects offer in the scope of understanding urban geographies. Some of the foundational texts include W.E.B. Dubois, *The*

Philadelphia Negro (1899), Delilah Beasley, *The Negro TrailBlazers of California (1919),* James Weldon Johnson's *Black Manhattan* (1930), Charles S. Johnson's *Growing up in the Black Belt* (1940), St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis* (1945) and the meta-theory of Oliver Cox's *Caste, Class and Race* (1948). These texts pushed open the academic door for the inescapable truths of how race is shaped through the conditions of geographies and the centrality to subject formation (see Reese 2019). Blackness in urban geographies has been spatialized through technologies of confinement and economic structures that are defined by Black subjects being controlled. The knowledge Black subjects hold derives from geographical contestations within geographies that must be understood as legitimate.

Black geographies are measured through regions as they are experienced through gendered, queered, migrant, immigrant, laborer, southern, northern and/or sexualized subjects, but are always diasporic (Eaves 2017; Eaves 2016; Hodder 2016; Featherstone 2013; Harris and Hyden 2017; Bledsoe et al 2017). The goal of Black geographers is to present "knowledge of racialized spaces, bodies, and landscapes, undergirded by and perpetuated through colonial legacies" (Eaves 2017:84). Part of the reason Black geographies are difficult to map is because Black subjects and the communities they create are mobile, dispersed and not always cartographic. Thus, dealing with Black knowledges as legitimate forms of experiencing geographies demands an articulation of a qualitatively distinct kind of politic (see Levien 2013).[2] This distinct politic is formulated on a different historicization of dominant ways of rendering logics of order within geographies (Alves 2016; Bledsoe 2018).

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[2] Levian states, "In arguing that the process of land dispossession generates a specific form of politics, I depart… from the sociology of social movements, which has abandoned the idea of grounding qualitatively distinct kinds of politics in the analysis of social structures, focusing instead on universal variable that seek to explain successful mobilization around any pro-given set of "grievances" (356). In their footnote they cite the work of Walder, "Political Sociology and Social movements."

Clyde Woods (1988) lays the groundwork for appropriately engaging space and Black geographies as he conducts an analysis of a "social-spatial dialectic" which is built from a regional analysis of identity construction and political allegiance. Woods defines:

> "The term 'regional bloc'… to understand the forces constructing and contesting regional power structures. The bloc can be conceived of as an alliance, a bargain, or a contract between disparate ethnic, gender, class, and other elements. The goal of the regional bloc is to gain control over resources and over the ideological and distributive institutions governing their allocation. The institutions and movements of the dominant group are typically explained in terms of moral, psychological, biological, and intellectual imperatives and superiority" (1988:26).

Woods explores the relationship between Black workers in the Mississippi Delta and the planter class to demonstrate the stages of political and economic development that denied people access to labor and other necessities to sustain communities. These restraints cause Black subjects to be forced out of the South, causing mass migration into northern and western cities for refuge. Through his analysis, Woods describes and contextualizes the Blues Epistemology, an expressive, musical demonstration of Black subjects making sense of uneven geographies that (re)produce categories of subjugation. The regional bloc introduces new principles of morality to which Black subjects are forced to conform in order to participate in regional social systems. For Black subjects, this means rewriting, eliminating and creating historical points of entry for new methods of knowledge, knowing all the while that their rendering of the production of space will always be under attack.

The prerogative to burn down buildings elucidates the distinct politic from rendering Black subjects as disposable, which forces an open and unignorable contestation. Urban revolts throughout the 20th century in New York, Baltimore, Washington D.C., Chicago, Watts, Detroit, Los Angeles and Oakland all mark a history of insurrection, which marked urban geographies as the vanguard for political struggle. These rebellions outline the stakes for understanding how

race and geographies can be powerful and dangerous in their dynamic creation of social relations through captivity. Rebellions, as a method of urban revolt, have carried into the 21st century through the continued political struggles that urban places as political sites continue to (re)order, (re)define and (re)construct Black subjectivity as a condition of their engagement with regional power structures. Confronting the tropes of carceral power demand a thorough engagement with those structures as they cannot be negotiated with.

Place v Space

The distinctiveness of the conceptualization for "place" and "space" as two differnt concepts may never be settled in the literatures of urban sociology and geography. This is partially due to the overlapping nature of the geometry within geographies that scholars describe. Place is generally referred to as more concrete whereas space is considered more abstract (Boyd 2011; Logan 2012). Place is something that we visit whereas space is something that we experience (see Singh 2018; Sanchez 2009; Sack 1993; Rolfe 2015). The turmoil within the literature results from the inability to disconnect these two terms from each other. Conceptually, space seems to subsume place. Some scholars even use these terms interchangeably as "the meaning of space often merges with that of place" (Tuan 1977:6). Postmodern scholars have continued to insist on the inseparability of the two concepts by highlighting socio-spatial dimensions that allow meaning to be made by the nature of the connections of space and place (Joessop et al 2008; Soja 1996; Wrede 2015; Withers 2009; Merrifield 1993).

French sociologist Henri Lefebvre shifted the conversation of space into a concept that needed to be considered social in the 1960s. Lefebvre (1968;1996) theorized two different levels in which society conceptualizes space. On one level, there is what he calls abstract space. Simply put, this is the way the state and investors think about building in or up the space of the city. So,

for example, where is the center of the city, the mayor's office, the residential area(s), and its police departments and fire stations. The other level is what he terms social space. This is how residents live within and interact with the space. Although different cities may have different characteristics, because of the way their abstract spaces have been built, "places produced by similar social systems tend to resemble each other" (Gottdiener et. al 2015:85). These two different levels are often in competition with each other, as investors may have a different idea of how to (re)imagine space than existing residents. It also may strain city financial and policy support for certain areas based on categories of difference for the residents. Castells, although one of his critics, praised Lefebvre's work in his taking seriously the relationship between how place is organized and his dealing with ideology as socially created through space (see Castells 1972; also see Susser 2002; Soja 1980; Soja 1996).

For Castells (2004), "Spatial transformation must be understood in the broader context of social transformation: Space does not reflect society, it expresses it, it is a fundamental dimension of society, inseparable from the overall process of social organization and social change" (393). Indeed, Soja, in conversation with Lefebvre's understanding of social space, puts forth the argument that place can be subsumed by space entirely with a proper dealing of this concept. As a postmodern geographer, he pushes scholars to contend with space, time and matter as a new conceptualization of spatialization. Soja (1989) argues, "these abstract existential dimensions come to life as a social construct which shapes empirical reality and is simultaneously shaped by it. Thus, the spatial order of human existence arises from the (social) production of space, the construction of human geographies that both reflect and reconfigure being in the world" (25). Thus, space, time and matter all inform how space is understood and experienced. This should also reflect the way scholars approach space.

Critical geographer and feminist scholar Doreen Massey puts forth the "simultaneity of space," which pulls the definition out of a real need to dichotomize all the dimensions that attribute to how space is understood and experienced.

> "What the simultaneity of space really consists in, then, is absolutely not a surface, a continuous material landscape, but a momentary coexistence of trajectories, a configuration of a multiplicity of histories all in the process of being made. This is not a 'problem', unless of course you long for the order of a singular story and legibility of smoothness of a surface; rather, it is part of the delight, and the potential, of space" (Werner 2018:229).

This definition also explains that space is not a given or flat concept, but rather something that is dynamic and engaging with socio-historical, political and economic processes. Space, then, a dimension of multiplicity, or not having a singular identity, adds to relationality and how meaning is made through those relations.

Why is it important to understand the logics of space while exploring Black subjectivity? Black subjects complicate a necessary distinction for how geographies are understood. The uneven geographies of which Black people live inform how their subjectivity is defined. As Shabazz (2018) notes:

> "Why does space in which Black life is performed and constituted matter? It matters because Black matters are spatial matters. And the places where Black people express their identities and struggle for recognition influence the tone and terror of their lives. Space and where we are in it determine in large part our identity and future mobility in the world. Space is not just an empty container; it is a dynamic social and geographic sphere where the spatial makeup of place influences and is influenced by the people who inhabit it" (40).

In my dissertation, I will deal with place and space as two distinct concepts while recognizing their interconnectedness. This is not to suggest that these terms have to be understood as distinct, but rather to point to different aspects or characters of the geographies I am highlighting. Here, I will lean on thinking about place materially and space as discursive, while recognizing there are socio-historical, political, ideological and economic processes that remake and are made by both.

Race and Capitalism

Cedric Robinson (1983) demonstrates how racialization begins in Europe as a condition of an ideological allegiance to nationalism narrated by the bourgeoisie. Nationalism is the building of myths that require racial sentiments to create difference. Robinson also outlines the trajectory of Marxism, and its alignment to radical thought. He demonstrates why a Marxist analysis omits the role of racialization as a by-product of European development as a *part* of capitalism. He states:

> "The development, organization, and expansion of capitalist society pursued essentially racial directions, so too did social ideology. As a material force, then, it could be expected that racialism would inevitably permeate the social structure emergent from capitalism" (1983:2).

Robinson takes us through the history of strife and rebellion throughout European history as the first racial subject, the Irish proletariat, is used as a tool for expansion of British imperialism. As this social ideology is developing through the lens of race, and capitalism is developing through the confines of the port cities, capitalism is instituted as a difference making mechanism that divides not only the industrial proletariat but also the nation-state borders according to the benefit of the European bourgeoisie.

Capitalism is a system that produces mechanisms of difference making. The process of racial capitalism occurs in two parts. First, dispossession, a requisite for the process of accumulating capital, "operates by leveraging, intensifying, and creating racial distinctions. Second, race serves as a tool for naturalizing inequalities produced by capitalism" (Jenkins and Leroy 2021:3). These mechanisms also work to produce class, sex and gender along racial lines. Thus, new ideological formations are needed to facilitate new community formations based on the needs of new technologies or industry. Many theories of urban geographies identify "the 'where' of blackness in positivist terms [that] can reduce black lives to essential measurable

‘facts’ rather than presenting communities that have struggled, resisted, and significantly contributed to the production of space” (McKittrick and Woods 2007:6). This analysis does not properly theorize race or understand capitalism to be a process of difference making (Sweeney 2021). However, these new advents of crisis are built on the ideological praxis of the state. In other words, uneven racialized geographies encompass more than just the logics of capital production, but also state sanctioned violence defining the surplus population through the logics of race.

Through the logics of racial capitalism, dispossession and disposability are the solution to uneven geographies, which necessitate an ideological disavowal of violence to legitimate the process of (re)ordering spaces through development. Development is a politically charged term that has been debated within the literature. How we should define and think about development is a scholarly exercise. Definitions of development have been used against non-western European societies to measure their inability to conform to white cultural norms. However, development is a useful term to deploy in order to demonstrate how societies use capitalism to build at the expense of destroying other communities and societies. Walter Rodney (1972) demonstrates the relationship between Europe and Africa as linked through development and underdevelopment. Economic development is a singular type of development that Rodney cautions cannot be the only measure. However, economic development is also singled out as the only indicator to use in order to evaluate a group of people or nation. Rodney suggests:

> “A society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology), and on the manner in which work is organized” (1972)

In the U.S. more broadly, but in California especially, all of this is made possible through the racialized and gendered violence that occurs through uneven geographies in order to increase the value of whiteness. Manning Marable describes underdevelopment to be the "direct consequence of this process: chattel slavery, sharecropping, peonage, industrial labor at low wages, and cultural chaos" (Marable 1983; 2015:3). Blackness is definitively comprised of confinement and captivity. Development and underdevelopment are key components for how community formations can be articulated through new imaginaries as urban change produces new modes of social space.

The concentration of political power in California created the opportunity for underdevelopment to continuously go unchallenged because those being impacted are largely restricted by their marks of disposability. The sociospatial dynamics of exclusions are not just positioned by spatial features of California's topography, but also the long history of segregation within the state which was instituted as a means of developing white communities and underdeveloping non-white communities.

The neoliberal response to crises gives the state incentive to remain complacent to the destructive war path on which racial capitalism sets its most vulnerable citizens, allowing for dispossession through geographic contestations (Camp 2012; Camp 2009). The use of property as a marker of difference reflects an ideology of a constellation of imperatives: first, the imperative to accumulate capital, and then use that accumulation of capital as a marker of difference helps to construct neighborhoods as zones for racial and economic homogeneity. This allows for Black property to make white wealth real. The state determines which histories merit recording, attention and validation; it also creates mechanisms for erasing history. To control the narrative is to control how people within that narrative are defined. Constantly reshaping the

narrative to elude unmasking its own illegitimacy allows the state to have control over history and the types of histories that become incorporated into common narratives. The state's role is to determine which bodies can be defined as disposable or surplus.

Geographic contestations evoke a need to maintain difference between whiteness and Blackness in order to associate value in the market. However, as this difference is reified, the political culture of California continues to promote diversity and inclusion practices that are responsible for discourses of racial justice (HoSang 2010). What Lipsitz suggests when he says that whiteness maintains power is that it exists as "the unmarked category against which difference is constructed, whiteness never has to speak its name, never has to acknowledge its role as an organizing principle in social and cultural relations" (1998:369). Any description of highly valued property and low valued property is racialized. As the material reality reflects the difference in value, the identification of what needs to be developed can stay centered on a place associated with Blackness. Many scholars who discuss urban social theories may restate this idea as singularly about the value of property and the place that is associated with low value *regardless* of race. However, this ignores that value, place and development are all racialized through racial capitalism.

Methodology

I used multiple methods to understand the evolution and impact of housing policy and practices in Oakland, California. These methods included content analysis, interviews and a case study. First, I conducted an analysis of an action plan aimed at creating equitable housing policy in the city. The Oakland Housing Cabinet collaborated with Enterprise Community Partners in

2016 to produce the "Oakland at Home: Recommendations for Implementing A Roadmap Toward Equity." The document was published on the PolicyLink organization's website, www.policylink.org, and is available to the public. PolicyLink is a national research and action institute dedicated to advancing economic and social equity. I did a content analysis of the Roadmap, which allowed me to understand the government's proposed solutions for inequities in access to housing. I coded the document, wrote reflexive memos and did a second round of coding once I finished data analysis of other methods employed in this dissertation.

Second, I conducted interviews of Black Oakland residents, which allowed me to assess the visceral impacts of these proposed solutions on Black communities. The participants in my project are really co-writers, co-theorists and mentors to the ideas I am articulating. In many ways, they should receive all of the credit for the growth of this project. I conducted a total of 68 interviews. 27 of my participants were feminine identified people, 23 were masculine identified people and 18 of my participants were gender non-conforming. 54 of these participants were 2nd and 3rd generation migrants. 14 of these participants were 2nd and 3rd generation immigrants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Most of the interviews lasted between 45-90 minutes. There were two exceptions; one of which was thirty minutes and the other was 2 hours and 10 minutes. All of the names of interviewees were changed both in transcripts and in quotations shared in the dissertation to protect their anonymity. When appropriate, I also changed names of locations that would identify the participant. I obtained IRB permission to conduct interviews.

Interviews are the best way to get at the experiences of each of my participants, who live out the consequences of policy decisions made by state actors. I use interviews to collect the stories of those dealing with housing instability in Oakland as a result of the policies intended to

address this instability. After transcribing each interview, I coded interviews and wrote reflexive memos. I created five categories to encapsulate types of housing instability: 1) completely unhoused, 2) unexpectedly living with a relative, 3) not able to afford the monthly rent or mortgage of their current place of residence, 4) deciding to move out of Oakland due to being rent burdened and 5) arranging to sell property in Oakland because of a high mortgage.

In order to investigate two competing ontological traditions, which I fully flesh out in Chapter 2, I use Moms4Housing to demonstrate acts of refusal against socially assigned disposability. Moms4Housing received media attention, which resulted in local and national news outlets reporting on their story. I accessed data collected from the organization's website and other online press. I coded the information from the website and press documents, and wrote reflexive memos.

Chapter 2:

In chapter two, I study the work of Moms for Housing to characterize Black knowledges of resistance to dispossession under "progressive" Oakland housing policy. Moms for Housing believes that no family should be homeless as long as there are unoccupied residences in the city. However, ideologies that privilege private property violently oppose these knowledges, and the state retaliates with force against those associated with Moms for Housing who attempt to occupy empty homes. By studying this case, I interrogate the ideological prioritization of private property over human life. I work through the theoretical motivations for understanding subjectivity as well as the centrality of geographies as they are contested. In order to make connections between how racial capitalism promotes dispossession as a necessary process of (re)ordering society, I describe how racial regimes help to disavow the violence (re)defining Black subjectivity.

Chapter 3

In chapter 3, I use two interviews from developers to demonstrate the contradictions in the logics of developers as they promote the politics of development. As developers work through their logics of community formation, their articulations lack both an understanding of how race is situated through geographies as well as how capitalism leverages racial difference to (re)order communities. I add to these interviews by demonstrating this same logic flaw as promoted by the City of Oakland through their plan to address their citizens' housing crisis. I highlight how California housing policy not only fails to create equitable access to stable, quality housing.

Chapter 4

In chapter 4, I uplift the voices of Oakland community members that demonstrate the tragedies of dispossession as they tell their own geographic stories. I label them as geographic stories because, as community members are describing their understanding of Oakland as Black geography, they offer an analysis that includes how their families immigrated or migrated to Oakland as well as what they are looking for in the new geographies they will be forced to relocate to. These collective stories demonstrate the markers of dispossession on different levels as the sociospatial dynamics of Oakland are being (re)imagined.

Chapter 5

In chapter 5, I demonstrate the many modes community members are using to resist dispossession and disposability. I show how the state's lack of proactive implementation and enforcement of equitable housing policy puts the onus on everyday residents to organize against their landlords, employers and the state. In doing so, already housing insecure residents risk eviction and homelessness. Indeed, those who have initiated strikes, protests and disputes with

landlords risk their entire livelihoods. This has created wide variability in how much protection residents receive under Oakland housing policy when they experience housing related abuses. Hardly a push toward racial equity, Oakland housing requires Black mobilization, and thus Black labor and struggle.

Conclusion

Key components of understanding the urban changes in Oakland are both contemporary and historic acts of dispossession. Theories of space, racial capitalism and underdevelopment help to make sense of the lived experiences of Black subjects dealing with urban change. The interviews I include in this dissertation point to a distinct politic that geographies defined by both captivity and control have to distinguish between subjects and objects. In other words, those that can be engaged with or those that can be disposed of. My entry into this project is to carry these stories and defend the acts of refusal to dispossession. The politic to refuse asymmetrical acts of dispossession defines the experiences of Black subjects.

Geographic contestations demonstrate the stakes of how Black subjects in particular are required to demand recognition in order to engage geographies and legitimate their own articulation of social space. If the Right to Housing will continue the long legacy of revolutionary struggles, ideological shift and state interventions will be required to truly deal with how racial capitalism creates difference within geographies. Housing the nation cannot be a neutral step in the progress of maintaining and distributing sustainable communities. Black communities continue to fight for the right to obtain housing meant to sustain a good quality of life. Oakland as a Black geography being dismantled is not only a detriment to the Black subjects within its city limits, but a lessening of the possibility to create space across the nation.

CHAPTER #2: Competing Ontological Traditions in Geographical Contestations

Introduction

In November 2019, two homeless mothers moved themselves and their children into a vacant three-bedroom home in West Oakland (Kim 2020; moms4housing.org). Formally known as Moms for Housing, these mothers put the housing crisis of Oakland front and center by highlighting the number of Oakland homes owned by companies that were sitting vacant as the homeless population (in particular homeless families) increased. This act of resistance led to a movement in connection to Right for Housing and other resilient actions against dispossession (Ramírez 2020). Hundreds of community members around the Bay Area rallied in support of these mothers and their attempt to gain the rights to the vacant home (Hahn 2020). After two months of struggle, the mothers and children were evicted from their West Oakland home, while the fight for housing still marches on (Chan 2020).

These families demonstrated their resistance in many different ways. The family structures of this collective action taken by a multi-familial, multi-generational household that came together to share resources in their home. This communal practice of sharing a home and collectively raising children works against the norm of how single families are conceptualized, but is a distinct politic within Black geographies (Nembhard 2014). However, what they will be known for is the seizure of private property and the demonstration of defiance by not leaving the home until local police were brought in to evict them (Hahn 2020). These families and their supporters rallied behind a Right for Housing movement. Their articulation of this struggle

centered on the very principle that families should not be allowed to live on the street with vacant properties sitting on those same streets. This account of the problem engenders a discourse of a long struggle over urban housing that is nullified by the interest of those who wish to accumulate capital in the housing market.

Moms for Housing generates an articulation of ways to engage with geographies that is rooted in a historic conceptualization of race, property and land. In this example, a competing formation of community knowledge is on display as part of a larger contestation over geographic spaces. Rather than using displacement, I instead promote the mobilization of dispossession which contends with the material violence and demonstrates the level of resistance communities have utilized to combat against land grabs. Understanding the dimensions of dispossession requires us to consider a remedy to dispossession that speaks to those dimensions. Specifically, as Black subjects contest the ontological relationships of race and space, the violent struggle for these geographies is most visible through how these communities make sense of their forced removal. This shift is significant because the "ongoing dispossession of Black Oaklanders is significant not only in how many residents have been displaced from their homes over the past decade but also because this mass displacement has altered the city's geographies themselves" (Ramírez 2020). This ontological relationship in respect to geographies helps to distinguish subjects from objects as well as subjects from subjects. This determines who is allowed to make claims to space and place, and more importantly, who is allowed to have this claim defended and protected. Geographies become racialized through laws, policies and practices that restrict, redirect and (re)order communities to be either stuck or mobile in place. Race becomes informed by geographies as place is used as a mechanism to inform the handling of communities.

Theorizing through Moms for Housing pushed me to pursue a number of questions about Blackness and space within the context of dominating systems that seek to (re)order geographies (Gilmore 2002).[3] Who is the Black resident? Are they a class, social or political group? What mechanisms exist to abject and subjugate the Black resident? What are the motivations to protect them? What knowledges do Black geographies hold across spaces? What about spaces define Blackness and vice versa? Many social theories that have explored urban geographies leave those questions largely unsatisfied. Instead, they enable a campaign of regime maintenance that omits the interrogation of racial logics. The omission of racial logics is precisely what constructs the mythology that the widespread dispossession of Black residents from their communities is merely an issue of economic policy (which masquerade as colorblind), that housing is a transactional relationship between communities, and that communities are narrativized based on the properties they utilize.

Working Through Dispossession

Dispossession (re)produces and is produced by logics of abjection and dispensability. An apparatus of social distinction, dispossession is the necessary consequence and condition of the difference making that results from reordering society. Thus, "dispossession is more than just land and money. It is also about bodies in space and time. With national geographies, racial categories are reproduced in how people see spaces and how subjects are produced" (Tynen

[3] "In Fatal Couplings of Power and Difference," Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2002) concludes that social scientists "should develop a research agenda that centers on race as a condition of existence and as a category of analysis, because territoriality of power is a key to understanding racism. The political geography of race entails investigating space, place, and location as simultaneously shaped by gender, class, and scale" (22). By focusing on Blackness, I am not suggesting the Blackness and race are the same conceptually, nor that Blackness is always materially referring to the same group. I am promoting Gilmores claim that "Blackness is spatially and temporarily differentiated produces, and real, condition of existences and category of analysis" (22).

2020:307). This process reinforces gendered, sexed and racialized categories in order to reshape modalities and conditions for participating in space (Colls 2012). Dispossession is a process of stripping communities of geographies, communal knowledges and practices, livelihoods and methods of being.

Scholarship on dispossession theorizes through (1) land (Harvey 2020; Kedar 2016; Hall 2013; Nichols 2018), (2) the bodies of people that live on the land (Moffatt 2019; Murphy 2011; Butler 2006; Mclvor 2012) and (3) the structure and practices of communities (Agha 2022; Gourgouis 2015). This includes movement across land—forced, voluntary and exiled—as well as enslavement. Colonialism requires the possession of land and money. The economic mechanisms of extraction have exposed dispossession as the root of possession (see Harvey 2003; Marx 1867). The genocide and forced removal of communities is simultaneously the dispossession of existing knowledge systems concerning land, capital accumulation and communal knowledges and practices (Tynen 2020:306). These theoretical propositions point to social strata and difference making as key determinants of outcomes of colonial, settler colonial and postcolonial conditions—whether or not scholars acknowledge them—is indicative of dispossession as an apparatus which mobilizes the complete panoply of mechanisms of difference making within modalities of ownership.

If owning place is a prerequisite to making claims and owning is a prerequisite to making claims to space, then the possibilities of underdevelopment and development are layered and interconnected. Thus, dispossession is the result of that layering. Since ownership is the colonial lens through which we conceptualize housing crises, all discourse is restricted to ownership and economic development, thus being legitimated through owning. If communities are valued and

devalued based on the properties in the geography they engage, then coming into being is based on an ontological relationship to ownership.

Neoliberal governance, in league with developers, ensures speculative markets that initiate and facilitate processes of development and underdevelopment as strategies of dispossession (Gunder Frank 1969, Bratton 1982; Potter et al 2004). Underdevelopment and development, as theorized by critical geographers, are two intricately connected types of contestations over space (Soja 1968; Cannon 1975; Cinchilla and Dietz 1981). As Rodney (1973) asserts, underdevelopment is *not* the absence of development but instead holds two central components: comparison and exploitation. The first helps to assess the difference between two economies. The second helps to determine if one economy benefits from the deprivation of the other (Radcliffe 2005). Rodney's declaration of the product of capitalist, imperialist and colonialist exploitation is what I use to understand dispossession or "*the export of surplus ensured*, depriving the societies of the benefit of their natural resources and labour" (1973). Underdevelopment marks places and spaces for one layer of dispossession, not only in type, but in the mechanisms needed to obstruct people from being able to engage both. This leads to, but is not restricted by, racialized subjects and bodies marked as disposable through another layer of dispossession based on their relationship to ownership and owning. In other words, underdevelopment marks bodies as disposable and geographies as lacking value.

Development, which emerges from the colonial tenets of possession and commodification of land, mobilizes specific kinds of dispossession including that of existing knowledges of land (Chinchilla 1981; Cannon1975). Restricting an analysis of development to the economy to measure all other kinds of development creates discourse that misconstrues communities as only as valuable as the property within the geographies they engage and

disciplines communities for their lack of value. Economic development is not, however, a proxy for other markers of communities. Discourses of development operate within a system of domination that supports extracting from one community in order to accumulate capital in another as the means to reorder society. The myth that development is incompatible with dispossession conflates being and having as ontologically tethered.

The process of racialization is the logic by which both development and underdevelopment are employed within geographies. How geographies become racialized helps in the understanding of racial categories. However, racial categories are not created, maintained, formed or destroyed on their own but are indicative of a relationship between each other. Athanasiou, in conversation with Butler, describes this as socially assigned disposability:

> "This is indeed related to socially assigned disposability (a condition which proves fundamental to the neoliberal regime) as well as to various modalities of valuelessness, such as social death, abandonment, impoverishment, state and individual racism… In such context, the power of dispossession works by rendering certain subjects, communities, or populations unintelligible, by eviscerating for them the conditions of possibility for life and the 'human' itself. The violent logic of dispossession seeks to reassert the propriety of both spatiality and subjectivity as it bodies forth displaced and displaceable subjectivities, as it challenges them to take their proper place instead of taking place" (2013:19-20)

Dispossession is a functional apparatus of difference making as it uses geographies and colonial notions of ownership to mark bodies as disposable. Dispossession has a logic, motivation and pattern of domination that exerts violence that racializes subjects. The conceptualization of incorporating subjects into racial regimes is better understood through the debate about power and systems of domination. Geographies become the solution to racial differences under racial capitalism.[4]

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[4] In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson argues "The historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism. This could only be true if the social, psychological, and cultural origins of racism and nationalism both anticipated capitalism in time and formed a piece with those events that contributed directly to its organization of production and exchange" (1983:9) Or as Robin

First, racialized subjects under capitalist regimes are subject to violence allowable by the process of underdevelopment. The process of underdevelopment allows for the movement of capital from one community in order to hoard it in another (Gunder Frank 1969, Rodney 1972; Harvey 2003). As housing needs are determined by the market, the residents within housing units are subject to losing value as their properties are mangled within the capitalist system (see Harvey 1973). Housing that is designated for Black residents is valued through the logics of race which allows the relationship between Black housing and White housing to remain constant. In other words, White housing can be defined through luxury and safety while Black housing is defined through destitution and instability. As Marable (1983) asserts, "Capitalist development has occurred not in spite of the exclusion of Blacks but because of the brutal exploitation of Blacks as workers and consumers. Blacks have never been equal partners in the American Social Contract, because the system exists not to develop, but to *underdevelop Black people"* (2). Thus, the second configuration is the (re)creation or order, which allows for the removal of anything marked as unstable. Here order is not defined by political needs or social relationship to a community, but rather the adherence to maintain racial difference, the needs of the market and the activities needed to generate the movement of capital.

Social analysts make sense of these contestations over space by developing discourse of these spaces through western imaginaries. These discourses in turn structure our understanding of how a subject comes to be recognized as human and delineates the markers of value. As Butler and Athanasiou discuss "In the political imaginary of (post) colonial capitalist western modernity and its claims of universal humanity, being and having are constituted as ontologically akin to each other; being is defined as having; having is constructed as an essential prerequisite

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Kelley explains, capitalism and racism "did not break from the old order but rather evolved from it to produce a modern world system of "racial capitalism" dependent on slavery, violence, imperialism, and genocide" (xiii).

of proper human being" (2013:12-13). This political imaginary is a dominating system with its own set of logics and traditions. However, as all systems of domination (re)produce violence, they also (re)produce resistance to violence. The use of geographies to enshrine racial difference creates a specific ontological relationship to Black subjectivity. As geographies are contested, those with the ability to make claims become the subjects for urban change. This antagonism is the impetus for defending a lexicon that privileges this knowledge. Blackness is tied to underdevelopment, marked for socially assigned disposability, as the places designated for Black housing are read as unvalued, unstable and unproductive.

Contestations over space are the sites of tension between two ontological traditions of conceptualizing engagement with geographies. The traditions I describe position two competing ways of enacting a construction of being. I theorize dispossession through the knowledges gained from a fugitive way of being and the friction that is generated by domination and resistance. I focus on a fragile point between the production of a myth and the knowledge refuting that myth. These ontological traditions have roots in two competing logics for categorizing and claiming community. The first is a tradition of housing struggles, which at its core privileges private property and limits an analysis to center on the physical buildings and property values. Often, infrastructure and physical appearance are said to determine the sociological worth and value of a place and its residents. In other words, material-based theories problematize property in terms of economic value and ignore the relationship value has to race. The discourse is predicated on the innate brokenness, criminality and need for intervention in Black communities. Nonetheless, these geographies are more than the sociological caricatures of urban decay, they are key sites of political struggles and community buildings in direct refutation of being marked for socially assigned disposability.

The second ontological tradition is a tradition of geographic struggles. Space is understood through the communities that engage these environments. Thus, the privileging of private property is disavowed for the sake of privileging communal practices. Communal practices create a perspective of space where the sociality of the people and geographies being engaged are used to understand the community (West 2019; Gaskins 2019; Rivera 2021). Communal practices are first how community members relate to each other as well as how they share resources within their community. This creates the opportunity to define their community. Collectivity and collaboration are the central principles for understanding what is needed within a space. By centralizing community practices, the investment is defined by autonomy of the community to make decisions about engaging the geographic space, a forceful affirmation of subjectivity and the subsequent rights to make claims.

Private property under capitalism is a commodity, and like all commodities, is used as a point of extraction and exploitation (Taylor 2019:10-11; Harvey 1973; Harvey 2013). The ontological tradition of housing struggles highlights a transactional relationship between peoples where private property is claimed, maintained and destroyed. The people who own and lose this private property are read based on the value of this property. The less valuable the property the easier it is for the people themselves to be read as disposable. By centralizing private property, the investment in a community is defined by the buildings as a justification for a marker of development. Thus, geographic spaces are organized based on their capacity to progress value in markets. In opposition to this tradition is the ontological tradition of geographic struggle, which centralizes communal practices and knowledges, the social vision for how communities engage with their environments is the marker for social wellness. The ontological tradition of housing struggles is violently opposed to the ontological traditions of geographic struggle as evidenced

by the marring and defacing of the historical logics in order to maintain the prerogative to mark bodies and communities as disposable.

Change and Racial Regimes

As geographies are the site of dispossession, ontological traditions implicate questions about Black subjectivity in order to understand the ontological relationship with property. Interrogating this relationship helps decipher the impact of racial difference and (re)production of racial violence. Theorizing through the actions of Moms for Housing we see both an engagement and a refusal that opens the door to a form of communities that must be defiled to maintain the centrality of private property. How should this action be understood through the lens of this geographic contestation? How will histories and discourses make sense of this refusal? Most importantly, what is this engagement of geographies evidence of in context of contestations in Oakland?

If we were to follow the tradition of Foucault (1976), we could describe relations of power as discursive. The character of power exists to consume through systems of domination. These systems envelope the ideas, customs and features of a society that exist only to reproduce themselves. The maintenance of these systems involves developing, hoarding and concentrating power to the hands of the few and abstracting from the many. Foucault (1976; Gordon 1980) argues this is a praxis of civil society to create discipline. However, if power is totalizing and systems of domination are disciplinary, then how does change happen? How are systems reordered and developed? Said (1983) offers a critique of this perspective of power, which enriches our understanding of how systems of domination exist in a constant state of repair. Said claims Foucault's theory of power "is a form of rhetorical overtotalization. In human history

there is always something beyond the reach of dominating systems, no matter how deeply they saturate society" (1983:246-47).

As Robinson (2007) points out, systems of power do not seamlessly incorporate "the stranger" or the unknowable subjects, new forms of knowledge into systems of oppression (xii). Instead, new subjects are incorporated through tension and chaos that helps to maintain the system of power. The incorporation of subjects is compiled through partial truths or myths which result in what Robinson (2007) identifies as "unstable truth systems." Using myths allows new subjects to be known and understood by systems of domination, however, this also means disavowing knowledges and truths that exist before the process of discipline by incorporation. The result is instability from the conflict of incorporating new subjects and knowledges into systems of oppression. Unstable truth systems, when pressed, will collapse under their own "artifices, practices, and apparatuses" (Robinson 2007:xiii) They may also fragment and discard the narratives for the sake of maintaining regimes.

To take the actions of Moms for Housing seriously is an admission that the centrality of private property is not totalizing (Lawson and Elwood 2018). The action taken by Moms for Housing is in conversation with a tradition of refusal of socially assigned disposability. The knowledges and communal practices that act outside the discursive maintenance of power through this refusal is a proclamation of Black subjectivity. As Robinson's stranger, the struggles for Black communal practices, collectivity and familial structures demonstrate the dimensions of disruption that have to be viewed as both deviant and rare as opposed to an ongoing struggle of two ontological traditions. These struggles are what need to be violently incorporated as part of the prerogative to assign social disposability. As Robinson demonstrates, racial regimes make sense of the (re)ordering of communities as part of their own maintenance.

Regimes themselves are hostile in their amalgamation of power, "the covering conceit of a racial regime is a makeshift patchwork masquerading as memory and the immutable" (Robinson 2007:xii). The discourse of the raced subject changes, adapts and morphs, but is consistently maintained through the political apparatus of colonialism, the economies of securing and controlling bodies, the arm of patriarchy and the invention of the Negro (Robinson 2007:xi). The production of race is not a seamless process. The production of race "is an alchemy of the intentional and the unintended, of known and unimagined fractures of cultural forms, of relations of power and the power of social and cultural relations" (Robinson xii). All inform the discourse of race. Robinson conceptualized a racial regime as "constructed social systems in which race is proposed as a justification for the relations of power" (2007:xii). Thus, following with the theory of power proposed by Said, racial regimes have a history of incorporating raced subjects through a chaotic process of discipline and domination.

Through a regime a myth is built that these subjects were raced *a priori* to their incorporation, while hiding the social production that necessitates their racialization. The process of their incorporation racializes them. As a result, regimes rely on violence to incorporate racialized subjects as well as shape the narrative of subjects. As Robinson (2007) continues:

> racial regimes do possess history, that is, discernible origins and mechanisms of assembly. But racial regimes are unrelentingly hostile to their exhibition. This antipathy exists because a discoverable history is incompatible with a racial regime and from the realization that, paradoxically, so are its social relations (xii).

Using the framework of a racial regime brings forth the relationship between ambivalence to violence and myths of the subjects, both equally complex and layered. Regime maintenance necessitates controlling and manipulating understandings of knowledges. Histories for Robinson are an invention of Enlightenment thinking. They set events and actors in linear plots that formulate ideology. Robinson is particularly interested in nationalist ideologies which produce

racialization. This is particularly important when considering contestations through and across Black geographies in an attempt to map refusal to dispossession as a distinct politic. The disavowal of violence, myths and so on are coalesced to create narratives of racialized subjects produced by racialized geographies.

Competing ontological traditions are constitutive of regimes compulsions to create history. In other words, as contestations build on a genealogy of power, the narrative about communities needs to be controlled to maintain the regime. Racial regimes, in addition to their violent process of incorporating subjects, are unrelentingly hostile to ontological traditions that press on the logics of dominating systems. If we realize that there is a mythology, composed entirely of fractures and attempts to repair those fractures, that masks a violent process of incorporation, then we understand that our social relations are built on the incorporating process and not congruent logic. Robinson reminds us:

> "the degeneration of racial regimes occurs with some frequency for two reasons. First, apparent difference in identity is an attempt to mask shared identities…. A second source of regime entropy ensues from the fact that because the regimes are cultural artifices, which catalog only fragments of the real, they inevitably generate fugitive, unaccounted-for elements of reality" (2007:vii).

The social relations are incompatible because they are what make the regime unstable in light of a discoverable tradition. In the same breath, the incompatibility provides a foundation for the regime to continue its tenuous function. Nevertheless, this competition, or the intentional and incessant resistance, is what prevents the system from totalizing.

The disavowal of the process of dispossession as violence is central to regime maintenance because of the centrality of private property. How does this disavowal toward violence enacted on a raced subject complicate our understanding of geographic struggles? The disavowal of this violence allows for denial of the racial order dictating social relations while

also justifying its existence through narrative. The ontological tradition of housing struggles is not totalizing as evidenced by the competing ontological tradition of geographic struggles. However, within the racial regime, raced subjects are dispossessed based on their relation to private property, which ignores the sociality built within communities. The disavowal of this violence toward raced subjects who press on dominating systems, in this case the ordering of geographies, is central to maintaining racial capitalism to produce order for race and land. The solutions to dispossession are wrapped in and warped by devotions to economic development as a proxy for measuring communal health. As Moms for Housing presented an argument for how to engage their geography where housing was a right to all families, the arguments and knowledges they presented necessitated hostility in order to maintain the racial regime that read them as unstable and, indeed, tied to underdevelopment. These knowledges evince the historical friction generated by resistance because the new argument offered continues the tradition of resisting socially assigned disposability. In this iteration of fracture and repair, Moms for Housing offered a new argument for contesting the system of domination, and the state and the corporation which owned the property were easily able to tap into a discourse and legalized framework to forcibly reinstate these knowledges into the racial regime.

Ontological Traditions and Their Myths

Ontological traditions discussed as being disparate and disjointed as part of the mythology (of space, geographies and communities) but are intricately tied together through racial capitalism. The tradition of housing struggle abides by property, where scholars explore the dimension and levels at which populations are segregated and isolated. Additionally, scholars measure wealth disparities through the lack of access to housing Black people have experienced. This tradition is often privileged over the marred and defaced ontological tradition of people in

communities. However, as McKittrick and Woods suggests, these studies injudiciously reduce Black life to essential measurable facts as opposed to contenting with their lived experiences through the engagement of their geographies (2007:6).

The ensnaring of geography and race is central to understanding dispossession through land grabs. Geographies are raced through the communities within them, and race is mutually constituted with the kinds of geographies available to communities. Thus, through Black geographies we need to understand how these struggles are embedded within an intra- and international struggle over land and sovereignty. Geographic struggles are about the relationships within spaces. This includes properties within place but also considers things like culture, mental maps, communal knowledge and relationships within communities. Changing our lens and adding to the scope of the analysis allows scholars to understand the contentions between and across communities.

Myth 1: Development is a solution to geographic difference.

The ontological tradition of housing struggles stifles the story of development as a condition of material progress. This myth is carried forward by the justification that communities with higher property values are communities with other favorable social characters. Following the groundwork laid out by both Walter Rodney (1972) and Manning Marable (1983)[5] helps to

[5] To quote Marable in his own words, "underdevelopment begins with the questions raised by Marxist economist Harry Magdoff: 'Where would the original accumulation of capital used in industry (in the West) have come from if not from the extraction of wealth from colonies, piracy, and the slave trade?'… Development was more than all other factors combined, the institutionalization of hegemony of capitalism as a world system. Underdevelopment was the direct consequence of this process: chattel slavery, sharecropping, peonage, industrial labor at low wages, and cultural chaos" (62). Underdevelopment is "the inevitable product of an oppressed population's integration into the world market economy and political system" (65).

unpack both development and underdevelopment as productions of economic expansion that influences the capacity for societies to engage with the environment. Thus, development purportedly solves two problems. The first is the value of geographies as the influx of new types of housing changes the relationship and capacity of a space. Second, development purportedly solves the social ills within a place that are defined and framed through racial discourse.

As housing developers and city governments describe development, their conceptualization includes the buildings and businesses that are in a city. They are focused on property and property values. When community members describe development, their focus is on social wellness and ways to increase community activities. These two ideas fundamentally antagonize each other. Thus, the discourse of Right for Housing is eclipsed by a debate about affordable housing.[6] This change not only distanced the demand made by radical activists from the historical logics, but more importantly, it wields short-sighted regime maintenance to put off addressing the needs of the people. Developers can claim that housing inequality is a class issue because they compartmentalize class and class inequality as being separate from racial issues. This is a form of erasure, which is a key component in denying communal knowledge. Warping the demand for recognition of the Right for Housing into a call for affordable housing is a disavowal of the violence of dispossession.

[6] For an example of this eclipsing, Molly Solomon from KQED wrote an article titled "What Would 'Housing as a Human Right' Look Like in California." The article describes the UN's definition of housing as a human right and cites the UN's International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Solomon then gives the reaction of Eric Tars: "A right to adequate housing is not a requirement that states build free housing for the entire population, Eric Tars, legal director at the National Law Center on Homelessness and Poverty. Rather, he said, it devotes resources and protective measure to prevent homelesses, discrimination and promote permanent stable housing. That could take the form of more public housing and vouchers, incentives to develop affordable housing, rent control and inclusionary zoning. 'What that looks like at the local level is a lot of the things that our country is doing already, but needs to be brought to a fuller scale,' Tars said" (2020)

Community members, however, are acutely aware of the relationship between race and housing. They also feel more vulnerable because of their position within racial capitalism. The violence specific toward Black communities has been a praxis of both exclusion from wealth accumulation and the maintenance of an exploited laboring class. This exploited laboring class can be removed, relocated, disposed of and replaced by virtue of their epistemological position as racial capitalism marks and measures their value racially (positioning whiteness) and economically (participating in demanded labor).

Capitalism is a system that produces mechanisms of difference making. These mechanisms work to produce class, sex and gender along racial lines. Racial capitalism is not a type of capitalism. The "class versus race" or "race versus class" adages are not only evidence of racial domination in their construction, but also devoid of a theoretical dealing with the logics of race and the function of racial difference produced by capitalism. Thus, the contemporary critique of capital as devoid of—or ontologically disconnected from race—is an incomplete project. Capitalism is racialized, and a critique of capitalism cannot fully explain resultant inequality under a framework that treats race as happenstance or intersectional. The ontological tradition of geographic struggles will require a racial capitalist lens, not only to situate an analysis on how geographic spaces are ordered through race, but also to expose how race is further understood through geography.

Katherine McKittrick (2006) demonstrates Blackness is continually positioned and defined by dispossession and perpetual placelessness. As residents are being locked culturally, politically and physically out of geographies, Blackness is then removed in the name of modernity. As McKittrick (2006) demonstrates:

> Traditional geographies did, and arguably still do, require black displacement, black placelessness, black labor, and a black population that submissively stays 'in place.' Enforcing black placelessness/captivity was central to processes of enslavement and the physical geographies of the slave system. Slavery concealed a black sense of place and the possibility of 'black geographers' through punishment, dehumanization, and racist discourses, which, undermined (but did not prevent) black knowledges" (9).

If developing places requires Black subjects to be disposable, then Black displacement is a product of racial capitalism. Displacement is an epistemological agreement for white safety at the expense of Black precarity under the façade of progress. White property requires Black placelessness in order to produce value in the housing market. Placelessness is an epistemological feature of Blackness, which is why racial capitalism works to differentiate white and Black geographies. Dispossession is a necessary component of property and ownership as a commodity that marks difference through disposability. Thus, the ontological tradition of housing struggles violently obstructs the ability to address racial capitalism, as housing is valued through proximity to Blackness, and produces myths that allow for the disavowal of violence to maintain racial regimes.

Through the ontological tradition of housing struggles, Blackness is definitionally tied to placelessness, development and underdevelopment are key components for how community formations can be articulated through new imaginaries. One problem with the argument that development is a solution to geographic difference is the ignored condition that whiteness is tethered to development and Blackness is tethered to underdevelopment. Value is created through distance from Blackness. Radical solutions must be aimed at the fabric of the ontological relationship to Black subjectivity and the possibilities to protect communities.

As communities are dispossessed and subjects are read as disposable in the name of development, the reordering of space is (re)imagined despite their communal practices. The ability of racialized subjects to produce space and knowledges becomes disrupted. The narrative created to maintain racial regimes disavows the violence of this process. The contention then is not housing affordability, but the possibility to protect communities and communal formation. As the political context changes, the demand of the geographies also changes. What we can conclude is that privileging the ontological traditions of housing struggles over geographic struggles relinquishes our analysis to a limited material critique that distracts us from what is actually being disrupted: communal practices. Thus, maintenance of racial regimes requires reinvestment in unstable truth systems through myths.

Myth 2: The relationship between race and housing

The theories scholars have used to conceptualize housing struggles are part of an unstable truth system, built on myths obfuscating the geographic struggles that hold communal knowledge. Two dominant conceptualizations of housing struggles in the 20th century collectively articulate the ontological tradition of housing struggles. The first can broadly be articulated through the tension of segregation and integration. The struggle to integrate Black neighborhoods began shortly after the failure of Reconstruction, which led the U.S. to have to compromise on a solution of what to do with over 4 million newly freed, formerly enslaved people (Coates 2014; Marable 1983). Theories that promote integration as the solution to housing struggles argue that Black people cannot access certain neighborhoods. They further suggest that access to these neighborhoods begets social mobility. However, the problem is not

that Black people need different kinds of housing, as these theories suggest, but rather that Blackness is tied to underdevelopment.

Segregation and integration critiques are built on the myth that diversity, inclusion and access are the nucleus of housing struggles. The critique put forth by theories of integration and segregation also depends on the myth that there was ever an attempt to integrate residential neighborhoods. This conceptualization is strengthened by the wide belief that segregation was a de facto process as opposed to the result of legal exclusionary practices committed by federal, state and city government bodies. Both Richard Rothstein (2017) and Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor (2019) draw out the legal histories of housing laws and policies that would have addressed segregation but demonstrate how the Nixon administration took the teeth out of civil rights laws to make them unenforceable. As the violence toward Black communities in the South sparked outrage and backlash, migrated settlements in the North and West also targeted and dismantled Black communities through legal codes. The regional differences are more ideological than material but created a need for mechanisms that were better at hiding this violence.

The second more recent conceptualization is the relationship between (re)development and gentrification. Gentrification is another type of housing struggle that problematizes displacement by connecting it to (re)development, which rests on the myth of (economic) development. Gentrification as a theory depends on the myth of a universal impact of housing struggles using generic definitions of displacement. Although the literature for gentrification is not homogeneous, the premise is rooted in a class lens as the problem of housing struggles. Through this conceptualization housing, space and geographies are erased from the process of racialization because the middle class (as a deracialized group) are implicated in the removal of

the working class (as a negatively racialized group). This mythology protects the violence within the process of "gentrification," committing asymmetrical acts of dispossession.

Spatial theories that do not consider how racial capitalism produces categories of difference take for granted the ensnaring of race and housing, and by extension race and geographies, by essentializing their interconnectedness. These theories make the mistake of suggesting that housing is racialized as opposed to dealing with the socio-historical incorporation that forces housing to be racialized. Meaning, they commit what "might be called bio-geographic determinism, black geographies disappear–to the margins or to the realm of the unknowable. In short, a black sense of place and black geographic knowledges are both undermined by hegemonic spatial practices (of, say, segregation and neglect and seemingly unavailable as a worldview" (McKittrick and Woods 2007:7). To refocus spatial theories away from essentializing race, spatial theories have to think beyond the centralization of private property to engage other conceptualizations of community.

The ontological tradition of housing struggles puts forth one story of the contestations within geographies, measuring and evaluating material changes. Although conceptualizations and critiques of material disparities introduced seemingly radical new imaginaries of housing solutions, these theories depend on myths that help to stunt the political imagination. The ontological tradition of housing struggles brings us to policy driven solutions as the most radical possibilities for the political imagination. Thus, they limit the ability to address racial capitalism and the way housing is valued through proximity to Blackness. Ontological tradition of housing struggles must maintain the myth that, again, whiteness is tethered to development and Blackness is tethered to underdevelopment. Value is created through distance from Blackness. As racial capitalism uses geographical solutions to difference, race is at the center of how we

make sense of the inevitable crisis at the end of capitalist models and entropy of racial regimes. Again, radical solutions must be aimed at the fabric of the relationship between Blackness and the way community is protected.

Conclusion

Contention over geographic spaces is rooted in how communities create understandings of their engagement with the environment. How this contention is described, understood and theorized creates both the method for solving these contentions and the narratives of the contention itself, which define the communities within a geographic space. Communities are by definition relational. How communities come into being and construct meaning for those relations builds *ontological traditions*. These traditions are built through relationships, which organize the geographies they engage through contestation. Contestation within and across communities builds on a genealogy of power, which becomes apparent in the narratives about communities.

The *communal relationships* are equally as important to 1) the kinds of organizations, institutions and narratives communities collaboratively build as well as 2) how social actors engage with *geographies*. What determines if actors are subjects or objects of this *contestation* is rooted in the direction of power and the employment of political structures. Under specific regimes *power* is directional and rips apart communal knowledge that helps to build ontological traditions. The organization of geography and the kind of technology that is introduced, determines the type of social actors who participate within the space. This determines how communities come into being and the relationships within communities.

As Foucault (1976) reminds us systems of domination build tension into which all resistance feeds, making them cyclical. Said's (1983) intervention rebukes this claim, insisting that systems of domination are not totalizing. There is always a form of resistance that exists outside of those systems. Robinson (2007) explicates this by reminding us that resistance to the regime and subjects outside of those systems need to be violently incorporated. The maintenance of the narrative of resistance is violence as the regime deals with incorporating subjects. My project advances that systems of domination are not totalizing. Blackness does not need to be reimagined through the mechanism of racial regimes, but their resistance to the regime is under attack. *The resistance held by Black communal knowledge and community formation is being attacked through the maintenance of the regimes, because racial capitalism requires Black placelessness to re-order value.* The regime requires an ambivalent relationship to violence. Black communities and Black placelessness cannot coincide according to the regime. Blackness is abjected through the discursive link to underdevelopment. Dispossession as a mechanism of racial capitalism to reorder racial differences through geography is met with ambivalence because this is seen as part of the regime.

Another human being losing their right to housing is an act of violence. However, the regime allows us to understand this as a character of raced subjects. Racial capitalism does not allow for Black subjects to make claims to Black place. Black people must always be moved and moveable, which is to say, racial capitalism makes Black placelessness necessary. Of course, Black people resist placelessness, not just by securing Black housing (i.e. property), but by building community (housing, social institutions, churches, schools, employment agencies, etc.) that support efforts to secure Black communal practices. To imagine beyond political strategies

that remap economic markers of development is to imagine what sits beyond the current racial regime.

CHAPTER #3: Problematizing Affordability

Introduction

Articulating urban change as political struggle warrants distinguishing antagonistic sides. I have expressed two distinctive ontological traditions. One that engages geographies to reify racial difference through underdevelopment, and another which opposes the privileging of private property over community wellness. In this chapter, I will explore the logics and ethos of this first tradition as expressed by both the City of Oakland in their analysis of the housing problem and progressive developers who demonstrate the contradictions within privileging private property. The City of Oakland, developers and community members all agree on the devastation of the existing housing crisis, however, the City of Oakland working in congruence with developers have promoted the discourse that this housing crisis can be flattened to a housing shortage. In the case of Oakland, the discourse of the "housing shortage" has given the greenlight to a massive increase in development. Thus, both the role of developers and the reliance of development to solve the housing crisis is central to the geographic contestation in Oakland and the resultant dispossession.

The mythology put forth by development hides the hostility of racial regimes and the amalgamation of systems of domination that discipline communities through assessments of value and productivity. Willful dependence on market solutions severely limits our collective vision for social equity within the housing market. State and local officials, nonprofits, advocates and even sometimes activists routinely turn to the market in their efforts to address housing inequality, often facilitating or supporting various price-managed housing programs and sometimes working with developers to "secure affordability" without sacrificing profit. These

efforts exacerbate crises and stifle our ability to imagine housing as a decommodified good within the market. Additionally, the racial logics within spaces are left identified as abstract problems, but not addressed through concrete solutions. As dispossession occurs through development and the (re)ordering of space, neoliberal governance exacerbates mythology of development to legitimize the maintenance of racial regimes through geographic contestations.

"Affordable housing" is a complicated term that needs to be complicated even more (Linnerman and Megbolugbe 1992; Gyourko and Linneman 1993). The distinctions of the types of housing I have heard from developers, city officials and community members are public housing, market rate housing and "affordable housing." Public housing is designated for low-income residents, seniors and people with disabilities. Oakland Housing Authorities follow HUD guidelines for income limits to determine who is eligible for public housing. Market rate housing is determined by the demand for housing and has no restrictions on the income, rental rates or sales prices of the area. "Affordable housing" works as a liminal category that is merged and adapted in between them. This term has been adapted throughout the years and continues to be reimagined (Feins 1981; Rosen 1984). The further market rate housing is from public housing, the wider the concept of affordability. Thus, "affordable housing" is a myth, disguised as a solution to displacement, but is a market-based solution. The struggle for housing is rooted in a political struggle for space within geographies (Von Hoffman 2005; Mollenkopf 1983). In Oakland, this is especially difficult as the development of "affordable housing" is a contributor to dispossession, not a solution.

"Affordable housing" is secured in two ways. First, there is the building of housing, typically on public land or land that has been subsidized (Rosen 1984). Second is the acquiring of existing units and maintaining their affordability by developers, the local government,

nonprofits or private individuals. The numerical rule of thumb for demarcating affordability is 30% of the median household income. Contemporarily, developers use this standard in the industry and now it has taken hold of common conceptualizations of the term. The discourse of "affordable housing" is at best problematic, and at worst a nefarious tendency to obscure the relationship between development and underdevelopment. When neoliberal governance relies on individualized, privatized solutions such as the creation of "affordable housing" units, a contradiction emerges. A central contradiction of "affordable housing" is that it is not affordable, but only profitable. The profit relies on racial difference to enshrine economic development (capital accumulation) through racial projects. That is, we cannot separate the current model of private property without considering violent processes of dispossession (historical and contemporary).

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the solutions proposed by the City of Oakland are not only oriented around myths of development, but also lack the intention of intervening on the racialized housing practices that disproportionately impact Black residents. First, I will focus on the interviews I conducted with two progressive developers that demonstrate both the pitfalls of "affordable housing" as speculative markets. Second, I will add to these interviews by reviewing the "Oakland at Home: Recommendations for Implementing *A Roadmap toward Equity*" published by the City of Oakland which narrates their understanding of the housing crisis and maps out their proposed solutions. Laying bare the tenets of housing struggles exposes how the disavowal of racial violence is covered by the relentless campaign for development.

A Word from The Developers

Property developers (developers) "add value" by renovating, extending and improving existing properties or converting land into residential or commercial property (Peiser and Frej

2003). They work with all aspects of a project from start to finish. In a densely populated area such as Oakland, there are few places where empty land is available. Thus, much of the development comes from "flipping" existing properties and thereby (re)ordering existing communities. Developers become central to the housing crisis only insofar as local governments promote the ideology of development as the solution to geographic unevenness. The current model rests on the creation and stabilization of "affordable housing" as the way to generate a separate housing market for low to mid-income buyers and renters. By working within the tradition of housing struggles, this model violently disciplines communities within Oakland in order to privilege private property.

How developers recognize their role in community formation is only as significant as the governments' reliance on development to solve community problems. In this section I will discuss the two interviews of progressive developers as they understand the housing situated in Oakland. They both grew up in Oakland and have been working in development to focus on affordable housing for over 15 years. As they describe their understanding of "affordable housing", they also unknowingly expose many of the contradictions of privileging private property as the solution for community development.

Terrance Howard

As I sat down with city developer Terrance Howard, who specializes in the development of "affordable housing", I probed him to better understand how developers were teasing out these issues. Throughout our conversation, he described to me not only how he interpreted the urban change happening in Oakland, but also detailed the interventions necessary to secure affordability in an area. I began by asking, "What do you know about Oakland housing?"

Terrance described. "I'm originally from East Oakland, and I've been living back in the Bay Area for 8 years now. However, I've also lived in the Midwest and East Coast. I have been a housing developer for 15 years. Primarily focused on affordable and mixed income housing around the country. I did work in Katrina and now I have an office in Daly City."

"In the work in the Bay Area, are there specific neighborhoods?" I asked.

"Right now I'm working in West Oakland doing affordable preservation work. I work for a private equity fund that's in charge of buying housing that's in danger of losing its affordability."

"How do you measure affordability?"

"Housing is affordable to you regardless if you make a million dollars or 100," he waved his hands to emphasize that this detail was unimportant. Then he continued, "if you can take 30% of your pre-taxed income and pay your rent or mortgage, your utilities and your home expenses. That's the definition of affordability. So when we talk about building affordable housing, we should speak of it through the caveat of who it's affordable to. To measure that, we use area median income. So traditionally when we're talking about affordable housing that's rental housing, we're talking about housing that's affordable between 0% to 80% of the area's median income. Then when you get to 80%-130% of the area's median income, that becomes more 'work force' housing. Affordability is 80 and below. That's what I talk about affordable housing."

"How would you describe gentrification that is happening in Oakland? When would you say the starting point for gentrification was?"

He shook his head rapidly. "My view of Oakland gentrification is a lot different than most," he said. "I was born in '78. Originally, near Eastmont Mall. When I was little the movie

theater was open in East Oakland. *All the stores*. The reason I got into this business wasn't for the purpose of affordable housing. It was how can we use development as a tool to revitalize neighborhoods, while preserving affordability, but also, creating a place where people aren't just leaving.

"I would say when Jerry Brown was mayor in 2000[7], that's when he did the whole "we need 10,000 units of housing downtown." A lot of people in the city viewed that as what pushed people out. I said, "I'm from here. No one lived downtown." You had the department stores… So it's not like, you know, we weren't kicking people out of affordable homes to build luxury homes. We were bringing housing to an area that never had housing. We were trying to get more feet on the street, which provides safety, and all these other positive externalities. I was disappointed that it needed to be 100% market rate. That was problematic but that development didn't displace folks.

"Here's my biggest thing now—it is so funny—low income folks don't want market rate. High income folks don't want affordable housing in their neighborhood. And so, in California folks can agree, don't build anything. It's funny because I remember going with my wife to a BBQ in East Oakland. There were San Francisco folks complaining that they got pushed out of SF. We're sitting in this nice house in East Oakland. You're complaining and you're pushing out Oakland people to Antioch but not even thinking about it." He took a moment to laugh before he continued. "But the economy both as a state and as a region, and as a city of Oakland, we did not build housing for *basically a generation.* So now there is a huge jobs boom in the region–largely

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[7] Mayor Jerry Brown's 10k Program was designed to bring 10,000 new residents to Downtown Oakland. Brown engenders his plan by "building approximately 6,500 condos, lofts, and apartments, most of them designed for affluent urbanites, he hoped to attract ten thousand new residents to the city's dreary downtown and transform it into a vibrant retail destination" (Grammon and Platoni 2007). The plan fell extremely short because of the financial crisis of 2008 (Temple 2009).

driven by jobs in Silicon Valley and San Francisco that recognize they don't have the housing there for all of these workers. And it's so expensive there. Those workers need to find another place, and that's Oakland.

"If they have $3000 a month to spend on housing, and no one built them a $3000 unit, then they are going to take that $3000 when you're paying $2000 or $1000. That's why that person gets displaced. Because there's not enough housing, period. It's an economic thing. It's not the development of housing that pushes people out. It's not having housing at all income levels.

He put his hands on his chest to indicate himself and said, "you're talking to a guy that has developed 10,000 units of affordable housing around the country. I'm the biggest advocate of affordable housing. But we're in such a crisis in California, particularly in the Bay, that we just need housing across the board."

"Why is Oakland attracting all of these new residents?"

"The cultural stuff. It's urban. If you're at the court, certain neighborhoods are walkable, nightlife—all those things. So when you get highly educated, white folks coming from all over the country, and they see that there's this [big] place—while Oakland is a lot smaller than SF—it's a different experience. These folks are coming from places like Indianapolis suburbs and growing up in the Midwest and the South. All of a sudden you have this big city, the airport, it's convenient and a whole lot cheaper than San Francisco. The weather is better. So many reasons to be in Oakland. Unfortunately, it hasn't yielded a tax base that has allowed municipal services and support of service to really bubble up to everyone else. But if you're young, white, have some money to spend it's a good place to be now, which is so funny.

"I had a place across the street from Preservation Park, and I remember like a random night watching a white couple late night walking on MLK, holding a beer, and walking their toy dog... Looked at that whole thing and I was confused why they weren't afraid for their safety. You got the police threat with an open container and you're two guys with a toy dog on MLK. You have no fear for your safety. That's when it hit me that it's completely changed."

I took a second to ask the next question, because he was still reflecting about this change. Then I asked, "What does a lack of affordable housing do to a city?"

He responded quickly, "It means where I am in, I got in this world for neighborhood revitalization. And when you don't have the foundation of affordable housing, when you're looking to revitalize an area, you're not lifting all boats." He slowly drew his hand up to signify rising water. Then said, "I'll give you an example, the first big development I did was in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. 60 apartments. There was a song that Juvenile did, the 'Nolia Clap.' He did that song about the Magnolia Projects. The Magnolia Projects were shuttered after the storm, and we were brought in to work with the community to rebuild them. But we weren't just going to rebuild what was there before.

So there were about 144 families that were living there at the time of the storm. We developed a plan where not only did we replace the 144 public housing units, but we developed a total of 195 public housing units, then we did an additional 144 plus affordable units. Then we mixed them all together with 130 market rate housing [units]. So we weren't re-concentrating deep poverty. We weren't saying public housing over here," (he said as he pointed to one place), "affordable folks over there" (pointed somewhere else) "and market rate over there" (pointed to a third spot). "We mixed everything together so there was complete economic integration. So, now we were able to develop at the market rate level, but also, we were able to create a place that not

only allowed people to come back and provide additional affordability, but provide homes for people with choices to *want* to live there and then integrate them together. So now you've created a mixed income neighborhood, which then you can go do the luxury stuff after that.

So now you have a stabilized safe neighborhood. You have long term affordability in place, and so it's not a huge kick to the community when you come in and build the luxury condos because everyone in the community is protected in perpetuity. That's the right way to do it. When you don't do it that way, you don't have the affordability. But all this additional investment comes in, then what you're saying is, I don't want to revitalize the community. I want to build a different community, which is very different."

"Where does the investment come from?"

"Well so here's the biggest secret to all of this stuff," he took a second to laugh. "So everyone says '*greedy developer, greedy developer*'. Developer has a bad name. What folks need to understand is developers put in about 5% of the equity that is needed to build a market rate development and the equity investors put in 95%. The bulk of the equity comes from investors. If you go all the way up and flow the power it's the pensions for teacher, police and firefighters. The same people that can't afford to live there. So if you look at it, that's where the power vacuum is. You've got all of these teachers, police and firefighters kind of protesting developers and voting for rent control, and every month they're investing money in pensions that are requiring certain returns from their developer partners. Which is why developers can only charge certain rent, because those are the rents that bring the returns that are demanded by, basically, the police, fire and teachers.

“:It's crazy. People, it’s the way they divide us. The sleight of hand. But it’s really, actually, this is where your power is. I’m hopefully going to be able to develop affordable housing on two state owned sites next to city hall in San Francisco.”

I turned our attention onto land, specifically how little land there is available in Oakland. In California, the legislature passed the Surplus Land Act in 2019, which designates surplus state owned land to affordable housing. Oakland also passed a municipal code which echoed the language in the state legislature. I asked him about the Surplus Land Act and what he knew about the law. He did not know the nuances about the state law or the city code, however, he was familiar with this as a process. I asked Terrance, “who needs to be held accountable for violations of the Surplus Land Act?”

“Well, it’s the municipalities that have to make it available for that!” he responded. “But you know, land isn’t the only issue. The challenge is affordable housing is not economical, and it’s more expensive than to build market rate. For example,” he paused for a second to collect his thoughts. “So the way that market rate housing gets financed, you have a developer who puts in 5% of the equity that’s needed. They go find an investor that does 95% to build. [However] it is probably 30-35% of the total cost. The rest you go to a bank that provides debt. You pull it together.

“So with affordable housing because, again it’s not economical, there’s not enough cash flow to provide a return.” He started to use his fingers to number things off his list. He stated “You have to apply for competitive tax credits, you have to apply for competitive bonds, you have to apply for competitive city, county, state and federal subsidies to put it all together. And to get all these things, it’s unfortunate and I get it—but I don’t get it. The [California] tax credit

program[8] was about creating housing for people that earn up to 60% of the area median income. It was just a housing program, but since then it's become a jobs program, a neighborhood works program, a social services program, a homelessness program. It initially wasn't for the homeless, it was for working low income folks, and all of these other bells and whistles that [make it harder] to qualify for these subsidies.

"You typically have to build larger units than what the market has to build. For example, when I was on the institutional equity side, I worked for a company that had billions of dollars in private equity funds. They had investors, pensions and other folks. My job was to find real estate deals to invest that money, in either existing units, or [in] partnering with developers and provide that 95% equity check, and with that, to build a market rate development in the city of San Francisco. Including land cost it would typically cost about $450,000 a unit for development cost. [Yet] to do affordable development in San Francisco, where the land [cost] was *zero*," he signaled a zero with his fingers for emphasis. "it cost $950,000 a unit to build. So affordable [housing] cost almost *double* to develop than market rate in the city of San Francisco, because all of those additional requirement layers that gets put on."

"What are those additional requirements?" I asked.

"So [developers] probably need to build larger family units. More market rate buildings are studios and 1 [bedrooms], maybe some 2's and 3's. Then to build affordable [housing] you have to build up to 5 bedroom units. Usually the site where affordable housing gets built has significant infrastructure cost. There may be some environmental clean-up stuff, to get brand

[8] Terrance Howard is describing tax credits disbursed by the California Tax Credit Allocation Committee (TCAC). TCAC "facilitates the investment of private capital into the development of affordable housing for low-income Californians. TCAC allocates federal and state tax credits to the developers of these projects. Corporations provide equity to build the projects in return for the tax credits" (Treasurer.ca.gov) TCAC works with The California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD, the California Housing Finance Agency (CalHFA) and the California Debt Limit Allocation Committee (CDLAC).

new sewers and streets. All those. Your labor cost more, you have additional consultants because they want to make sure—these are good things, but they cost—they want to make sure that you're hiring locally, paying higher wages than you would for market rate development. Then there's lots of stuff associated with the different layers of financing. So I explained how the market rate gets financed, its equity and debt. With affordable housing it's bonds, tax credit, it's a loan from the city, it's a loan from the state, maybe the feds. There also are all these fees associated with that. Then the lawyers and accountants do extremely well, because of all those additional layers that you have to negotiate, as well."

"What makes a site ideal for low income housing?"

"Ideally you're close to transit, and your walkability is high. It's the same fundamentals as market rate, but obviously it's hard to get because you can't pay as much for the land as market rate can. Most affordable housing in cities like San Francisco, Oakland or Los Angeles, 'core cities', end up getting built on government owned land because that land comes into the project at no cost. And the city is incentivized to provide subsidies for the development of that land."

I took a moment to warn them that I was going to ask him a question about definitions. I explained to him I wanted to know how he defined and used these terms differently. I asked, "What do you see as revitalization? Do you see it as separate from gentrification?"

"I'll give an example," He said. "my father grew up in St Louis, Missouri, which is where a company that I used to work for is head-quartered. So, I spent 5 years living there, and there was a neighborhood called the Gaslight Square where my dad graduated high school. That's where the jazz clubs were and all the nightlife. Just to give you more context of St. Louis, when my dad left to go to college, there were 800,000 people who lived there. When I left St. Louis to

move back to the Bay, there were 300,000 people who lived there. So, basically, the city of Oakland left the city of St. Louis. You had an influx of cocaine and crack, you had white flight and infrastructure deterioration. This neighborhood became one of the worst neighborhoods in the city. Boarded up buildings... Rough place.

The company I used to work for came in and said, okay there's a lot of land here that's basically been abandoned, and its tough, but if we can do something of scale then we can revitalize and turn it around. First, we're going to build mixed income multi-family apartments. We're going to build 250 units, which is a good number of rooftops. We're going to make sure half of them are affordable [housing] and half are at market [rate housing]. And right now the market isn't that high, but you got two layers of income. Let's also build some senior housing here and do 100 plus units of senior housing. Now, we're looking at 350 units and, all of a sudden, now there's a lot of people walking around–it's starting to get safe.

So, let's make some homeownership opportunities. It's not an expensive market, yet, because it's still changing. So, we'll sell them at the market rate, but the market is affordable at this time. So, now we have over 500 rooftops in this area, we can justify making investment to build retail. So, we build the first supermarket to go back in St. Louis for 20 years, and some retail around it. Okay, so now we have all this housing, we have access to a decent grocery store. It's a place where people want to live, so other developers can come in and build luxury townhouses and that type of thing. Now everyone wants to live there, but because of the thing we put up front. We preserved affordability, so there's going to be long term affordability in the neighborhood, but there's market forces that are going to do their thing as well. That will allow additional investment to come in.

That's how I view revitalization. If I look at the neighborhoods I grew up in in Oakland, those types of interventions, even now… People are afraid of gentrification and displacement. But if you just cruise down from First Ave and go out to East 14th, as you head toward San Leandro, it is not doing well out there. But you have BART that goes out that direction. You have the stadiums that aren't going to have tenants soon. You have the rapid transit that will make it easier for people to get downtown. That's a huge opportunity that the City [of Oakland] is just not capitalizing on, to be able to preserve affordability there, to make large investments around where these transit infrastructure investments are being made. Then you let the market take over, and you're not going to have people upset talking about gentrification, because you did the groundwork.

That's what I call revitalization versus gentrification. It is just we're not going to put those protections in at the off set, we're just going to let the market do its thing. Largely we did nothing. And so, the jobs came before the houses. People didn't have a place to live, this is where they came."

"Well, what advice would you give to Oakland?"

"I would say, you know, West Oakland BART should be the absolute focus. It's one stop to Downtown Oakland and one stop to Downtown San Francisco. You could build hundreds of units of affordable [housing] there mixed with market rate housing and allow that area to grow. And it's not just the BART station itself, but all those additional parking lots and that stuff. I think West Oakland is the biggest place where you could really do a revitalization strategy that preserves affordability creating additional affordable [housing] and allow the market to bring all folks up. That's where I would focus. Then I'd focus along East 14th and that corridor where the bus rapid transit is. Obviously, I don't know what the solution is for the stadium because it's on

the highway. It has good access to transit, but I don't know, other than housing, I don't know what would draw *people* out there. So, I think there's an opportunity for a lot of affordable housing. It's not a market rate market yet, but high-quality affordable housing creates that. And then let the market take over, but I would make large investment in affordable housing."

"Who could make a turn?"

"Governor Newsom. There wasn't one housing production bill that passed through the legislature in this last session and there were a number of them on the docket. Basically the legislature came back and just didn't make it happen. Because of the NIMBYs.[9]

"I just don't know how to convince people that it's not development that *creates* gentrification, because it feels that way. At the same time, [when] you're seeing the restaurants and the bars open up are [when] people are getting displaced. But the issue is there's no place for anybody to live. So, there's not enough supply, but I got money. I'm going to get the little supply that there is. So, that's the biggest issue. Now I actually think—it may not feel that way now—but things are going to change largely because of COVID, but also there are 6,000 units that are going to come online in Oakland over the next 3 years. Mostly market rate. At the same time, people are leaving San Francisco and Oakland right now due to COVID.

"Just as an aside, I sold my place a few weeks ago, but I was renting a loft across from Preservation Park. The tenant was a white woman who worked for Facebook, and they announced folks don't have to ever come back to the office. So, she kept her job and moved to Florida. So, because things are so expensive, we're seeing that, at the same time, all these units are coming online. There's going to be [a shift], while technically the rents aren't going to go

[9] NIMBY is an acronym that stands for "not in my back yard." Often associated with wealthier residents who do not want to allow a new development or change to occur in their neighborhood because it will impact their property values.

down, these buildings [in Oakland] are giving 1, 2, 3 even 6 months free rent depending on how long you sign a lease. [Thus] over the next few years there will be opportunity, but you have to strike while the iron's hot. Just an example, I brought my place in 2001-02, so everyone's talking about how things are not affordable now. It's a 1100 square foot 2 bed, 2 bath loft in Downtown Oakland that I paid $215,000 for. And it wasn't that long ago. We've been talking about the city being unaffordable for the last five years, when 8 years ago all these folks couldn't pay their mortgages. There was foreclosure and short sales throughout the city because of the last crisis. So it's cyclical. And now that we're finally getting some units delivered, it looks like that cycle is trending down in the short term. But folks need to jump, because three years from now we're going to be in a worse position than we are now."

I spoke a bit about many of the people in the Bay Area moving into Antioch where many of the people there may not be interested in coming back to Oakland.

"I'm glad you brought that up," he said while waving his hand and sitting up in his chair. He gave a big smile. "because that's also a very important thing regarding displacement! So, I did a bunch of work in the Bay View in San Francisco, and the advocates out there and community members were yelling "we're getting displaced." And it's like well, let's take a step back. Bay View has the highest homeownership rate in all of San Francisco. Last place where poor black people lived. Someone knocks on your door five years ago and says, "I'd like to give you $800,000 to $1.3 million for your house," and the community is saying, "you know what, don't sell your house because all this investment is coming. And it's going to be great here." And you're like, I've dealt with generations of disinvestment in this community. Someone's going to give me an amount of money I can't even fathom, and I can go to Antioch and buy a brand new house that's twice the size with the yard, or Vallejo, and in some case maybe even be in a gated

community. Which is the last place I'd want to be, but I get it… When you're living in a certain type of place for generations it's like, I'll sign up for that. So, in that case with the homeowners, they are not being pushed out! They are taking the check!"

Terrance and I finished our conversation by talking about his experiences with housing difficulties. He relayed the great timing of his choice to leave Oakland as he was able to get a great price for his unit near Downtown. he is now relocating to a nearby suburb.

Camila Aguiliar Ruiz

The second developer I spoke to was Camíla Aguiliar Ruiz, a second-generation immigrant to Oakland. Her knowledge of the urban changes is rooted in her work as an urban planner and developer. She spent her career working in the Bay Area through multiple housing agencies. I asked Camíla about her experiences in Oakland and how she began to contextualize these urban changes.

Camíla began by describing, "I grew up when Jerry Brown became Mayor. When Brown became mayor, he launched in to go along with the trend of urban development at the time when people were returning to cities. Downtown has suffered from an extreme divestment. The corner of Broadway and 14th, for decades, it was not a great neighborhood. Not in the same ways as the residential areas. It had big builds that were abandoned. When the office buildings weren't filled it was very empty.

"So when Brown took office, he wanted to bring 10,000 units to downtown. He started focusing on Jack London. With the knowledge that I have now, a) what the change did eventually look like and b) of urban planning and development an initiative to bring that many people sounds great. But that number doesn't have specifics to it. I'm not mad at the

gentrification, or who's doing it, but how it's done. So again that 10,000 number sounds great but with no specifics on it, it can wreak havoc.

"So with the Dot-com boom, which was going along with the same timeline, all of this money came into the Silicon Valley and eventually San Francisco. People who used to be able to afford to live there, started moving to Oakland. So over the course of time you get that population shift, and with that a market shift. So part of it changes because times change. But as a child growing up everyone got their shoes from Lakeshore [Avenue], went to the [Fentons] Creamery for ice cream and spent all of our time at the Lake. I was able to draw roots near downtown.

"I would say Oakland didn't really change until the early 2000s. Once people got priced out of those areas and started to move to Oakland, and people in Oakland started to move out—people started to realize what the value of Oakland was. This little hidden gem of diversity and inclusion with a special sort of energy. Not as hippie as Berkeley because Oakland was sort of more working class.

"Then once the Dot-com boom was over and we were hit with the recession, you really saw Oakland get taken over by a whole different cultural phenomena. I use Lakeshore as a very powerful testament because even after my son was born, his first few years were on Lakeshore. We'd spend time at Peets and get a burrito. I couldn't be on that street without seeing people that I went to school with, people my parents went to school with. So it was a big community feeling. That feeling was the same for a long time.

"Then in 2014 or 15 it just, was different. The stores that were more rooted in a diverse community started disappearing. In a place where the high end was a Mercedes, we're now

seeing Maserati's. Now it doesn't feel like home. I'm not saying hi to everyone walking down the street.

"If you weren't able to obtain property or have some property passed along to you, you're lost. As much as you love Oakland, you have to leave. Rather it was you were prohibited from owning a home because of price or the feeling of it just not being home, there's no going back. Oakland is now cost prohibited for my peer group and everyone else. When people are native Oaklanders and seek to remain or return but can't, what does that look like?"

We both nodded in silence for a second in a moment of agreement. Then I asked, "Do you think there's a long history of struggles for housing in Oakland?"

"No." she said quickly. "I don't think people paid enough attention to it. I think that if people have paid attention to keeping housing affordable in Oakland, than the changed would happen, but it would look different. It's weird to think about how much Oakland has changed under the leadership of Libby and Jerry who really messed Oakland up. And now the neighbors that move into grandma's housing, don't look anything like grandma. And you know, it's not about race, it's more about *class* and *culture*. If we had paid attention when Jerry said, 'I'm going to do these 10,000 units' to the *how* and *for the who*, we'd be in a different place. I think when people decided that they had to carve out affordable housing as separate from housing, it became very separate."

"Can you expand on that?" I asked.

"I've spent my whole career in affordable housing development." she said with her hand raised. "Rather than them thinking about affordable housing as community development—we're developing for everyone. We're doing it for the preservation of this culture and community, which is why we choose to live here. When we started developing affordable housing as a place

for the poor people to live, it became separate. It became an ‘us versus them.’ I am a believer that a good, thriving community has mixture. The Oakland I grew up in was very mixed. It was that diversity that allowed us to align on common values. So when it changed to a society that we’re building affordable housing to “help” people—helping in the negative sense. It made it so that the development of housing was separate from the development for the community. Then you have these a California redevelopment laws, that’s the way affordable housing is produced, formulated so much money. Now for an average person affordable housing was a good business. It became a business where someone could actually make a lot of money. It really became about making money. So the people that were making this money realized that some of these units were in golden places. So maybe they could move some more money in. The population began to change as the real estate values changed. I do believe that if we had been more conscious in what we were developing, and who we were developing for, we might not be looking at the culture shift in Oakland we’ve seen in the last decade.”

“In what ways can you make money from affordable housing?”

“This was associated with Proposition 13 and the ways our property laws got distributed to support community development. So they formed redevelopment agencies, which had the ability to disperse municipal funds, city funds or institutional funds into specific areas.” She took a long pause to formulate her thoughts. Then continued with a sigh, “governments traditionally are not reflective of the diversity of our community, particularly in places like San Francisco and Oakland. So I can use San Francisco as an example, the Fillmore was designated as a redevelopment area in the late 1960s and 1970s. Again, it’s been a thriving business corridor and as the nature of the country’s economy changed, so too did the Fillmore’s economy.

"When the municipalities and governments looked at identifying areas in which they wanted to put investments in infrastructure—often time in the forms of freeways, these tended to be communities of color, Black communities in particular. In thriving areas of Black ownership, they decide to put that freeway in those areas: Fillmore, MacArthur, East Oakland… dividing communities. They decided with the way the money would be invested didn't benefit the community in the long term. It was about attaching investment. Without the recognition that the people that live in communities, rather it be San Francisco, Oak, anywhere, without that recognition that people who are living there are assets. The opportunity for outsiders to come in and invest money is an easier one. That causes the fundamental culture of any neighborhood, any city. Unless it's done with purpose and intent to maintain that culture, it dilutes it. Then the people who are taking advantage of their experience and cultures change the area. I think if you look at the role of these redevelopment agencies and where and who they allocated their dollars to, and for what, we would see sort of the systematic breakdown of the preservation of cultures. This all goes without representation, the bodies making decisions about where buildings go and where housing goes, are not reflective of the people that live in these communities. They are going to outsiders regardless. There are outsiders making decisions about these communities. This is why representation is so important."

Camíla gave me advice to look more into Proposition 13 and the change in redevelopment agencies. She described how the agencies themselves went away with this legislative change, the function did not.

I warned her that I was going to ask questions about terms. I wanted to see how she used and defined these terms. I asked, "How do you define affordable housing?"

She laughed and then stated, “The dictionary definition of affordable housing would be less than 30% of your total income.” She lowered the tone of her voice and emphasized “*How many people really spend that on their housing?* My non-dictionary definition is less than 30% of your total income is ‘affordable.’ However, broader than that, everyone should have the ability to have safe, sanitary housing. Everyone should have access to housing on a level that they can obtain.”

I followed up with, “Does your agency match that definition? Is that everyone’s understanding in your agency?”

She took a second to laugh before she answered. Then she stated, “redevelopment agencies and housing agencies (that still exist) there are very common terms for what affordability looks like. Whether that be at 80% of the area median income (AMI) or 120% where many places in CA are what they called high-cost cities. There are very common definitions. The problem is,” She paused and hesitated. “…there are hundred times more people that fall in the definition of needing that ‘affordable housing.’ Let’s say you’re at the 80% of AMI, if you make 80% of the AMI, you’re eligible for affordable housing, that’s a really high threshold. The way that tax credits work, they are a way of producing affordable housing, but they are defined at 50% and 60% of AMI. The amount of people that are living right at that income level is *triple*, *quadruple*, the availability of housing that is built for people on that level. So what happens is you have a 100 unit building built, and you get away with calling it affordable. So we can keep building these buildings all we want, but if we have a 7,000-person waiting list, we’re never going to beat that list. It's everyone’s job to meet that need. It’s the federal government’s responsibility to pass along enough money to the cities and states. It’s the state’s responsibility to pass along enough money to the cities. It’s the cities responsibility to

make sure they are doing local laws, in zone and awarding contracts and permits. Systematic exclusion from housing can be broken down to the permit level. Who is getting the permit, the dollars, the municipal and federal funds to build these buildings? But we don't live in a society where that's a priority. We live in a capitalist society where some people benefit from having more than others."

I then asked, "How do you define gentrification?"

"Gentrification to me is physical neighborhoods change without benefiting established residents."

"Do you mean buildings?" I followed.

"Yes! I mean buildings." she said. "Whether that be a commercial build or a residential building I mean the physical landscape of the neighborhood changing without the human occupants. Benefits could mean a new house, a new roof, a job… the benefit is so broad. That's why there's so much opportunity within gentrification. That's why people have the opportunity to use that word and not think of bad things. Because it doesn't have to be a bad thing. We can have physical neighborhoods change that benefits the residents in those neighborhoods. When you don't do it with purpose and intent, when you don't build physical structures for non-tangible communities is when we go awry. Then the negative connotation of the word gentrification happens when we displace residents." She slowed down her speech and leaned in. "Sometimes," she paused. "…honestly, a little bit of displacement is necessary for a community to thrive. Sometimes you have negative elements that move into our community and overtake the positive ones. But it has to be about established residents or long-term residents, participating in the practice that we see in these changes."

"How do you define displacement?"

She stumbled over her words at a mumble, “It’s not just people, it’s bigger than people…” She took a really long pause to think. Then she said, “the changing of an environment that does not allow a person or place to thrive. I’ll use a non-human example. You have a plot of land and in that plot of land there’s a beautiful park. The city then decides to zone that land into industrial and given the opportunity, companies come to build industrial buildings around that park. That park is no longer desirable because it’s surrounded by industrial buildings. So the functionality of that park, a space where people would come to enjoy clean nature, has now been displaced. Now displacement, as I mentioned, sometimes is necessary when you have negative element in your communities.”

“What do you mean by ‘negative elements’?”

She quickly said, “When communities are neglected or suffer from disinvestment. You have elements of crime, the deterioration of buildings… it is necessary to do some displacement sometimes. But again, it’s how you do it. For example, Chicago just did a massive redevelopment of their public housing. As you can imagine, the definition of displacement being people who lived there no longer living there. There was an incredible amount of displacement of folks that live there. The positive example that I’ll use, is a working-class neighborhood by the lake in Chicago. There was a big public housing development. As they were involving residents in what manners of policy would be put in place when their units were rebuilt, residents were allowed to return, residents worked with the management company to incorporate annual drug test as part of their lease. That was because during the 1980s and 1990s, the crack epidemic crippled their communities, destroyed their community.

“So residents that were there, they were feeling like they were a part of it. They were having a say as to what needed to be put in place to help their communities thrive. They initiated

this. They needed to displace a certain population of people and the way they did that was through policy. If the management company, which was probably not [racially] reflective of the building, had said 'in order to come back you're going to have to take a drug test.' That would have never worked. Even if they did it, you would have found so much community and political push back, it probably would not have worked. But because the tenants who had lived there, who had participated in a thriving community, and wanted to participate in the redevelopment, said this is what our community needs to thrive. Then it was a policy measure that was able to be implemented and worked. People go along with it, and they don't have any problems taking their annual drug test for their subsidized apartment.

"So this is about affordable housing and producing housing for everyone to live in, not in the private marketplace. That's an important distinction. But I also feel like the private structure, while we have some very good mechanisms for the private sector to participate in affordable housing development. I really feel like there's a huge responsibility in the private sector to produce and maintain [housing] for workforce, that is underestimated and underdeveloped. Some companies realized that there is money and profit and benefit to investing in housing for their employees, but for the most part in our society we don't work that way."

"You know," she paused for a second. Her voice got lower and full of sadness. "Even as a young, Black mom that was a producer of affordable housing, I'm not able to make housing affordable for me. I don't see a path to homeownership for me as someone who loves Oakland. Now I'm in the process of moving to Las Vegas and it's a very sad hard thing for me to do. To make a choice to leave. Having left, I now can never come back. I think that's why the Lake has become, what the Lake has become. Now you need a central area to find community. You can't

just go outside on your porch anymore because the culture has completely shifted. It's heartbreaking to not like it, but the Oakland that is here is not the Oakland that I know."

Camíla and I finished our conversation by talking about the many Oakland Technical High School teachers that we had in common even though we were ten years apart in our graduating years. Our image of our high school was almost exactly the same.

Oakland (In)Action Plan

In 2016, the Oakland Housing Cabinet worked with Enterprise Community Partners to produce the "Oakland at Home: Recommendations for Implementing *A Roadmap toward Equity*" (*Roadmap*). Here the conceptualization of Oakland residents is separated into renters and homeowners. Following assessment of the housing crisis, this *Roadmap* attempts to discuss strategies to address each of the identified purposes. What is implicit in the action steps becomes explicit in the City of Oakland's analysis and steps toward solutions. Policy makers are reflexively turning to developers with nominal renter protections to ameliorate a housing inequity; moreover, the analyses neglect a substantive engagement with race, community formation and the trap of commodifying housing. Throughout the report their emphasis on protecting housing units instead of the people within them demonstrates their engagement with housing struggles instead of a recognition of the communities that are constructing these spaces.

Ostensibly, the goals laid out by the City of Oakland are intended to secure affordability so that the community within Oakland can be stabilized against displacement. There is a lot missing from the plan. First, there is only one proposed possible legislative change, which is uncertain if it can be developed. Second, multiple times in the *Roadmap* the City describes strategies that "requires little direct City effort but can be led by others" (20). They position both staff and City Officials as "administrators" of other programs or "committee members" that will

work on future strategies. Third, although they mention race as a serious problem in terms of the analysis, there is nothing in the plan that addresses racial, ethnic or low-income communities specifically. Thus, although they are using language that would indicate they take seriously other social issues that impact housing, the only solution they propose to solve all of these problems is development.

The *Roadmap* summarizes three points of entry to understanding the housing problem. The "Shortfall Analysis" demonstrates that there is a serious class issue resulting from income stagnation on community members. The "Disproportionate Impact Analysis" describes the racial inequity of those being impacted by both instability in the renters and homeownership markets. Last, as described in the "Severe Cost Burden Analysis", both homeowners and renters are dealing with the effects of being burdened by the housing supply in Oakland.

> **Shortfall Analysis:**
> The difference between total households in an income group and the affordable units they occupy, indicates that from the 2000 Census to the 2008—2012 American Community Survey 5-year estimate, the shortfall of homes affordable to Extremely Low, Very Low and Low Income renters in Oakland grew by an average of 1,035 homes per year. This is in addition to the shortfall pre-existing from the last century. In order to prevent the shortfall from increasing further, Oakland would need to produce, preserve, or stabilize 1,035 affordable homes per year or 8,280 over the eight-year period (11).
>
> **Disproportionate impact analysis:**
> African Americans represent 26%--or 17,125 household—of all homeowners in Oakland, yet comprises 35%--or 4,845 households—of homeowners with sever cost burden. The situation for African American renters is even starker: African American renters are 35%--or 31,720 households—of Oakland's total rental population but make up 45%--or 11,645 households—of severely rent-burdened households. They are the face of the housing crisis. (10)
>
> **Severe Cost Burden Analysis:**
> It is generally understood, renters and owners should not be spending more than 30% of household income on housing in order to afford the rest of life's necessities. This analysis indicates how many households are paying more than 50% of their income in rent and are therefore, are at particularly high risk of losing their housing due to rent hikes or loss of income. There are over 26,000

> severely cost burdened low-income renters in Oakland and nearly 9,000 severely cost-burdened low-income owners. From 2000 to 2008—2012, there was an increase of 7,798 severely cost burdened low-income renters in Oakland and an increase of 1,518 severely cost-burdened low-income owners (11).

The solutions that the report proposes to solve each of these problems is to build new homes in order to saturate the housing market. As they report:

> **Population and household growth projections**: The Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) projects that the total population of Oakland will rise by approximately 5,350 people per year in the 2012-40 period. Plan Bay Area estimates Oakland needs to add 51,450 housing units between 2010 and 2040 or roughly 1,700 units a year. As reported in the Oaklands Housing Element, to meet its Regional Housing Needs Allocation (RHNA) target Oakland would need to add 14,765 units between 2012-22, or 1,845 units a year. This number includes both market rate and affordable units.

The report focuses on two main areas: protecting affordability and building new homes. The section on affordability holds three points of analysis for conceptualizing the problem (2016:11). Throughout the *Roadmap*, officials demonstrate how much housing will be impacted by taking these steps. They state:

> We believe that at least 17,000 affordable homes will need to be protected and 17,000 affordable homes will need to be protected and 17,000 new homes will need to be created in order to preserve Oakland's economic and racial diversity. This is an ambitious goal, but one that is achievable if the strategies are followed (10)

The *Roadmap* gives a breakdown for how they understand these different ways to protect and create this many units. Here is how they outline this:

> **Protect Affordability** (17,000 existing homes)
> 1) Improve renter services=approximately 5,000 homes
> 2) Strengthen renters protections=approximately 5,000 homes
> 3) Enforce renter protections=approximately 5,000 homes
> 4) Acquire and rehab Naturally Occurring Affordable Housing (NOAHs)-approximately 2,000 homes

5) Secure single family homes with fragile financing-approximately 500 homes

Build New Homes (17,000 new homes)

6) Build existing pipeline of affordable homes and add new ones=approximately 2200 (including at least 500 homes on City's public land);
7) Build existing pipeline of market rate homes and add new ones=approximately 14,800 (including 1,500 new backyard rental homes).

One of the ways affordability is managed is through the control of rent prices. Rent control is seen as the more progressive measures that both non-profit sectors and government agents propose as a legal intervention for residents to be protected against displacement. According to the Oakland Action Plan from 2016:

> Oakland is now the fourth most expensive rental market in the United States, according to a report released at the end of the last year by real estate website Zumper. By the end of 2015, median rent for a one bedroom home increased 19% over 2015 to $2,190 per month, while two bedroom homes increased 13.3% to $2,550 per month or $30,600 per year. Renters comprise 59 percent of Oaklands households, with a median income of $34,195 (17).

There are restrictions to the percent increase that landlords are legally bound to, however, if landlords violate these laws, tenants can turn to rental services to offer protections. Unfortunately, the City of Oakland reports that rental services that offer these protections have been underfunded and offer a solution in their 2016 plan:

> For decades, the Rent Adjustment Program (RAP) services fee (the rent fee) have been capped at $30 per unit annually. The fee provides funding for the operations of renter services including programming and staff time. However, the fee is inadequate and renter services have been severely underfunded. Renter services are the first line of defense against displacement. This service is one means of identifying landlords who are carrying out illegal evictions, rent increases, and other illegal landlord actions.

Along with rent control, the City of Oakland advocates an increase in the housing supply. The premise for this argument is that there are too many people seeking housing and not enough

housing supply, this shifts the market to more expensive prices. Market rate housing is particularly problematic because it displaced current Oakland residents and then created a supply of units that are unoccupied. So if the market cannot attract enough market rate renters or buyers, this creates a housing supply that is even more problematic because there are many unoccupied units. This only leads to speculative markets, that includes vacation rental companies, where people can make money from empty units. Building affordable housing does not affect the current Oakland residents who are severely rent burdened who can't afford market rate housing. Thus, the answer wouldn't be affordable housing or below market rate housing.

The plan does not include housing policy. Instead it is a proposal of market solutions matched with a proposal to bolster rental services that have been underfunded.

8) Set up internal working group to ensure steady progress
    a. Ensure coordination as policies are refined and strategies are implements
    b. Staff a small Advisory Committee (a 'Kitchen Cabinet') coordinating, troubleshooting, communicating successes and ensuring implementation
    c. Set up and manage a website for community to track progress. This should be a place to find materials that are relevant to the strategies and for the public to track progress.
9) Ensure Oaklanders have preferences in new affordable housing.
    a. RecievecClarification (*sic*) on appropriate and legal language to build into project approvals where City funds are used that would ensure that Oaklanders have preference in new affordable housing developments.
    b. Craft language and work directly with San Francisco and other cities to make more changes at state level to make it easier to do.
10) Raise funds from philanthropy and others to support work.
    a. Raise funds from philanthropy, the business community and individuals to support some of the activity or capital needs.

In the Roadmap they admit that many of these objectives have problems being realized. *Step 8* has yet to be updated on the City of Oakland website. It is also unclear who these members will be and how they will be evaluated as effective. *Step 9,* as summarized in the report, cannot be performed by the City of Oakland at the time of publication. Instead the report stated they will

look to see if San Francisco is successful at securing this kind of initiative. They also have future plans to possibly lobby state legislators to make this easier. *Step 10* does not include a list of donors, but does name the possibility of recruiting nonprofits and private philanthropists.

Discussion

The mythology of development is seen throughout the interviews with the developers as well as the *Roadmap*. The contradictions in this mythology highlight the ways housing struggles ignore the people within communities. Much of this mythology rests on the legitimation of numeric categories that can be moved and adapted as developers justify markers of affordability, for example the use of percentages of area median income. These shifting boundaries are not just harmless debates, but ways to legitimize dispossession and disposability. How developers recognize their role in community formation is only as significant as the governments' reliance on development to solve community problems. The *Roadmap* continues to turn to developers as the solution for the housing crisis. Developers, even those that are invested in affordable housing, believe in the ideology of the market to fix the housing problem. However, this does not account for the racial logics of the market and the imperative to ensure difference. The market cannot be used as a social justice tool.

Rent control is designed to limit the amount landlords can increase the rent to a national average. This national average does not provide protections in all places. However, rent control does not address the families within Oakland that are already severely rent burdened. This is matched by the cyclical rent increases that landlords can ask for each year. Building market rate housing does not entice severely rent burdened families out of an already existing, excessively priced rental unit in Oakland. This is due in part to the fact that there are no new units being created that are below what they are already paying. Also, since there are no rent caps on these

units, cyclical increases damage long term impacts of "affordable units." Since income does not increase at the same rate, renters are by design drastically left behind. If renters release rent controlled units back into the market, landlords are encouraged to rent these same units at the market rate or, in the case of rent controlled units, at an "affordable" rate that will still increase.

Developers rely on implicit markers of deservingness to explain why development justifies dispossession. Even as the two developers I spoke with describe their social visions for producing space, they weave in their own assessments what it is for a community to thrive. This includes descriptions for who deserved to move, who deserved to live in an area seen as lacking criminality and what kinds of housing can be demarcated as affordable. Both developers allude to a vision of a community born of economic diversity and express a commitment to allowing interventions to the housing market to ensure that vision became reality. Yet, they also routinely espouse definitions of affordability that would not ensure the type of diversity they were promoting. The *Roadmap*, which demonstrates the commitment the City of Oakland has to this mythology, is an example of how the myth of development supposedly supports the professed mission to maintain the ethnic diversity in Oakland. However, the plan does not include policy that specifically addresses racial barriers to access to housing, it only demonstrates that these are core issues. In some cases, the *Roadmap* and developers were more explicit about their boundaries of deservingness, such as in lauding the inclusion of annual drug tests into rental leases.

It is difficult to reconcile Oakland's *Roadmap* with the reality of dispossession because the City so thoroughly bought into the myth of development. Thus, there are few other solutions that the City offers in support of the residents of Oakland. Even the City's diagnosis of the problem is incompatible with the reality and the needs of its residents. By focusing on the

number of overall units and the number of affordable units, the City of Oakland has constructed the problem as one that can be solved with strategic investments in buildings and protecting the "right" kinds of housing. In other words, Oakland has constructed the problem such that the solution has no need to address any underlying systemic problems that would contribute to the dispossession of its residents; rather, it could justifiably reinforce a bureaucracy that ensures a smooth process for market actors to gather funding and resources for development projects.

The first three steps of the "protect affordability" section proposes to "save" approximately 15,000 homes by strengthening, improving and enforcing renter protections and services. The *Roadmap* outlines how Oakland has a large and expensive renting market. However, renter services, such as the Rent Adjustment Program, have been continuously underfunded. The solution to this underfunded program is the addition of more fees to a struggling rent-burdened renter market in order to support these programs. Thus, the only way the City of Oakland is proposing to "save" these 15,000 units is to put additional financial burdens onto Oakland residents. This neither addresses the fact that so many residents of Oakland are rent burdened, nor does it proactively involve protections from the City.

Another 2,000 homes, they state, will be protected through acquiring and rehabbing NOAHs. In the report, older homes are seen as part of the solution to protecting affordability. An additional 500 homes with "fragile financing" could be saved if the City of Oakland had the money to save them. However, their only course of action so far has been to raise money for these homes. The *Roadmap* suggests possibly increasing taxes or raising money from philanthropists. Again, this does not address the many other social forces that deal with cost burden issues. This plan also misses the racial practices that cause these homes to be labeled

“fragile” financing in the first place. Thus, these measures to protect 17,000 existing homes through affordability have dubious implications.

As the developers describe the security of affordability, they mention public grants and private loans are secured from different levels of financing. Grants are funding targeted at building affordable housing, but the definition for affordable housing continues to move. Thus, there are no clear boundaries on the success of these buildings being funded actually providing more housing options. Thus, when the City of Oakland says it wants to “build new homes and promote an existing pipeline of affordable homes”, it is relying on the mythology of development that proposes making multiple different renting and buying markets to solve the housing crisis. However, by the developers’ own examples, having cheaper housing in an area where someone can always pay more does not solve the issue of housing for those who have less.

When developers and policy makers describe securing affordability, they are only describing one point in time. That’s why affordability is a misnomer. Pointing to affordability at one point in time ignores that there are cyclical increases in housing costs, importantly this is not at the same rate of increases in income. The median income of an area may not change over a decade, but the cost of housing in that area can dramatically increase, such as what is happening in Oakland. The *Roadmap* states that cost burden housing is an issue, however, there is nothing in the report that addresses how to relieve this issue specially. When developers describe using mixed income places after a crisis in a “concentrated places of deep poverty” forcing people to relocate, they are disavowing the violence in relocating parts of a community, and in some cases promoting that idea as helping the community develop. The market is a mechanism of difference. Therefore, the market is constantly producing those that can be removed based on those same myths. When Terrance discusses bringing people to East Oakland, he is ignoring that East

Oakland is the most densely populated part of Oakland, but it's clear that the people who live there, and will be disrupted if development increases, are erased in this mythology.

Affordable housing attempts to create market-based fixes to crises that are produced by the very market it is attempting to reform. The problem lies in the fact that in many cases, the incongruence between an individual's income and the affordable housing unit still presents a significant burden for most of the people for whom this type of housing was intended. The burden is the inability to economically sustain living in a housing unit where rent still occupies a large share of their income and cyclically increases. In other words, the rudimentary problem that is not being addressed is that income levels are not rising at the same time or pace of housing prices. Income stagnation and the absence of policies to prevent rent increases of any kind, null any of the intended benefits of affordable housing. Solutions to the housing crisis must include reforms that both deracialize and decommodify housing in the progress of achieving equity.

Discourse that suggests that the state, or developers as its authorized agents, can be the arbiter of what percentage of someone's income is appropriate to spend on housing is problematic**.** Assuming that spending 30% of one's income on housing is appropriate, what renters need is to stabilize or decrease rents so that their incomes have the ability to catch up to inflation and they can return back to the range of 30%. However, the solution only works for those who have access to income. Using a median income to measure affordability doesn't consider those who are unemployed or have unstable employment, which disproportionately impacts Black subjects. Both Howard's and Aguiliar Ruiz's articulations of affordability provided neither a plan to make housing available to people with incomes below the median threshold nor an accounting for the acute burden of dispossession and forced dispersal placed on Black subjects. In fact, the idea that the cost of housing could be 130% of the median income

would be suitable for “workforce housing.” The designation of 30% as the recommended tool presents many problems as to what the real housing costs are for renters and owners. The ascription to workforce calls us to imagine a specific type of worker, one who makes up to 130% of the median income of an area, and deftly sweeps workers with lower incomes out of the field of our imagination, inviting us to also accept that their communities will be torn apart. Thus, unless the solution to housing also includes an expansion of, investment in and adaptation to public housing, we will not be stretching to people who do not have access to income or the unhoused.

Strengthening, improving and enforcing renter protections and services includes modernizing the system as well as providing more outreach; however, the only way to request intervention from the state is on an individual basis. This requires renters to successfully make a complaint against their landlords. The question remains as to the ways the city government can be mobilized to intervene for the protection of their residents from capitalist strategies of extraction.

The City of Oakland is framing the housing crisis as too many renters or buyers chasing too little supply, rather than too many landlords pricing above what renters have the ability to pay compounded by a stagnation of income. The squeeze becomes visible not only as the disproportionate economics, but the unscrupulous practices for racism and capital accumulation. For homeowners, they face unscrupulous mortgage practices that also disproportionately impact Black residents. The city government is not attempting to protect residents by interfering in these capital gains, where landlords and banks are extracting as much as possible, instead they are inviting more investment to extract more. We also need solutions for folks already unhoused and

unemployed. This would require rethinking the expansion of public housing such that it does not depend on non-profit workers, who also face decreasing wages.

Conclusion

Interviews with developers and an examination of the City of Oakland's Oakland at Home: Recommendations for Implementing *A Roadmap toward Equity* report demonstrate the ontological tradition of housing struggles, the material and ideological commitment that the tradition requires and the consequences for the dispossession of Oakland's Black subjects. The City, working in congruence with developers, have convinced themselves that this housing crisis can be flattened to a housing shortage, which legitimates the ideology that developers are responsible for offering solutions to this crisis. The mythology of the develop works to both transform the language by which geographic struggles can be understood while also focusing on a singular side to housing issues.

The pitfalls of affordable housing as a liminal category exposes how the disavowal of racial violence is covered by the relentless campaign for development. The ontological tradition of housing struggles invokes specific logics and ethos. Private property, and the value added to it, is seen as the way to preserve a community that is already dealing with dispossession and urban change. Market solutions to a housing crisis create a demand for developers to lead the charge for meeting the needs of the residents of Oakland. Those who are seen as undeserving of being part of those communities, are marked as disposable, thus continuing to disavow the violence of (re)ordering communities. Developers' emphasis on thresholds of affordability and flipping existing properties confines us to the ontological tradition of housing struggles. Making economic development the proxy for community renders the violent dispossession and

disciplining of communities within Oakland necessary for the social production of space. Neither the City of Oakland nor the developers offer strategies for dealing with racialized housing practices or ways that race places a role in the lack of access to sustainable housing. Insofar as developers think about race, racial disparities are not included in their mythology of development. They fail to see how their logic specifically and violently targets Black geographies.

The deliberate omission of racial logics in the analyses of both developers and the state exacerbate crises and constrict our imagination regarding housing possibilities. Housing is reduced to a commodified good made accessible through the marketplace. As dispossession of Black subjects occurs under neoliberal governance, racial logics within space are written off as abstract problems, outside the scope of the problems development should address. The City of Oakland has cast developers in the lead role of promoting the mythology that the marketplace and "affordable housing" will solve Oakland's housing crisis; in doing so, they legitimize the maintenance of racial regimes through geographic contestations and disavow their responsibility to protect Oakland's residents from the violence of racial capitalism. The mythology of development is not just a misnomer. These myths subtly stifle political imaginaries with revolutionary responses to racial capitalism.

CHAPTER #4: Dispossession, As Told By

"I'm tired of being colonized. I'm tired of being a colonizer."
Oakland Resident, 2019

Introduction

Oakland has a cultural style that offers both an aesthetic and ethic of Black resistance and a tradition of labor struggles. As multiple generations have participated in the traditions of Black struggle, the production of space within Oakland involves community members articulating their own positionality within a long history of dispossession. As community members describe their understanding of dispossession, they understand themselves not only in the context of Black community members in Oakland, but Black community members contending for place throughout the history of the U.S.

Housing struggles, as a component of liberation struggles, are a site of contention that reduce community members to the loci of which racial capitalism needs to reorder society. Oakland as a city for Black migrants has been decimated with asymmetrical acts of dispossession as a result of housing policies and spatial disruption. These housing struggles manifest in the tension between homeowner and bank, renter and landlord, and homeowner and renter. Between each of these positions lies a tension that is ordered through racial, gendered, and sexualized lens. In this chapter, I recite the stories of the residents in Oakland. Their stories demonstrate how geographic struggles are fought through the demands of community members trying to make sense of spatial changes while also being removed from the place they live.

As past generations have migrated to California in search of labor and alternative places to live outside of the South, Oakland became a destination that many migrants settled. Placing

these geographic stories within the context of Black migration histories throughout the U.S. helps us to understand the impacts of spatial changes in Oakland. As residents continue to experience asymmetrical acts of dispossession, their articulations of these acts must be central, which creates the discourse of an ontological relationship to space. The enduring spatial changes in Oakland lead many community members to describe psychological impacts of seeing buildings being removed and built at the same time. Some even describe having feelings of depression, anxiety and claustrophobia. As new developments arrive, the character of the city also changed. Community members would remark on how the skyline of Downtown Oakland is noticeably different. This is matched onto the renaming of different neighborhoods that community members have adapted to narrate the new order of the city.

These community members see their problems as personal problems situated within social problems. Policies that were meant to intervene or soften the blow of these asymmetrical acts of dispossession were mostly aimed at protecting the middle-class. Thus, many who are working poor who do not own property are at the mercy of non-profit organizations that could help them advocate for themselves. Even then, there are no guarantees.

Closed In and Shut Out

There are many dimensions community members described in their conceptualization of dispossession. Within the struggle over the meaning of different parts of Oakland is the "feeling" of the city. New buildings, particularly the models being placed in Oakland, change this feeling. This is matched by the real cases of community members being priced out of not only new buildings in Oakland, but also older buildings as landlords raise the rent to match market levels. Both are compounded by the cultural and informal norms that have been established in different

neighborhoods that incomers do not understand. In these next three sections I will detail the physical, economic, and cultural ways that residents describe feeling both closed in and shut out of Oakland.

Physical

The architecture of many of the houses in Oakland represent styles from the 1920s and 1930s. Some of the most well known residential buildings are the Victorian row homes, famous in both San Francisco and Oakland. Besides the downtown area, many buildings are low to the ground, maybe only a few stories high. The texture of the homes aesthetically is incredibly diverse. Houses within the same neighborhood have different styles, shapes and colors. This makes the look of the urban sprawl reflect both the color and taste of the community members who live there. New buildings, however, do not match either the style or aesthetics of the older buildings. They are typically larger in both height and length. Many are built with more concrete and glass than the single-family homes around them. These new builds are also more focused on condo and apartment style houses; thus, they can drastically change the skyline of an area. They often tower over their neighboring structures, which blocks much of the light on the streets.

These architectural choices are not simply a matter of style to Oakland residents. Many of the community members I spoke with described a sense of distortion, as their image of the city they grew up in became deformed by new buildings. More than once they shared full stories about some buildings. Community members recalled with specificity when building began in an area, how long it took to construct the building, what construction company worked with the developers and who they saw moving in after the building was completed. No one described these steps as a sign of progress. Instead, they described feelings of hostility towards these

buildings and disgusted at the city of Oakland for being complicit in allowing developers to drastically change the city.

The interpretations of these new buildings were central to community members' contestation. Often, the complaint scrutinized the pace and look of the construction and design of obstructive buildings that looked nothing like the rest of the neighborhoods. Community members described them as huge blocks that were "just in the way of everything around them." Some of the community members even described increasing feelings of claustrophobia. More and more builds also led to a panic as they watched more of their friends, families, and neighbors forced to leave Oakland.

Long time West Oakland resident Montrell Washington has had a front seat to these drastic changes. He is a 2nd generation Oakland resident. His great grandfather moved to Oakland shortly before World War II. Montrell showed me pictures of both his mother's Oakland home and his father while we spoke. He described the neighborhood of West Oakland and the time he spent at Prescott Elementary School. As Montrell remembered, "So many people in this neighborhood lost their properties. I mean, after 2008, it was terrible. There wasn't even time to be able to organize or strategize about what to do about it. It all happened so fast. One day the whole community was together and the next everybody was gone. People had to go all the way out to Antioch or Pittsburg… And the city didn't even do anything. I knew they were supposed to help. There was federal money given to Oakland, but it didn't go anywhere. So then, it was just over."

Montrell and I spoke for 20 minutes about the housing crisis. His understanding of the changes was highlighted in his continued disbelief of what unfolded in the aftermath of the recession in 2008, as he still was in awe of the scope of the massive dispossession. He continued

to make the comparisons between the "then," a distant memory of how Oakland was shaped, and the "now," a completely new city that had transformed around him. He pointed to a newer development 20 or so feet from his home. He stated, "I used to be able to see downtown from here. It wasn't much of a view, but I could at least see the buildings. Now all I can see is that guy—" He pointed to a particular unit. "—playing video games all the time and arguing with his girlfriend. They leave their windows open all the time, so I know all of their business. Everyone on the block knows all of their business. It is so bold. No one can see anything but what goes on in their house. Look around, they built this here like it's supposed to be the focal point of the whole neighborhood, but who wants to look at this big box. It's absurd."

He asked me, "How much do you think it cost to build this? How much do you think this cost for the city? I haven't moved and I don't even know where I am. We just have to watch as our lives hang in the balance while rich assholes take over the world. How many companies are here now? Google! Facebook! Uber! And all of them are stealing our home from us. This is our labor. Our city. And what? We just have to go?!"

The materiality of dispossession on the level of the physical remarks the (re)ordering of space. This (re)ordering marks not only the new and the old, the underdeveloped and the developed, but also the subjects who have been assigned to engage them. Explicit in this conversation with Montrell is this act of difference making as new builds are both dangerously close to his home yet incredibly unattainable. Montrell, who lives across the street from this building in a two bedroom apartment, pays $450 less in rent per month than the two bedrooms in this newer unit. However, as Montrell becomes increasingly rent burdened each year, he will continue to struggle to stay in his unit. He described to me his options for moving out of Oakland, which included places such as Atlanta and Houston. As he stated towards the end of

our conversation, “I have to go somewhere [Black] people are, but where I can afford to pay bills and live. Like really live. I’m losing so much just by trying to hang on here.”

Economic

Sheila Washington works at a nonprofit in Oakland where she works with teen girls. When she’s not working with the youth in the program, she takes care of her two children who both attend middle school in Oakland. When I asked about her family, Sheila described the relatives she had back in Arkansas. She knew very little about her grandmother’s transition to Oakland, but she knew her great grandmother brought her grandmother here when she was very young. Both Sheila’s mother and father described to her their interactions with the Black Panther Party. She laughed as she remembered her mom talking about members of the Party always carrying guns. She knew at a young age that “they were real change agents for Oakland. There will never be any other organization like the Panthers.”

Sheila attended McClymonds High School. Sheila reacted quickly to my questions about her. Several times, she repeated that community members did not know anything about what Oakland was before all of the spatial changes. In fact, she said more than once that community members who came into Oakland after 2008 were all here to uproot a community she felt so many had fought to protect. When she spoke, her voice was filled with many emotions: sadness, anger and sometimes even a little despair.

“So many people neglect to consider that there are families and kids who are struggling because the City isn’t interested in protecting us. It’s all talk. The courts aren’t doing anything about it. There are four vacant houses for every one homeless person in Oakland. And these billionaire companies are buying these houses at foreclosed prices, and then just letting them sit

there. Literally just sitting there. Meanwhile Moms and children are on the streets. If my sister hadn't taken me and my son in, I would be one of those people. Then what would I do?"

As she described her situation, I became lost in the fact that she worked with youth and was struggling so deeply herself. She talked about this as a structural problem with many youth workers and community members who worked at nonprofits suffering from the same type of economic insecurity. However, for her it was more important that she had a steady job and a place for her children.

"For the first time, I'm considering leaving Oakland. I'm first considering a move to Vegas or near there. It's hella Black people moving to Vegas, so I think that would be good for my family. Honestly, I think lots of people are going to have to leave California. People can't afford shit. The newer people who moved to Oakland don't care about what used to be here. So that leaves people feeling so hopeless. At that point, it's better to consider moving to a place where you can buy a bigger property such as Atlanta. I mean, look at me. I have a job. I have a car. I have kids. I'm still struggling. I'm not willing to pay someone $1700 for a small two-bedroom apartment. That shit is just ridiculous. For that amount of money, I could get a house in Houston or Atlanta. I could really live, you know what I mean?"

Sheila spoke so animatedly about the same thing many community members described to me: the price of a two-bedroom. Typically for families this was the goal for housing that would reasonably accommodate them. Many community members would describe the rent for a two bedroom and compare this number to houses in other areas. Within their Recent reports demarcated residents that can be categorized as low-income in Oakland make between $105,000-117,000 a year. The newly renovated properties have monthly rent from $2,000-4,000 for a two-

bedroom apartment. Meaning the cost of living in Oakland is something to produce nightmares. Many residents in Oakland are paying above 50% of their income to rent alone.

Sheila broke down her numbers to me and they were indeed terror inducing. At the nonprofit she worked at, she earned $21 per hour, which is equivalent to $3,360 monthly/$40,320 annually. This meant that she was $64,680 under being considered a low-income person in Oakland. The apartment she was evicted from raised her rent for the fourth time in 3 years to $1775. Three years ago, her rent was $1342, which was already a change from the $1100 that she paid when she first moved in. However, this last 10% increase meant that she would have to commit to $21,300 a year to rent alone.

Sheila also described the changes being made around her apartment. A new build that was constructed next door to her apartment building immediately started renting 2-bedroom units for $2700. She describes the new build as disruptive. Not only to the view from outside of her building, but also to the look and feel of the neighborhood. Sheila also described the tension between the new renters and the rest of the neighborhood. Immediately there was an increased frequency in calls to the police for noise violations as well as an increased number of tickets given to residents for parking violations.

Many of the respondents described the same trends in their neighborhoods. These trends are continually built within conflict, not just among the community members themselves but the way these spatial changes were viewed as an immediate threat. As one respondent said loudly, “Everyone starts to become concerned when you see a new building with windows slightly bigger than they need to be. That’s a marker of the beginning of the end. It’s too late to do anything about it.”

Cultural

There are many ways to describe the cultural changes that have occurred in Oakland. Community members demonstrate another layer of dispossession as they take up space throughout the process of urban change. The informal solutions that community members describe as part of dealing with the density in Oakland are seen as violations to new residents moving into the city. Parking violations and noise complaints are central to the way new neighbors enforce their own ideas about what should be allowed in particular neighborhoods. The violence introduced by new members of communities as they (re)imagine social spaces exterbates the violence of lack of protections afforded to longtime community members. New ways to produce social space also produce precarity for residents enforceable by the laws in Oakland.

In East Oakland in particular, the homes are small and typically close together. These homes vary in the number of rooms, but homes that were once much larger have been divided into duplexes, triplexes, or quadplexes in order to accommodate more residents. Thus, many residents can be cramped into one place with only street parking available or very limited private parking space. Residents in the past have had to get creative with how parking in these neighborhoods is best configured so that there is room for everyone. This may mean parking straight on in places where cars are meant to be parallel to the curb. This sometimes means leaving one’s car so that it is exposed to the sidewalk. However, new neighbors see these informal solutions as infractions.

Many of the community members I spoke with described an increasing hostility as neighbors clashed, trying to explain these solutions to new residents. Since the housing in neighborhoods are often small and close together, the noise levels are also a source of contention

between neighbors. Single family homes in East Oakland sometimes are only separated enough to fit the fence that sits in between them. Thus, when families have guests or play music, the noise level can rise quickly. Many of the celebrations that were frequent within the neighborhoods also bring many groups of community members together. To deal with these perceived infractions many new residents have been described as harassing their neighbors or calling the police to enforce municipal rules. These solutions only create more tension. I arranged a meeting with Rahel as she described to me the tensions her family faced as the neighborhood around them changed.

Rahel looked around the restaurant as we spoke and tried to keep her voice as soft as possible. She explained, “Of course there are anti-Black, anti-immigrant sentiments everywhere, so I can’t place all of the blame on the new neighbors, but things just got worse the more new people moved into East Oakland. You know, that used to be the spot no one wanted to live, but you put a huge luxury apartment building throughout the Brooklyn Basin, and it messes with everything.”

The Brooklyn Basin sits east of the 880 freeway. It is south of Jack London Square and Downtown Oakland. The Brooklyn Basin used to be a small community but has now been developed into a densely populated area. Rahel’s mom lives near International Boulevard, which in this area has a mixture of both small commercial businesses and single-family homes. As the development of the Brooklyn Basin became more realized, the spill over of residents who wanted to live near this area and pay less rent changed the residents who lived in Rahel’s mother’s neighborhood.

She continued, “My whole neighborhood used to be full of immigrant families and we all knew each other. It was also so beautiful during the different holidays because you could see all

kinds of celebrations year-round. My Mom said she came here during the Chinese New Year celebration and that's when she fell in love with this place."

Rahel held her coffee with both hands and shook her head slowly. As she started to explain the new tensions in her neighborhood, she grew more and more frustrated. "I'm not even sure when it all started," she said. "Like I said, there were so many families on our street and slowly but surely, they all started to disappear. My Mom stayed because she loved her neighborhood and really didn't want to go anywhere else. As her rent got higher and higher, my sister and I started to help her out. But, now my rent is rising and I'm not sure how long we are going to be able to do this. Now with this new neighbor, he is just starting to terrorize my mom. It used to be such a diverse place, but now there's less diversity. And these people aren't from Oakland. They are from all over, so they don't know the rules.

"Last year my mom got a note on her car that said 'if you don't know how to park, leave.' It was so weird. My Mom can't read English, so she called me and took a picture of it. I was pissed. I wanted to fight him. But of course my mom wasn't going to let that happen. So the next day she wanted to apologize and brought him and his kids some food."

I interrupted her story, "Was your mom parked in a weird way?"

She gave a heavy sigh and shifted her body in her seat. She explained, "There's a really small lot around the building. It's really only built for small cars. My Mom has a little Corolla. When her old neighbor was there, he had a Buick. He would always take up more space and sometimes would move my mom's car for her when he needed more room. Sometimes if he needed to, he would park behind her. It's like three spots. Hers is in the middle and the other unit's [parking spot] is closer to the wall of the house. So at one point her and her old neighbor

even switched spaces so he would have more room for his car. But this new dude doesn't want to do it like that. My mom offered but he said no."

I directed her back to her other point, "So what happened after your mom gave them food?"

Rahel laughed a little, "He didn't accept it. Which—whatever—he's an idiot. My Mom can cook, but then it was every day. My Mom would come home from work, and he would bang on her window. Literally rattle it and tell her to move her car. This went on for weeks. I went to him and tried to settle it. I told him, he's got a big truck and my mom has a Corolla. The math don't math. Basically, he got even more mad, which scared my mom. Now he's reporting us to the landlord. This makes things even worse. That place is in my name and my mom is undocumented. So of course, now she's scared. Doesn't want to deal with this man. So she started leaving her car at my place. But I don't live close to her, so whenever she needs to go somewhere and drive, she has to call me to give her the car."

The landlord in this story received seven complaints from this new resident. Rahel believes this is the reason he is going to try and evict her mom. Her mom lives in a unit that has rent control and this new tenant is living in a unit that is not. Rahel mimicked the voice of her mother as she explained this fear, "My mom is always like 'Rahella the landlord is just going to let him keep troubling me. He just wants me to move. They both do. They are taking away my air.' I get so emotional. I think she's just going to have to move in with me, but neither of us want that. She loves that place. She's been living there for 30 years. Her old landlord would have never let this happen, but when this new landlord bought the building 7 years ago, I knew something was going to come of it. Now, here we are."

Unlike the new development of Brooklyn Basin, Downtown Oakland has been dense for a long time. There used to be a mall in Oakland that contained Sears and other clothing stores. There are also many bars and restaurants where the majority of the Oakland nightlife occurs. There is an ice-skating rink, which adds to the reasons people are often in this area. Most importantly, this is where Chinatown sits. The Oakland Chinatown is one of the oldest in the state and is home to many different communities of Oakland-born and immigrant populations. In Downtown Oakland (renamed Uptown in some places), the conditions of parking are dire. I spoke with Deonte Richardson, a 2nd generation Oakland resident whose family is originally from Maryland. Deonte lives in the middle of Chinatown where his parking story seems like it will never be fully resolved.

Deonte laughed through the entire retelling of this story. When I asked him why, he stated multiple times that laughing was better than the alternative. He started with, “Back in 2008, I think, a friend gifted me a car—it was a 1998 Dodge Grand caravan. For several years, I only really used it to transport my music equipment for weekly gigs and rehearsals. The rest of the time I just used public transportation. In 2017, I got a job as a high school teacher, so I used it every weekday to drive to and from work. But my commute was only 15 minutes, and by 2018 I got a second car.

“The problem with having a car has always been parking. I live in a 3-bedroom apartment, and my other housemate, Angelica, had a car when she moved in, so she used the one parking space that’s allotted for our unit. It’s a little parking lot behind our apartment building, accessible via an alley driveway. That parking lot has four spots, one for each of the units in our building. But most of the people who have lived in our building are young professionals in their 30s—we are not ‘families’ even though the designation is that our building is full of single-

family homes. But they're just condos. What that means is that, if you're the 2nd or 3rd housemate who has a car, you have to look for your own parking on the street or in a paid lot."

I asked him about the difficulties of finding parking in Downtown and he let out a scream. He talked to me about common streets he would scour, but repeated multiple times it was impossible to find a spot. He described, "for several years I just looked for free parking spots around my neighborhood. The few spots were a combination of broken parking meters, residential blocks with completely free street parking, or random spots that the city just didn't put a meter on. But, owing to the fact that we live in downtown, there is street cleaning each night on alternate sides of a block. And the street cleaning is usually from 12:00am-3:00am or 3:00am-6:00am. I also live across the street from Lincoln Elementary, which, has school zone parking restriction—from 8:00am to 4:00pm on school days. So that parents can safely pick up kids. Of course, on holidays or during the summer, folks would wake up at 6am (once the street cleaning time was over) and snag a spot for the day.

In fact, for several years, I would wake up a few minutes before 6:00am, right after the street cleaning no parking zone had ended, and try to park my minivan in one of those free spots. Since street cleaning alternated sides of the block, sometimes I could snag a spot on a Monday, Wednesday or Friday and leave my car in that spot for 2 days. My neighbors without a parking spot, who didn't have to commute to work, or maybe they went on BART, but a lot of folks in the hood did this. I'd often see my neighbors at like 5:55 am, driving around looking for parking spots. About 2 years ago the city "updated" its parking meters to include mobile app parking, which also included fixing broken meters, installing broken meters in some of those "Free" spots, and even putting up meters on blocks that were previously no-go areas on account of the block being 100% residential buildings. There are also a few blocks with 2-hour parking zones."

He shook his head and rolled his eyes. As he spoke, he started to hit his hand against the table for emphasis, “Suffice it to say, for years I just played the parking game. Sometimes I could wake up early and get a free spot. Sometimes I couldn’t. Sometimes I’d move my car every 2 hours or so and pray I didn’t get a ticket if I ran over time. And parking enforcement regularly came through. So, over the years I’ve probably got a dozen tickets. Sometimes for parking at a meter without paying, because I thought I could get away with it. Sometimes for parking too long in a 2-hour zone.

The worst time was this past September. I got 3 tickets in two weeks. By that point I was just fed up. All those free spots that the few of us had depended upon were gone due to updated meters and what not. But Chinatown had become increasingly populated. New apartments meant more residents, some of whom had cars. Maybe some of those apartment buildings had private parking garages on the ground floor, which is great for them. But inevitably there were still more cars out and fewer spots. And on the weekends, forget about it. There’s a small family-owned and ran grocery store on my block. Folks regularly double park just to quickly shop for food. The pandemic slowed that down for a year or so. But now things are almost back to normal. So I got those 3 tickets—on average $70 each. So I gave up. Why pay this money, lose sleep time, have my sleep disrupted and always be worried about getting a ticket. I was done. I needed to find a private parking lot.”

Deonte began to get more exasperated as he described to me his frustration. He started to pause to laugh more and more as he continued the story. At times, I laughed along with him, but I could tell his laugh was full of pain. He held his head as he told me he finally called the City of Oakland. He stated, “So, first I called the city to just complain and gather info. I talked to the Parking Permit office, because I had one final question. Why didn’t our neighborhood qualify for

residential parking permits? There are a few blocks in Oakland that are restricted for residents. The city employee I talked to gave me the details. First, I would have to get everyone in my neighborhood to sign a petition for the residential parking permits, which is hard because businesses typically want the metered parking for their customers.

"Second, I asked why the city can't consider residents who have lived here before and create policies to help them with parking rather than *only* helping these new apartments that pop up everywhere? This employee, who stressed the need to remain neutral, admitted that (1) the city has a rule that new apartment buildings must provide their own parking but (2) that rule is often waived in the rush to approve more housing. Because, you know, the city is convinced that more housing will alleviate the housing crisis. I don't believe that, especially since the new housing is so prohibitively expensive. And (3) the city is just banking on residents using public transportation. Which is great if that fits your work schedule, but [public transportation] rarely fits my schedule and I need a vehicle.

"So then I asked about parking lots. Apparently, the city "*manages*" some parking lots. Which is a bit of a misnomer. I don't know what kind of deal is going on, but it seems like the city has a public-private partnership going on. A 'private' company—Douglass Parking—manages a bunch of parking lots... all over the country!!! There are two in my vicinity—about four blocks away. They are uncovered. Unguarded. But I just had to deal with the fact that I need one. So after all these years, I've purchased a monthly parking permit for $150. Fortunately, I have a place to park my car, *but* I'm not suppose to leave my car there for more than 48 hours. So every other day I park it near my house at night, which gives me more peace of mind. I still have to wake up around 8 am to move my car from the meters or no parking zones, but it's easier than waking up at 5:45 am.

"Oh, and 4 years ago I purchased a second car. That was back when I was commuting everyday to work. I had the money and I wanted something with better gas mileage. So I left my minivan at my partner's house, in East Oakland, which is just more residential, less street cleaning, but more parking. Although I've had my minivan stolen once while it was parked there, had my rental car (that was being used while the van was stolen) broken into, had another rental car scratched (which cost me $500), and had the side mirror broken. Having a car in Oakland is no joke. It's costly. There are plenty of risks. It's annoying."

Deonte spoke to me about the possibility of moving. He described it being difficult for him to think about leaving Oakland, especially given the community he had established here. However, with rent prices going up, and his housemates becoming more and more agitated with the new changes of Oakland, he knew leaving was only a matter of time.

"Where your grandma stay?"

Sometime in the early 80s a kitchen caught fire in the middle of West Oakland. Cradling her youngest in her hand, Ms. Betty Johnson watched from the street as the fire trucks arrived. She wasn't afraid for the house. She instead rejoiced in the knowledge that all of her children surrounded her on the sidewalk. Before the fire department had arrived, neighbors had come to the rescue with buckets of water for the fire and blankets for the children. Ms. Betty Johnson remembers her babies crying more than she remembers the sound of the fire or the sirens that came blazing down the streets. As the fire department arrived, she was ushered to a safe distance across the street where she was instructed to wait for her husband to come home.

Forty-one years later I stood in front of that home with Ms. Betty Johnson and her grandson listening to this story engulfed with laughter and joy. She looked up at the sky and giggled, "I just really remember it being so hot. Hot! And all I could think about was my

husband, but that was way before cell phones. So, I was so scared. I didn't have any way to tell him." I asked, "Was he at work?" She shook her head, "No, that was the problem. He was back home picking up his sister Val so she could move out here. I had no idea where he was and the last we spoke, he was leaving Texas. I knew as soon as he got home, I would hear it. I was so scared. Not of the fire, I was scared of his mouth. But, you know, the neighbors took care of us. We had people from all around bringing us food and checking in on me. By the time [Abe] arrived home I had already brought a new refrigerator."

The Johnsons have a migration story very similar to other Black migrant families from the South. The eldest Johnson son, Mitchel, came here to work in a factory job. He spent five years here alone, but always sending money to his family back in the South. As Ms. Betty Johnson tells it, one day he just got frustrated. She thinks part of it was because he missed his family, and the other part of it was that he felt he had a lot on his shoulders. So he gave his younger brother, Abe, an ultimatum, move to West Oakland with him or they would all have to move to New York. However, for Abe New York was no place to raise the five children he needed to take care of, and for Ms. Betty, "California is everybody's dream." So, Abe left his wife and five children to move into an apartment in West Oakland. It was only supposed to be for six months, but it turned into fifteen. Abe and Mitchel worked long hours to save up enough money to move into a bigger two-bedroom duplex in a better neighborhood. Mitchel, who was single at the time, had no intention of living with five children in a two bedroom. Thus, soon after Ms. Betty arrived with her children, Mitchel moved to a temporary housing building in Richmond.

"It wasn't just us though," said Ms. Betty Johnson. "Many Black people were moving to Oakland at that time. You know, [World War I and World War II] brought many Black people

out here because of all of the different kinds of employment. There were people who wanted the opportunity to just have more. That's what you got in Oakland. It's so different now, but it's what we wanted for us and our families and our people."

Ms. Betty Johnson spoke about times when it was hard, coming from Louisiana, living in a big city like Oakland. She talked about how difficult it was to move from a rural area to a big city, but she said that she loved it. She would eventually begin her educational career at Merritt College in the 1980s so that she could start a career in early childhood education. For her, this was the exact kind of opportunity that her California dreams had promised: A Black community to raise her children, a place for her and her husband to provide for those children, and the schools built to give those children even more opportunities. However, one by one, each of these dreams were deferred.

Now Ms. Betty Johnson and her grandson Marquies were in the middle of deciding how and when to leave Oakland. There was a huge shift. This conversation was heavy. Marquies had spent their whole life in Oakland. The same was true for both of his parents. Their love for Oakland ran deep. They described how being from Oakland shaped their own identity and even elevated their own self esteem. They were proud of the fact that their elders had been able to build a place for their parents and them to love, grow, and struggle in. For Marquies the decision to move was both a financial decision as well as one that stemmed from a deep understanding of how the changes in Oakland impacted the identity of the community members.

Marquies explained to me, "My Dad used to tell me stories of when he was young it was just hella random kids at their house. He would come home from school and find kids napping in his bed. Back in those days, it was much more common. However, we barely see the kids now. All of these changes feel like a fucking nightmare. It seems as if no one has any clue what the

solution is. When you try to ask the city to intervene, they are reluctant. And it's so sad because everything's changing. All the history that's here is being erased. You know where all the clubs were and the schools that have all this history, all that gets done over. It's like a plow."

I asked, "Do you think the changes are going to mean you have to leave?" They responded, "It's like this… What's here? Now in 2019, these houses are selling for over a million dollars. No one I know still lives in Oakland. I can't afford shit. I mean, and this house is a two bedroom, but for what we could get for it versus what we would get living up in Houston with a lot less problems. It just breaks my heart. I remember how Black this place used to be and how there used to be so many people here. I remember the kids running around outside. The people walking up and down the street and playing basketball at de Fermery park. I can still remember how we used to barbecue and throw block parties [in the early 2000s]. However, now all of that is gone. It's all gone. They stole it right from under us. Is there any coming back? And Black people don't have much in this country. All we are really asking for is a peaceful place to live where we can live with a nice community. Instead, they just keep kicking us out. You know, and it's not just the Town. It's everywhere. Harlem, Brooklyn, Miami, Atlanta. Anywhere Black people are, they are vulnerable to being displaced. The manner they are displaced doesn't matter at all. They will put people in jail, close down schools, and make sure you can't afford to rent there anymore. Anything that has to be done to remove Black people."

I wanted to ask Marquies where they wanted to move after they left Oakland, but I knew it was a delicate question. Both they and their grandmother were both emotional as they described the changes that Oakland was facing. They talked about this building and that building. More importantly they talked about what used to be there. There was a strong emphasis on

before and after periods, with the way the city used to look, and the events they could associate with different places.

"There's no place like Oakland." We all agreed.

Instead, I asked, "Are you considering putting the house up for sale?" Marquies clicked their tongue, "Maaan! A few developers have come by and made offers. There were even a few realtors. Unfortunately, I can't afford the rent where I am, so soon we will have no choice but to make a decision. I have to go, but I can't leave my grandmother. My aunt who used to live in Richmond with my cousins recently moved to LA. However, they are about to be kicked out of South Central. So the question becomes: what's next? It's hella people moving to Antioch, but I refuse. I feel like Houston might be a better option. I would honestly prefer to move to Atlanta but my grandmother doesn't want to move to Georgia. I keep trying to convince her there's hella Black people moving to Atlanta but she says 'nuh-huh'. *Georgia is not on my mind*."

We all laughed. Ms. Betty Johnson, who had been shaking her head the whole time gave me a very rehearsed answer. One that I could tell she probably usually said when they had this conversation. "You just don't understand the South is the South. You kids need to build here. This is what I want. I want all y'all to build." Marquies, of course, clicked their tongue and rolled their eyes.

This generational story introduces the tension many families of migrants articulated as I completed my interviews. Families had moved to California through a long chain of community members in search of labor. These early migrant stories as told by Ms. Betty Johnson demonstrated the decisions that community members who needed to build a community in their own image made and gave the context for how the children of migrants began to see a community worth struggling for. In these stories lay demonstrations of how powerful migration

was for families in the South to come to California with dreams for their families. When they spoke to me, each family's points of emphasis encompassed more than the push for somewhere economically stable, but also a place where Black community members already lived.

When the children of migrants or grandchildren of migrants brainstormed about possible options for them to relocate, they consistently talked about possible places that other Black community members were already moving to or places they knew were Black places. The emphasis on following other Black community members was usually followed by carefully strategizing how comfortable they would feel being in a new neighborhood that was across the country. Thinking across space was instrumental to many of the respondents describing their geographic stories. Often community members would talk at length about looking to find another place like Oakland somewhere else, and the challenge that would pose for them. A place with the same amount of diversity, level of public services, with an emphasis on Black culture. When they imagined other places, they would think through other Black spaces they could imagine having similar community members. For them, this is the way that they define safety.

Their relationship with that space was built into respondents' understandings of the spatial change that Oakland was enduring. Many of the community members I spoke with gave me metaphors of destruction, theft, and neglect. Marquies spoke about a plow. Likewise, many others gave vivid depictions and comparisons to bombs, tornados, tsunamis, and even personified the dispossession as an executioner. Their metaphors illustrated their analysis at both the levels of community members and buildings. Central to their own theorizing of dispossession was a lack of expectation that anyone in the city or local government even cared that this was happening. For many of my respondents, this was simply a fact. It was an inevitability of a Black community. As one respondent put it "Only in a racist capitalist society can you see something

being destroyed for community members and think, ‘well they should have paid more while they had it’.”

Lamont Williams had lived in his apartment in Oakland his whole life. He went to Prescott Elementary School, Oakland Military Institute, and then graduated class of 2008 at Oakland Technical High School. Lamont explained, “My grandmama is from New Orleans. I think she moved to Oakland with her sister. They both moved to the East and brought a beautiful house.”

We spoke about his Mom’s upbringing and her experiences at the different neighborhood schools. Lamont and I spent a lot of time bonding over both having gone to Oakland Technical High School. Although we were years apart, we could still complain about the same teachers and celebrate the same mentors. Lamont said “That’s what makes leaving so rough, you know? On the one hand, moving will not cause me to have many hardships, but it’s not the Town. It’ll be different. I often worry about where I will be safe as a Black man? Oakland absolutely has issues, but are the only other options to move to *Hercules* or *Pinole* or *Martinez*? You have to go where Black people are already there. When my grandma came from New Orleans, she knew she would like it here for two reasons: one) it’s Cali and two) it was Oakland.”

“Do you think there’s similarities between Oakland and New Orleans?”

“I mean… I’m sure my grandmama would disagree, but I believe so. I mean the way she describes New Orleans it seems like there are the same people, the same vibe. Of course, there are differences, but you know, it’s still a majority black city. That’s really important, however, people also have to be able to afford it. You know, living in Oakland really teaches you how to have pride in where you are from, but also there are many people who are barely making it. Just trying to survive, you know. And, the cold part is, there are new people coming here changing up

shit without any knowledge of what the Town used to be like. You remember what happened to New Orleans?!"

This question surprised me. I knew that he was referencing the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina, but I didn't understand the connection he was making from those events to Oakland. As Lamont continued speaking, he began shifting in his weight from one leg to the other as he talked about the connection he was making. At times his voice began to wobble as he went through his explanation. As he continued, the connection he was making became clear. He understood that the storm itself lasted for about a week. The ramifications of the storm are still on-going for the families and friends that had to deal with this disaster. Similarly, the housing struggles in Oakland would have lasting impact on the families that have been impacted by dispossession.

"I think that made everybody feel different about housing, Bush and labor. Like, New Orleans has always been a place that was thriving. What's worse is that people were abandoned during the storm. Hella people in Oakland had family in New Orleans, Mississippi and Texas at the time. It's like a wave. You witness something like that and it hurts you, too. Then, you see the 'response', which really wasn't a response, but it is all evidence of how the government will treat people during a crisis. And when people left New Orleans, they couldn't come back. Now look at us. We can't come back. It doesn't matter if someone is a college graduate, has a good job, or your family lives here. It's a wrap. The rent is too high. The houses are too high. We continue to get pushed out of the schools. It's terrible."

"But in N.O. you have a lot of the families that were splintered off after Katrina..."

"Yea! Exactly! It's fucked up, you know? That's what happens when people are vulnerable. Everything changes once there is any kind of crisis. Particularly because no one is

willing to respond in a way that protects Black communities. Now, my granny has to move, my partner is moving to Brentwood, and I have to figure out how to proceed. What am I going to do? And I'm just me. Imagine how bad it is for folks that are responsible for two or three different households. It's crazy because you have to think about where you are going to live relative to where you are going to work. Currently, I work in SF. Imagine if I moved to Pittsburgh. There are no jobs in Pittsburg, but *everybody is moving* to Pittsburg. That will only make that place more vulnerable so that one day people will have to move again. So there is no winning!"

Lamont dealt with many different ideas throughout his own anxiety in thinking about both the changes in Oakland as well as the options he had moving to a different city. The comparison of Oakland and New Orleans allowed me to understand the magnitude of how he understood what was happening to the place he lived. It was difficult to listen to his ideas about moving. He, as well as many others, faced long commutes to jobs that did not help them to afford the travel to and from work if they were forced to move to other cities in the Bay Area.

These multi-generational stories demonstrate the connections between each of these places where it was considered safe to be Black. As community members were moving, or considering moving across the country, they made an effort to picture how their way of life would also have to be different.

Conclusion

Acts of refusal to disposability demonstrates how dispossession creates a particular politic for Black subjects. Although Black geographies are difficult to map, the legacy that created their existence allows for their connected history to become apparent. Part of this struggle includes how subjects experience these geographies and a different historitization. These acts of refusal throughout these

interviews demonstrate how Black knowledges include resistance to dominant logics. Renters, because they do not own their property, can be read as disposable through the lens of privileging private property. Thus, Black subjects have to oppose these logics in order to make claims to space within geographies. Black subjects have to combat this ontological relationship in order to demand recognition.

Developers and city officials are constructing communities through the building and properties that exist within geographies, thus violently opposing the community members that see their community through the people within geographies. In order to protect this ontological tradition, community members have to engage in acts of refusal. The risk they engage in to protect their community, although high, demonstrates a commitment to this distinct politic. Each of these acts of refusal addresses the violence Black subjects are facing as they face being marked as disposable. The mythology of development, the ontological tradition of housing struggles, marks these subjects as disposable.

In stark contrast to the narratives and factors prioritized by Oakland officials and developers, second and third generation Black residents connect their experiences to Black community members throughout the U.S. who have contended for geographies in a violent history of dispossession. Developer's unblinking reference to racial capitalism's social reordering as an inevitable and necessary process precludes investigation into the physical, economic and cultural facets of dispossession. Instead, community members articulate the violence of social (re)ordering, recounting their experiences with spatial disruption and policies that give rise to their demand that the City of Oakland protect them from abjection and socially assigned disposability.

By identifying aspects of dispossession related to land, bodies and community, community members show how dispossession is an apparatus that mobilizes the array of mechanisms of difference making within modalities of ownership. Oakland's second and third generation Black residents historicize their own geographic stories through multiple generations

of migration and immigration. They recount the stories of their past through the choices their family members made to come to Oakland. As they think about relocating, they identify other places they consider to be Black geographies where they will be able to build similar communities. The economic hardships and increasing pressures they feel from newer residents are two of the main reasons these families are considering leaving their homes. To them, the (re)imagined production of space has drastically changed the way Oakland is "supposed to feel." This is matched by the new shape of the city, which is a physical reminder of these social changes.

Community members residents are acutely aware of how dispossession feeds into an economy that continues to deprive them of the benefit of their communal resources and labor. The City's disavowal of the obligation to protect residents marked their bodies as disposable and Oakland's Black spaces as lacking value. As the geographic contestations continue, community members identify barriers to their ability to make claims as they and their community members face abjection.

As high rises mar the city's skyline and negatively impact the lives and wellbeing of existing residents, they knew that these buildings exemplified the privileging of private property and an analysis confined to physical buildings and property values. Retrenching economic development as a proxy for markers of community, developers argue that creating more housing units for the market would attract people to Oakland that would ensure economic diversity as a path to housing stability. Oakland's second and third generation Black residents articulated markers of their community based on how community members negotiated the production of space through collectivity and collaboration. They centered a staunch affirmation of their own subjectivity and the right to make claims and define their community. Those lived experiences

and the knowledges they produce are precisely what the state must obfuscate to mark bodies and communities as disposable.

CHAPTER #5: Mapping Acts of Refusal

> "In a lecture on Human Rights delivered in 1945, W.E.B. Dubois suggested that essence of the global predicament is to be found in 'the problem of minorities': "We must conceive of colonies in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as… [part of] the local problems of London, Paris and New York. [Here in America,] in the organized and dominant states of the worlds, there are groups of people who occupy the quasi-colonial states: laborers who are settled in the slums of large cities; groups like Negroes in the Unites States who are segregated physically and discriminated spiritually in law and custom… All these people occupy what is really a [quasi] colonial status and make the kernel and substance of problem of minorities."
>
> -W.E.B. Dubois 'Human Rights for all Minorities' (1945), reprinted in *W.E.B. Dubois Speaks: Speeches and Addresses 1920-1963*

Introduction

As we understand Black knowledges and Black geographies, the acts of refusal of disposability by affirming Black subjectivity is central to this knowledge. Our understanding of how Black subjects can, if they're able to, negotiate with regional political structures is a constant battle because of racial capitalism. Without a serious engagement and intent to intervene on behalf of Black subjects within regional political structures (or within a regional bloc), political institutions maintain the control over who is marked as disposable and surplus. In this chapter, I give a few examples that will continue to present as political struggles over housing. Although seemingly episodic and sporadic, these examples cannot be ignored as participating in the same struggle. These actions by community members are participating under the guise of seeing housing as a human right. Again, Black geographies are dispersed, and not always cartographic, which makes mapping urgent acts of refusals non-linear and forming a particular politic of being. Therefore, geographic struggles are a response to an ontological relationship as we will see through each of these different methods of refusal to racial capitalism

Sparring with the Landlord

Seemingly at the center of housing struggles are landlords. As community members are struggling with an increased eviction rate matched with a skyrocketing unemployment rate, landlords are raising the rent on tenants who already cannot afford the price to live in Oakland. Tales of horror from struggles with landlords are incredibly detailed. Many of the community members I spoke with talked about the rent increases they were faced with, sometimes without their knowledge of an increase, which they feared would eventually lead to them losing out on their housing. Although many of the residents were able to find help and seek out organizations that would help them push back on their landlords, some of the residents I spoke to were not so lucky. Either residents had to rely on their vehicles for shelter, move in with relatives, or spend periods of time living without shelter. The fear of losing housing was immensely difficult on the Black queer respondents who did not have family or chosen family to fall back on. However, even with the dramatic stories I was told and the egregious actions by landlords described to me, everyone was aware that the real problem was the structural relationship between race and housing.

Rashid Brown

I sat down with a community activist named Rashid Williams to discuss his experience with Oakland's increasing pressure onto the renting community in Oakland. He described the pressure he feels in his own home. Rashid explained, "I moved out with my housemates so I could go to UC Berkeley. But, of course, I could only afford to live with housemates. We signed a one-year lease on a four-bedroom apartment. There were 6 of us and I slept in the living room with a pull-out couch. It wasn't glamorous but back then it felt like the only option. After my

family moved to Texas, I didn't have the option of being a boomerang kid anymore." He laughed and paused for a second.

Then he continued, "As a graduate student a third of my monthly income went to housing costs. Fortunately, living with five energy-conscious students kept our water and gas/electricity bills low; our landlord picked up the tab for garbage collection. About two years later, I moved to a three-bedroom apartment, another shared lease apartment in the North. It was probably around the initial wave of First Fridays; back when the events were confined to the side streets [24th and 25th]. It was also during the foreclosure crisis.

"The owner of our apartments couldn't afford to flip and sell, so he renovated and rented them out. It worked for me. I was paying about the same in rent. So, my housemates and I were pretty jazzed about the area. Our new landlord required that we pay for all utilities, including trash. You wouldn't believe how much trash has gone up in these ten years. But that's another story."

Rashid threw his hand up to emphasize his next points. He began by breaking down his financial problems. "I've been in the same location for about six years," he said "and, for most of that time, I lived primarily on a graduate student yearly salary of about $19,000. I've watched the price of our rent slowly increase from its original level of $1950 to today's price at $2500. We don't split it evenly. But, nowadays, my share of rent and utilities is about $800. I think we're lucky. Granted, none of my housemates nor I could consider buying a home in the Bay. Our options would be severely limited to the ex-urbs. And with today's insane traffic, our commutes to work would increase to obscene amounts. But we're also stuck. We can't afford to lose our rental apartment and expect to live in the same area for the same price. [Rent] prices have

doubled or tripled. So, in the meanwhile, unless we totally quit the area or trade in for far more lucrative jobs...or worse, marry for money, we are in a weird financial limbo."

Rashid and I joked about that being the option for all the graduate students in the Bay Area. We referred to the recent activism he was participating in through the university as all graduate students were participating in a Wildcat Strike asking for a cost-of-living increase. Rashid talked about the impossibility of being only a graduate student and living in a place like the Bay Area.

Rashid continued, "I'm still working on my doctorate while teaching at a neighborhood community college. It's the only way I'm keeping afloat. However, this year our landlord wants to increase our rent by 15% on account of a 400% increase in his homeowner's insurance premiums. With every annual increase, we ask 'How long can we really hold on to this rental spot?' People who have houses; their money goes toward purchasing something to own. We're just throwing our money away. It's a strange feeling."

Rashid explained that his next step was to take action. He explained, "I was able to work with the rest of the tenants in his building to form a union. We worked with a friend who was actively involved in a union that had already successfully sued three different buildings after they raised the rent by a 20% increase in one year. For me, my entrance into housing activism was personal." He described many examples of having to work with the city-wide Oakland Tenants union which holds both monthly meetings as well as virtual advice hours.

"We have double digit Black unemployment in Oakland right now! That should scare us. There also doesn't seem to be a plan that consists of priority for Black and Latinx laborers. When you look at West Oakland, they are having a time with all of their new constructions and newly renovated units. We know plenty of friends who have moved out of the area simply because they

couldn't afford the rent—usually because they lost their lease, or the owner sold or something catastrophic. You know those doomsday clocks that countdown to nuclear annihilation of the planet? That's how I feel about our housing situation in the Town. It's only a matter of time until everything explodes. Once your housing is gone, everything suffers.”

Rashid and I spoke at length about the limited accountability the city of Oakland had for the demographic changes that were happening in Oakland. His frustration was rooted in the number of available units and the escalating homeless population that for him demonstrated a lack of humanity. He was also saddened by the encounters he had with public officials. He reiterated many times, “there just doesn’t seem to be any plan. You have all these people out here on the street and you just refuse. You throw your hands up and say what is the solution that will best satisfy the capitalist. It’s maddening.”

The fights tenants have with their landlords over rent and space sometimes resulted in a mutual agreement with the owner and renter. Many people reflected to me the fear and anxiety they held while having to negotiate with the person who owned their house. Not because they were afraid of advocating for themselves, but instead because they were vividly aware of the consequences of what happened when things went wrong. The homeless encampment in West Oakland and Downtown Oakland is growing larger and larger. The number of people who were living with relatives is also growing at an alarming rate. Many of the people living on the edge of homelessness described a consistent fear before they had to begin fighting their landlord, however, during the advocacy it became that much more intensified.

Siori Halle

Siori and I had been talking about her family's experience immigrating to America for 20 minutes before the conversation transitioned into her parent's housing issues. Her uncle Ogbai and Tesfai immigrated here because of the war between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Her mother and aunt came to the U.S. four months later. Siori was born at Kaiser Hospital in Oakland and they grew up mostly in East Oakland. She also has close family in San Leandro and Alameda.

One day, out of the blue, her mother Haregu called her distraught. Siori explained to me, "she said that the landlord told her that she had been paying the wrong amount on her rent. My mom doesn't speak English that well and so usually I'm the one corresponding with her landlord. I was heated. I called the landlord immediately to try and figure out what was going on. They tried to tell me that I had been sending in the wrong amount for the rent for five months and that I owed them a bunch of money. I didn't understand. We had just signed a new lease and there was never any notice in an amount change at all. My mom called me back the same day and said it wasn't just her. The guy who lives upstairs from her had the exact same problem. He also told her that multiple people in the building were freaking out because they were told the same thing. And it's messed up. Everybody in the building are immigrants. Many of them have been living there for decades and now they are starting to have all of these problems."

"Did the problem start this year?"

"No, it all started when the property switched management. There were all these new issues with the parking and then the mail. I honestly believe they are just trying to kick everyone out because they are all under rent control. They just want to put in new tenants so they could charge them more."

"Were you able to settle with your landlord?"

She shook her head. In her voice I began to hear that she was exhausted. She said, "I think I just have to pay the money. If I don't, my mom could get kicked out. It's trash. My mom doesn't want to press it because she's afraid they are going to make things worse for her, but also, I don't want her paying all of this extra money. So now we all live in fear. I contacted the City. They are supposed to help with stuff like this, but I never hear back. I've called multiple times. Now I don't know what to do and they said if we don't start paying, they're going to have to start the eviction process. I've thought about getting a lawyer but with what money. The other people who live there are going to want to press it either. Some of them are undocumented and some of them have extra people staying with them. So, what can they do?"

Many residents who were undocumented, returning citizens or had people who were returning citizens spoke of this same situation when they came up against fights with their landlords. They describe feeling that the situation was doomed, and they would have to give in to what their landlords were demanding in order to keep their housing. Anyone with additional layers of precarity talked about these same problems. If they lived in a rent controlled unit, they knew that holding onto this property, even if they were rent-burdened, was the only step they had at maintaining housing.

Keenan Smith

Keenan and I spoke for hours. The struggle with his landlord took us through three cups of coffee at the cafe we met in. His story was hard to keep track of, but as he took me through the details, it was obvious to me that the egregious actions of his landlord was not uncommon. His involvement with the Oakland Tenants Union dragged on for many weeks. However, through this ordeal he referred to many other Oakland residents in the exact same, if not eerily close, situation.

He started, “The case against our landlord started back in 2018. We’ve been living in the apartment in Chinatown Oakland since 2008 on a twelve-month lease that our landlord renews with a small rent increase. Usually 2-4%, which always led my housemates and I to believe we were under rent control. But in September 2018 he called for a 12% increase and claimed that his insurance premiums had increased by 400%. As usual, we had thirty days to decide if we wanted to continue the lease with this new increase or move out. Concerned about the steep increase, but without the luxury of time to investigate, we acquiesced to the new amount.

“We live in a four-unit multi-home dwelling. It’s really two attached townhouses or row houses. Each row house has been subdivided into two separate 3-bedroom 2-bathroom apartments. Our owner owns all four. So, we checked with one of our neighbors; his lease always renewed a month earlier. He, too, was concerned about the 12% increase. Apparently, our landlord wanted to increase by 25% but instead chose to split up the increases over two years. Alarmed by this information, but, again, without the luxury of time, we just fretted over our position as tenants. Was it time to look for other places to live? Quite frankly, we didn’t have many options. Rents were increasing at alarming rates.”

“What do you think is the cause of these increases?”

Keenan answers in a frustrated, flippant way. His voice was almost sarcastic. “Various reasons were offered in the press: a tech boom or surge of employees in tech firms with substantially higher salaries threatened the stagnant salaries of traditional workers and students, lack of increases in the supply of new housing stock, new housing mostly being marketed towards high income earners with fewer spaces available for working class or middle-class income earners, etc. Among my housemates we all knew friends who had moved out of the area because they could no longer afford the costs of living, with housing being the biggest problem.

“2019 rolls around and we anticipate another increase, but this time I had left my job and was working independently from home. So I started to do some research on our status as tenants. I checked with the Oakland Tenants Union that offered free consultations every other Sunday at the downtown Oakland library. According to them, we lived in a multi-unit dwelling, so as long as it was built before 1982 (one of the cut off dates for rent control), then we should be entitled to rent control increases as set by the city of Oakland. I was tasked with calling Alameda County's records office to determine when our building was built; he couldn’t find information online. To my surprise, our building was built in 1900!”

Keenan’s voice became more and more frustrated as he continued. He shifted a little in his seat then began to explain, “The City of Oakland has a Rent Adjustment Program (RAP) office that offers free consultations for both tenants and landlords. I called them next and spoke to a woman who claimed since we were living in a four-unit building, we should be under rent-control. She even claimed most landlords don’t quite understand the law. But, regardless of when the property was created, apartment buildings with 3 or more units are under rent control unless the owner applies for an exemption. And, according to what she can see under our address, there is no exemption certificate on file. The exemption pertains to buildings that are renovated. If the renovation cost is 50% or more of the building cost, then owners can apply for a certificate of exemption from the city. But, the certificate must be displayed in the building. We have no certificate.

“So I went a step further. I visited the county records office to get documentation of the construction date as well as property lines and ownership records. I then visited the RAP office and asked for some advice. They were impressed with how much I had gathered already. Again, they confirmed that no exemption was on file and, even more so, there was no indication that our

owner had been paying condo association dues. The issue, for them, comes down to how our landlord thinks of the property.

“So, I was tasked with just asking him—do we live in a condo or an apartment? Condominiums, condos for short, are considered single family homes owned by individuals and therefore not under rent control. But, of course, condos share a building. So, by law, the condo owners must pay into a condo association and decide governance to maintain the common property that they share. To the RAP office, since our owner owned all of the units and we were not paying separate condo dues, we should qualify for rent control. Another RAP officer even found mortgage records and gave me a copy.

“So, through a few weeks of digging around, I had a substantial amount of information available. I consulted my housemates and my neighbors and decided to take my landlord to court. I wanted the City of Oakland to make the ruling: did we live in a condo or an apartment? My landlord claimed it was a condo—at least, in an email, that’s what he said. He would later say other contradictory or weird things to me in-person. The plot thickens of course.

“Once we filed the case he came and offered a paltry settlement. If memory serves me correct, he offered to lower our rent by $400. But we had the feeling that we should hold out for more. If he’s offering a settlement already, then he must have been in the wrong. He even got a lawyer. We debated getting legal representation, but the cost seemed prohibitive at the time.

“So we rejected the first offer and waited for the court case. Unfortunately, the hearing (originally scheduled for April 10, 2020) got delayed due to COVID-19. By April 10, 2020 we’d still be waiting nervously for an outcome. I'll also add that our landlord offered all of the tenants a $300 month reduction in rent for 3 months, on account of COVID-19. We rejected that offer, as we didn't want to complicate the on-going settlement.

"During July 2020 we got notification that the City of Oakland would conduct the hearing virtually on August 10. So, our landlord offered another settlement. This time I consulted with a few law offices, but I had really waited too late. Nevertheless, one law firm thought I had a good case. So, my housemates and I agreed to take our landlord's 2nd settlement offer: $10,000 returned to us—an accumulation of 3 years worth of rent increases, effectively returning our rent to 2017 levels. He also agreed to only increase the rent by City of Oakland rent control levels, effectively giving us rent control without acknowledging. And he would wait 14 months before the next rent increase. We took the offer.

"So, two things that I've thought about this entire ordeal: (a) In June 2018 my landlord occupied one of the empty units in our building which made this whole case a little awkward. (He literally moved in *during the middle of the night* without telling anyone.) I kept my neighbors, the other tenants, abreast of the case, hoping they would join me. One tenant ended up moving out; he was generally tired of the Bay Area's cost of living and his company offered him a job in Portland, Oregon. They even paid for his moving costs and paid the remaining three months on his lease. The other group of tenants declined to participate with us; they were afraid of making waves. I guess they could afford the increases. I tried to remind them that it's illegal for our landlord to retaliate, but they still declined. In the end, I never let them know about the settlement.

"(b) Our landlord is Chinese American; he grew up in the Bay Area and attended UC Berkeley with his wife. I identify as Black and I live with a Jewish-American male and a Chinese-American female housemate. Our neighbor who moved out is White appearing with a Latina-immigrant girlfriend. Our neighbors who declined to join us in the case are Southeast Asian-American males, I assume. And, as I said before, we live in the Chinatown section of

downtown Oakland. I shudder to think of what other tenants go through when they are faced with tenant-owner disputes. What happens when tenants don't have the time to investigate these issues? What happens when tenants don't have the financial resources to hire a lawyer to handle their case for them? What happens when tenants are afraid to make waves because the housing market is so competitive, and they are afraid to lose their home? Or just, generally, how much having shelter is the foundation of one's mental health, so any disruption or possibility of a disruption can cause an enormous amount of stress?

"My housemate was stressed out during this entire process and afraid to even encounter our landlord/owner. I think the entire system disadvantages people of color, the middle class, and definitely the working class. I appreciate the help I received from the Oakland Tenants Union. I'm also relieved that the City of Oakland has the RAP office that offers free consultations. Most of the folks working there were Brown and Black. And I feel as though they were willing to do as much as they could because they are painfully aware of the racial inequities in housing in the city. I also think of Chinatown as a space in which people of Asian descent organize in order to create space for people of color. There's a continual sense of struggle against the housing market. There are new condos popping up in various parts of downtown Oakland. And, if most of those are luxury apartments or condos sold at market rate, they don't alleviate the burdens of working- or middle-class families. So, I really fault the City of Oakland. I don't understand why the supply of new housing is always so expensive, such that individuals with fewer financial resources get caught in exploitative situations."

Surplus and Crisis in Oakland

There are two city ordinances which apply both to land and low-income housing. These ordinances were revised by the Community & Economic Development Committee on 12/2/2014

and the Oakland City Council on 12/9/2015.[2] In order to comply with these ordinances, steps have to be taken by the city that ensure low income residents have an opportunity to gain access to housing. The activist responsible for getting the city to grant and support these ordinances fought to ensure that the land Oakland was selling would not be used as a means to sell to investors that would increase dispossession. In the midst of the housing crisis, there is a lack of response by the city to act on the enforcement of the ordinances to new investors or act on ensuring they have taken the necessary steps to follow through with these municipal codes.

The Eastlake United for Justice members challenged the selling of a 12th street parcel. Public Advocates, a non-profit advocate group in Oakland, submitted a letter addressed to then President Lynette Gibson McElhaney and the additional members of the Oakland City Council to alert them of their noncompliance with the Surplus Lands Act (of the state of California), Oakland's General Plan and Oakland's Municipal Code. The document details how each of these laws are applicable as well as how they should be applied to this particular property. In the documents the team states:

> It is unclear whether the City complied with any of these procedural requirements. On the contrary, it appears that 'staff issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) to those developers who had shown interest in the Property.' The City Administrator and City Council's failure to take the necessary procedural steps would put the City out of compliance with Ordinance No. 13287 and its predecessor, Ordinance No. 13185 (July 2013) as well as the City's Housing Element.

The closing of the letter reads:

> Finally, state law also forbids local governments in "the enactment or administration of ordinances from taking any action to prohibit any residential development because "of the method of financing" or because" the development… is intended for occupancy by persons and families of very low, low, or moderate…." To the extent that the City discourage affordable housing, prioritized luxury housing over affordable housing or refused to consider affordable housing during its disposition process, it would be in violation of this requirement.

They also produced a checklist for the compliance with the Surplus Land Act in order to clarify how to observe these laws.

I spoke with a longtime activist Mr. Allen West about this issue in particular. Mr. West is a longtime advocate and activist that has worked on housing in Oakland specifically to protect the marginalized people in this community. Mr. West stated “That’s why the city got sued over that 12th street property. They are supposed to be designating that land to low income property. But they clearly aren’t. It’s such a shame. And then you have all these people leaving with people here who don’t know their history. When people don’t know their history, it’s like sending someone to a fight with a gun with no bullets in it.”

In a breaking news story Darwin BondGraham with the East Bay Express wrote about the 12th street victory:

> On Tuesday, Oakland quietly issued a ‘notice of intent and offer to convey property’ for the 12th Street Remainder Parcel, the acre of land near Lake Merritt that until recently was slated to become a 300-unit luxury apartment tower. Under the Surplus Land Act, Oakland was required to first offer the site to affordable housing developers, but the city instead issued a private RFP to three companies seeking to build luxury housing on the site.

The report also suggests that Oakland was not doing all it could to advertise this property to interested parties.

Oakland Teacher Strike

The Oakland teacher strike lasted seven days. After two years of failed negotiations, many veteran teachers took the lead in declaring they were ready for the next steps to prove to the Oakland Unified School District (District) that they were no longer going to compromise their own stability while also dealing with the suffering needs of the students in their classrooms.

The teachers held protests in front of each of the Oakland public high schools, marched in front of the district in downtown Oakland and held a rally in Oscar Grant Plaza.

Oakland teachers striking is not unheard of. Most people who grew up in the Bay Area can recall at least one teacher's strike per decade of their lives. This most recent strike was particularly impactful because the discourse contextualized teacher demands within the rising costs of living in the Bay Area. Discussions about the classroom were really discussions about the community at large. To understand and analyze the strike, therefore, it is important to briefly summarize Oakland teachers' larger political moment.

Oakland schools have many "veteran teachers" that are like legacies in the community. These are teachers who taught multiple generations of students, and people describe them as big deals. Teachers, especially veteran teachers, have a big presence in City Hall and are influential within local politics. They are powerful forces in how the District makes decisions for how education is organized. Their work carries weight for how education is supposed to be done in Oakland, specifically. Many people talk about urban change at the individual level. Some see the newcomers as invaders in their homelands. Others have gone as far as to compare gentrification with colonization. However, teachers describe being at the front line of watching a community, within a school and beyond, morph.

More broadly, teachers as a category of workers set standards. Both for how the community responds to them and the types of responsibilities that any community has to its teachers. It is important not only because of the amount of time they spend with students, but also because of the impact good teachers and education systems can have on communities as a whole. In particular, the school as a geographic site is a site of contention over the discourse of urban change. Oakland has many neighborhood schools. These neighborhood schools are public

and thus invite students based on the area of Oakland that they live in. Thus, many students who start off at an elementary school, many have some of the same classmates in their high school. The community looks to the schools as facilitators who demonstrate ways to hold the school district accountable. Worker strikes are an act of refusal that marks another method for opposing disposability.

Because of the corruption and mismanagement at the District level there is a continued miscommunication of how much money there is and what the goals are and what the relationship to the community needs to be.

Mr. Allen West

As Mr. Allen West and I continued our conversations about the Oakland teachers strike, I watched his face turn more and more red. The teacher strike was now a big deal to most Oaklanders, however, he has lived as both a principal and a veteran teacher in this community for 35 years.

Mr. Allen West's voice began to deepen as he spoke through his frustration. He said, "The mismanagement and corruption in the district led to a stifled flow of communication. The district is not as transparent with the community as they should be. It is disruptive because teachers and principals have limited power and the District is the one who should be held responsible for things—like how many charter schools there are or where resources are being allocated. One of the things that was instrumental to the strike was the teacher's explanations of what was going on. To the District it appeared that the teachers were just asking for more money. Consequently, the teachers sent out videos on Facebook and set up a twitter account. The education association made a Facebook to explain basic information about the teacher's strike. The public education campaign allowed the community to understand that the teachers had a

two-year contract. Whereas the district would paint these events as a sudden thing, the teachers were able to correct that notion by showing how much planning and work had gone into creating that moment.

Using anything from tweets to Facebook memes, teachers explained how public officials were spending money. They explained the gaping discrepancies in how California spends money on its classrooms, and how Oakland spends its money in contrast. We call it a teacher's strike, but the teachers were trying to work in tandem with other school employees such as janitors and counselors because in a different way they also need a pay raise. For example, there are 22 nurses for every 37,000 students. It was really about schools as a whole. Those in the schools who were most overworked and underpaid. The district continues to argue that they do not have the finances to support students. Meanwhile, parents are upset at the quality of education. Parents start thinking they should send their kids to charter schools as better options, but they don't treat Black students any better. Charter schools also do not function better than public schools."

"What do you think this moment means for Oakland as a community?"

Mr. Allen West looked at me sternly and responded, "this is a moment for the political identity and the legacy of engagement in Oakland to potentially change. Public schools are getting whiter, wealthier, [and have] more privileged students. Charter schools make it more difficult for public schools to function. This is a result in a shift in the population and the type of class consciousness that exists in Oakland and that is a result of many people in power who have made decisions for how Oakland should change.

"A labor movement becomes vital because it's a demonstration that such an event will not happen without contention. People see and pay attention to the technocrat economies'

attempt to change Oakland. The labor movement is an example of people's collective consciousness to fight back in a moment of vulnerability.

"The vulnerability stems from the change in the political economy. A labor movement in an area that is becoming wealthier and less family friendly makes teachers vulnerable because they are still considered working class folks. Because there is so much competition with the charter schools, it makes it challenging to maintain a workforce a good teacher at these public schools. Thus: if I'm making 40k at Oakland Technical High School, a public school, why wouldn't I make 80k at Head-Royce, a private school where tuition is $42,900 per student? One of the problems is that yet again, schools and teachers have a legacy within the political climate on the kinds of educational programs that exist. If you remove that you extinguish what it means to be in or from Oakland."

Fernanda Sousa

Fernanda was one of the teachers who had participated in the strike. We spoke about the struggles her school had in deciding to join the strike and her experiences in Oakland. First, I asked her about her experiences growing up in Oakland.

She looked up as she began to reminisce about her story. She started, "I think that I had a different experience than some folks because I grew up by the Lake and spent a lot of time going to the Lake. Me, my Dad and my sister spent a lot of time going to the park rollerblading, etc. Then, because we went to schools up in the Hills, most of our time was either spent there or in the Hills where I was at school. That's where my friends were from, so they were all in that area. I had an experience of Oakland that I would say was a sanitized version. I got to have the upper middle class white version that some people get, and a lot of people don't. I also had access to a

lot of shit in a way that most people don't because of the schools I went to (and by nature of who also went to those schools)."

"Has being from Oakland shaped you?"

"It's hard not to right? Oakland has such a cultural identity of like 'we are Oakland.' It's pretty hard not to. I remember growing up with hella pride to be from Oakland. That was a big thing. When I was younger, it was like 'OMG Oakland is so diverse.' Even going to schools in the Hills, it was still a pretty diverse group of students despite the fact that it was removed from neighborhoods where Black and Brown people lived. So even going to a lot of these places and schools, there's like something about growing up in Oakland that you don't… take shit from people! I don't know what it is about this place and the people here but… I definitely think that I learned from this city (and from my Mom) to not take shit."

"So, you've done all of your schooling in Oakland. Now you're a teacher in Oakland. Why was that important to you?"

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher in High school. I remember having teachers like Darrick Smith, Mr. Wing, Ms. Joe, and Ms. Haugen and being like these folks are doing shit! I remember learning- you can't come into a community and be like 'you need this.' I was like this is my home, this is where I grew up, these are the people that I grew up around and I know. If I can do some subversive stuff and get a job that I think I would love," She paused quickly, and then continued by adding, "it has to be Oakland. It wasn't really a question. It was either teach abroad or stay here! I think that ultimately made it easy. It didn't matter where I ended up. I think it's appropriate that I'm at this school because of my experience but I knew that I wanted it to be in Oakland. There is an intangible thing about this place and the students."

"Can you describe it?"

“I think it’s a historical thing. It’s ingrained in Oakland history. Where the identity of the city has developed for decades. It’s coming from a place of struggle and liberation—in particular, Black folks fighting for rights. We’re all hella lucky to benefit from that history-non-Black folks are lucky to benefit from that history in a place like Oakland. And really reap the benefits for what Black people have built.”

“Has the price of housing impacted your school?”

“Short answer yes. Would you like me to elaborate? Even if you look at Oakland Tech demographics today and knowing what it was 15-20 years ago. It was about 60-50% Black, I looked it up today and that number is down to 26%. They had a Black graduation and like—what? Isn’t graduation just Black?

“Well yea all the Black people have moved to Antioch. All my students, all Black are saying ‘we’re leaving. We’re going to move to Antioch.”

“How does that feel?”

“It feels like anger and sadness and imagining a future where I can leave. I remember Darrick Smith saying if TryUMF ever got x% white, we’re done. And I feel that. I could teach white students—they need to learn, but as a mixed kid that grew up around white folks and wrestling with my identity, I know that is not where I want to be. I don’t want to be surrounded by white people and feeling out of place. It makes me sad to see and feel the culture change and watch as Oakland gets more beautiful, less Black. It’s like—so now we’re going to invest in a ‘beautification project.’ That’s fucking nuts and it doesn’t feel like a coincidence to me.

“What’s crazy to me is this catch 22 of folks come here (for these tech jobs and there’s money in the Bay Area) and Oakland is an appealing place because of its culture. Then [people] come here and you suck it all out. It also makes me mad where I have white teachers who are

like I can’t teach Black students, Black history or ethnic studies. And I’m like- why the fuck are you here?” She threw her hands in the air to emphasize her frustration. “There are so many other places you can be if you can’t teach Black and Brown students. It makes me sad; it makes me mad- it breaks my heart a little bit to think that aside from climate change there are other reasons why I could leave this place.”

“Has the price of housing impacted you personally.

She laughed a little and started her response sarcastically, “luckily my landlord came down a lot in rent, but I pay $1650 for a studio apartment—which is crazy.”

“That just shouldn’t be a thing”

“You remember that guy who was like the rent is too damn high, the rent was way lower when he said that.”

“Do teachers talk to each other about the cost of housing?”

“Yes, we talk about it. I’ve had a couple of married teacher friends who recently brought houses and both of them were outbid for over a year. They ended up figuring it out. They are both massive fixer-uppers. They are doing a lot of work themselves to fix those houses. It’s substantially cheaper, you spent all this money on a house that’s overpriced, so you do it yourself. On the other side, I have a coworker who comes from enough money where he bought a house in 2006 and could sell it for 3 or 4 times what he bought it for. It makes me sad. Both of the folks that have bought a house recently are pushing into their 50s and been teaching for 20 years, with a spouse who has another income. The spouse is also not a teacher, they are doing something else.”

She thought about her answer and I could tell she was trying to be careful with her works. As she spoke her eyes looked up so she could continue without becoming distracted. “I’ve been

teaching for 10 years." she said. "When I got here there was an overhaul of the staff. So when [the principal's] tenure ended, it marked a change. Our school was just a public school in Oakland; not bad, not good. Now it's at a point where its 30-30-30: Black, Latino and Asian. So, [the principal's] tenure marked a change of an upward trajectory of our school moving up in the ranks. There's waitlists to get into another high school, so our school is the second choice. There's where we're at, and I'm worried because recognition comes at a cost. I want to do dope education for the kids that go here. For the kids who don't have a choice. They either walk or get on a bus. You can tell that the reputation is changing. Same with the feeder middle school we have. They just had a petition signed to make sure the demographic of the middle school doesn't change too much. Saying we want to be committed to Black and Brown students. That's the big change I've seen happen just with gaining status and stature. I imagine that's what happened to Tech, and it'll happen here. So, what do I do when that happens."

"Do you think the increase in charter schools impacted the public schools?

She nodded for a second before loudly responding, "Yes! It's so fucked up what they did to Mac, Fremont and Castlemont. Even though Oakland is not a small town, there are people that you grow up with. People that you went to elementary school with, end up at your high school. So if you take these schools away, you ruin that. You also ruin all of that history. Then there's all these fucking charter schools, which is another thing. The District is selling us out- to put it plainly."

Discussion

In this chapter, I capture acts of refusal against disposability. Since Black geographies map dispersed subjects throughout communities, their acts of resistance may appear to happen at random. However, the logics of dispossession and disposability

introduce a distinct politic that Black subjects develop through geographical contestations. The interview samples I provide in this chapter show that these acts are not random but combatting a racial regime. In fact, all of these examples demonstrate an awareness that socio spatial processes within Oakland are connected to the consequences of their living conditions.

This chapter also demonstrates the failure of "inclusive" housing policy in its stated purpose of improving access to housing. The impact of these policies, even as proposed changes by the City of Oakland, still works to further their disposability. The interviewees highlighted the many abuses they face through these logics, and thus the need for protection by government officials. The city's approach to combating abuses is not proactive. Instead, these policies require residents to mobilize, many times in mass, to ensure their needs are addressed because access to social service programs that protect renters against landlord violations depend on the tenant coming forward to the City. This creates significant risks for a population that is already dealing with housing instability. Thus, creating a significant barrier between those who would receive that protection and those not afforded the same treatment by social service programs. Placing the responsibility on residents to speak out against housing abuses required residents to organize strikes, form tenants unions, and spar with their landlords, all at the risk of facing retaliation, getting fired from their jobs or becoming homeless. Without proactive steps from the government, community members risk their livelihood in order to mobilize. Otherwise, they are forced to remain silent while the problem continues.

From the excerpts on Sparring with the Landlord, the stories of Rashid Brown, Siori Halle, and Keenan Smith highlight the lived consequences of government

interventions that favor capitalists over everyday people. Rashid's interview demonstrates how many residents experience anxiety around keeping up with the cost of the housing market even before needing to organize against landlords raising prices. He demonstrates an awareness of the coldness of the government toward the widespread problem of homelessness and overcrowding, creating real, visceral, material stresses on Oakland residents. Rashid knows that the problem is so much larger than any landlord, although landlords tend to be the face of drastically raising rent prices and inflicting other abuses. In this instance, Rashid feels he has a more reasonable price worked out with his landlord in comparison to the market value of other places in the area. However, he conveys an impending sense of doom regarding how long he will be able to keep his current arrangement - he has few affordable selections to live in the area if he stays, especially on an abysmally low salary.

Siori's story captures a landlord's abuses against immigrant families by demanding that some of the families give him more money for rent than they had agreed to pay in their leases. In this instance, because the burden of seeking out state intervention for landlord abuses fell on the backs of vulnerable people with a lot to lose, Siori and her family stayed quiet and paid the landlord the extra amount. Keenan, on the other hand, spent an enormous amount of labor using different resources to eventually settle with his landlord for the substantial amount of money that covered all of the illegal rent hikes over the past years. The outcomes for these two different people who faced abuses by their landlords were very different, even though they are protected by the same housing policy. This demonstrates inequity in access to affordable housing by race, class, and immigration status, going against the stated purpose of the policy. These stories also

reflect how the state's lack of proactive intervention in the housing crisis negatively impacts Oakland residents.

Conclusion

Acts of refusal to disposability demonstrates how dispossession creates a particular politic for Black subjects. Although Black geographies are difficult to map, the legacy that created their existence allows for their connected history to become apparent. Part of this struggle includes how subjects experience these geographies and a different historicization. The mobilization demonstrated in these acts of refusal throughout these interviews demonstrate how Black knowledges include resistance to dominant logics. Renters, because they do not own their property, can be read as disposable through the lens of privileging private property. Thus, Black subjects have to oppose these logics in order to make claims to space within geographies. Black subjects have to combat this ontological relationship in order to demand recognition.

Developers and city officials are constructing communities through the building and properties that exist within geographies, thus violently opposing the community members that see their community through the people within geographies. In order to protect this ontological tradition, community members have to engage in acts of refusal. The risk they engage in to protect their community, although high, demonstrates a commitment to this distinct politic. Each of these acts of refusal addresses the violence Black subjects are facing as they face being marked as disposable. The mythology of development, the ontological tradition of housing struggles, marks these subjects as disposable.

In stark contrast to the narratives and factors prioritized by Oakland officials and developers, second and third generation Black residents connect their experiences to Black

community members throughout the U.S. who have contended for geographies in a violent history of dispossession. Developer's unblinking reference to racial capitalism's social reordering as an inevitable and necessary process precludes investigation into the physical, economic and cultural facets of dispossession. Instead, community members articulate the violence of social (re)ordering, recounting their experiences with spatial disruption and policies that give rise to their demand that the City of Oakland protect them from abjection and socially assigned disposability.

By identifying aspects of dispossession related to land, bodies and community, community members show how dispossession is an apparatus that mobilizes the array of mechanisms of difference making within modalities of ownership. Oakland's second and third generation Black residents historicize their own geographic stories through multiple generations of migration and immigration. They recount the stories of their past through the choices their family members made to come to Oakland. As they think about relocating, they identify other places they consider to be Black geographies where they will be able to build similar communities. The economic hardships and increasing pressures they feel from newer residents are two of the main reasons these families are considering leaving their homes. To them, the (re)imagined production of space has drastically changed the way Oakland is "supposed to feel." This is matched by the new shape of the city, which is a physical reminder of these social changes.

Community members residents are acutely aware of how dispossession feeds into an economy that continues to deprive them of the benefit of their communal resources and labor. The City's disavowal of the obligation to protect residents marked their bodies as disposable and Oakland's Black spaces as lacking value. As the geographic contestations continue, community

members identify barriers to their ability to make claims as they and their community members face abjection.

As high rises mar the city's skyline and negatively impact the lives and wellbeing of existing residents, they knew that these buildings exemplified the privileging of private property and an analysis confined to physical buildings and property values. Retrenching economic development as a proxy for markers of community, developers argue that creating more housing units for the market would attract people to Oakland that would ensure economic diversity as a path to housing stability. Oakland's second and third generation Black residents articulated markers of their community based on how community members negotiated the production of space through collectivity and collaboration. They centered a staunch affirmation of their own subjectivity and the right to make claims and define their community. Those lived experiences and the knowledges they produce are precisely what the state must obfuscate to mark bodies and communities as disposable.

CHAPTER #6: Right for Housing as a (Black) Politic

"The challenge of the twenty-first century is not to demand equal opportunity to participate in the machinery of oppression. Rather it is to identify and dismantle those structures in which racism continues to be embedded. This is the only way the promise of freedom can be extended to masses of people."
Angela Davis, *Abolition Democracy: Beyond Empire, Prisons, and Torture*

"Throughout his long and brilliant career as both a social scientist and political militant, DuBois speculated that the final solution to racial conflict in America might be the complete extermination of the Black race."
Manning Marable, *How Capitalism Underdeveloped Black America*

Introduction

Black scholars through the 20th and 21st centuries have continued to argue the only way to save Black America from the violence racial capitalism continues to wage is through the abolition of oppressive political and economic systems and the dismantling of ideological regimes that uphold them. As racial capitalism continues to justify inequality through racial categories, the disavowal of the violence of socially assigned disposability will also be justified through racial regimes and economic principles that value private property over the lives of community members. The Right to Housing, then, is not only a social revolution worth struggling for, it is a step closer to the (re)defining and (re)construction of racial categories within geographies.

In this dissertation, I investigated the relationship between underdevelopment and Black geographies. I then explored the consequences of this relationship on the city of Oakland. From 2019 to 2021, I conducted 68 in-depth field interviews of Black Oakland residents who detailed the processes and mechanisms by which California housing policy contributed to the

displacement of Black subjects. Building on the work of scholars of Black geographies, I have interrogated the myth of development and the relationship to the dispossession of Black geographies. I present two antagonistic ontological traditions in order to further understand two opposing ways of being, both conceptualized through community, as magnified by geographic contestations. Although dominating systems (re)produce violence, taking seriously the politic created through dispossession helps to map acts of refusal throughout Black geographies. The horror of asymmetrical dispossession of Black urban communities and the violence of Black subjects read as disposable is not just a risk for Oakland, but for possibilities to create Black space.

Black issues are spatial issues. As Black subjects are read through geographies and mapped on to underdevelopment, Black geographies are marked as unstable, unproductive and thus disposable. The relationship between Blackness and disposability (re)defines Black subjectivity. As I have argued in Chapter 2 and demonstrated in Chapter 3, this relationship can only be upheld through myths and the narrative used to propel those myths. The refusal to dispossession then is an affirmation of Black subjectivity and acts against these narratives.

As Oakland residents describe their geographic stories, they demonstrate the possibility to (re)imagine spaces across places. They articulate a tradition of this method of thinking through space and highlight the importance of this continued production of knowledges. Residents read their own geographic stories in connection to the generations before they migrated or immigrated to California. This demonstrates the distinct politic created from experiencing dispossession: a refusal to be read as disposable and a refusal that demonstrates collectivity. These acts of refusal must not be understood as locally bound. Instead if we take Black knowledges seriously, Black

refusal of dispossession must be understood as diasporic, liberatory and the very site of struggle.

Dispossession (re)produces logics of abjection as a consequence and condition of the difference making that results from (re)ordering society. Colonial tenets of possession mobilize the dispossession of land through the mythology of development. Development, particularly economic development, distorts the way communities are valued as reducible to the property within the geographies they engage. There are many ways dispossession can be seen and experienced. However, all dispossession is rooted in systems of domination that support extracting from one community in order to accumulate capital in another as the means to (re)order society.

The undertaking of spatial theorists who deal with Black geographies is to contend with power exercised through and within space. Narratives of decay and disorder mar both the histories of urban geographies and the contestations over the production of space in urban places. Social theorists who take for granted the connection between race and place misread the colonial legacies and socio-historical processes that force these concepts together. The extent underdevelopment vandalizes Black communities and (re)defines Black subjectivity must be demonstrated to defend ideologies of those who press beyond dominating systems. The abolition of oppressive systems must begin with defending Black knowledges, which requires exploring the centrality of space in relation to Black subjectivity, contending that the resistance to disposability as a discourse and making clear the imperative of political education against racial capitalism as the only option.

Centrality of Space to Black Subjectivity

Space is neither empty, static nor flat. Space is a dynamic process which results from and constitutes methods of sociality. The methods themselves are also consistently remade through struggles over identities and definitions. Urban change can only be understood through the context of social change. To ignore how spatial change and social change are constituted together is to ignore the direction of power that (re)imagines both place and space. Black spaces are crafted and defined by captivity and control. As racial capitalism (re)creates economic mechanisms for categories of difference, development becomes an ideological tool to justify (re)ordering geographies in the name of progress. Racial regimes explain, and even uphold, these (re)orderings as racial categories are leveraged through dispossession. Upholding the mythology of development requires the disavowal of this (re)ordering. This mythology professes that (re)orderings do not involve power, that the history of underdevelopment is a neutral process and, most importantly, that markets can be used as social justice tools.

In truth, the processes that ensnare race and place have meticulously carved out geographies, which limit the possibilities to produce space. These processes reify the unevenness that (re)defined Black spaces and the subjects that engage their geographies. To see beyond this narrative without essentializing the relationship between race and place is to (re)imagine Black subjectivity and to affirm that these subjects are more than the ramifications of these processes. Developers work through their understandings of what makes communities thrive, how communities become safe and how the people within communities should relate to space. However, as they describe these logics, contradictions for who belongs in communities and how those community members deserve to engage these geographies are expressed through a lack of contending with the (re)orderings of these places. As governments uphold these logics and

further their legitimation, the mythology of development violently opposes revolutionary social visions.

For community members in Oakland, this legacy includes their own family members as well as the socio-historical processes that informed how space is shaped. The mythology of development is not simply a misnomer. This ideology supports a social vision that negates Black subjectivity to preserve profit made through private property, which disavows the violence of disposability. Asymmetrical dispossession violently opposes Black knowledges, community formation and communal practices. Through myths, racial regimes control and manipulate knowledge for maintenance which erases the histories of opposition to dominating systems. The myths produced by privileging private property over the community members that engage these places are not neutral. Current models of underdevelopment and dispossession cannot be disconnected from the legacies that produce socially assigned disposability.

Black geographies are difficult to map as Black spaces are dispersed. Blackness is epistemologically linked to placelessness, which makes it difficult to make claims to the production of place. Black subjects must be mobile, and imagine across spaces to demonstrate the distinct politic as they are read as disposable. Acts of refusal against dominating systems are evidence that these regimes are not totalizing, meaning there is room for Black subjects to affirm their subjectivity through this politic. Scholarship that grapples with Black geographies has a responsibility to take seriously Black knowledges, stories and experiences of geographies while not essentializing the relationship between race and place.

A Distinct Politic in Black Geographies

The ontological tradition of housing struggles narrates uneven geographies through disorder as justification of underdevelopment through the mythology of development. This narrative does not take seriously Black knowledges of geographies or logics of disposability. Through the mapping of acts of refusal to dispossession and conceptualizing a distinct politic, Black subjectivity can be recognized and a distinct politic can be read as a discourse of antagonism. This discourse opens the possibility to rectify the marred history of struggle that resists socially assigned disposability.

In chapter four, the stories of Oakland community members demonstrate the horror of asymmetrical dispossession through geographic stories. The (re)imagining of space in Oakland has challenged community members to begin to think through other places to migrate after being culturally and economically locked out of Oakland. As new buildings are erected with different styles, the abstract space of the city is being deformed around these community members. Their reactions to these changes involve feelings of anxiety. The physical changes are evidence of the threat they feel. Community members describe these changes using language of war and mass catastrophes. The collective stories told by community members demonstrate the markers of dispossession on different levels as the sociospatial dynamics of Oakland are being (re)imagined. Geographic stories mark one example of how Black knowledges look across spaces. As residents of Oakland are experiencing dispossession, they view their own migration in connection to family members who brought them to California.

Acts of refusal to dispossession create a particular politic for Black subjects as they contend with urban change. However, the City of Oakland, lacking proactive implementation

and enforcement of equitable housing policy, puts the onus on everyday residents to organize against their landlords, employers and the state. In doing so, already housing insecure residents risk eviction and homelessness. The aspects of dispossession these community members are expressing as related to land, bodies and community demonstrate the many mechanisms of difference that are mobilized through disposability. These second and third generation residents of Oakland work through engaging in strike and attempting to negotiate with the City of Oakland. The success of their mobilization is varied. The concerns of those who mobilize are both real and heightened through their own experiences with precarity. Community members, as they describe their social visions for Oakland, include the people who engage these geographies and the community formations that have been central to this production of space.

Dispossession as a Site of Struggle

Transforming the debate and changing the discourse of housing illuminates the stakes for deepening the way housing issues and urban changes are recognized. Dispossession of Black geographies, the disposal of marked Black subjects and the rupture of Black communal practices and knowledges are key sites of struggle. Unfortunately, the privileging of private property allows for the justification of the same mythology that leads to asymmetrical dispossession. The relationship between refusal and dispossession has implications for how scholars engage with space. Despite traditional ways to envision Black communities, Black knowledges demonstrate the ways geographies are conceptualized across places. Additionally, acts of refusal to being read as disposable influence the way Black spaces are built and experienced. Refusal as a method acts to (re)imagine Black subjectivity. The ideological and material privileging of private property narrates their subjectivity as being read with underdevelopment. Spatial theories that rest, sometimes haphazardly, on a misread of these processes see urban changes as spontaneous

events rather than theorizing them as part of racial capitalism. Thus. disconnecting modes of urban change from colonial legacies of power.

Dispossession, however, is not spontaneous. It also cannot truly be written as a specific event marked within contemporary times. Most importantly, dispossession is not universally structured or experienced temporally throughout racial regimes. Rather dispossession is built into the ideological and material maintenance of the same technologies that necessitate development and underdevelopment as apparatuses of capital accumulation. A proper dealing with the leveraging of racial categories required to produce accumulation helps to illuminate the asymmetrical acts of dispossession used to control and dissipate Black communities.

The mythology of development promotes an ideological devotion to privileging private property. To collapse housing issues to a social issue that can be dealt with through market intervention is a dangerous premise that obfuscates social and political imaginaries for communities. Complex economic factors, racialized practices and neoliberal government trends have all contributed to gendered, sexed and racialized categories that reshape how subjects participate in space. The many attempts and false attempts to house the nation have fallen short multiple times as have the social movements that emphasize the importance of housing as a human right.

The mechanisms of dispossession work to move people out of urban landscapes while legitimating the power to read land and people as disposable. The mythology of development is part of this legitimation. The urgent discourse to build "affordable housing" is a short-sighted response to a manufactured crisis, which can only be seen as spectacular through an ahistorical, depoliticized lens. In the end, it is the capitalists who gain from these limiting revolutionary

discourses, as housing issues are dealt with as something new, rather than a disparity that is built into capitalist models for uneven geographies. These gains are both political and material. Thus, in Oakland, developers and city officials transformed issues of housing to how much "affordable housing" is needed and what should be demarcated as "affordable." This distracts from the real question: why does civil society need this category of housing at all?

The dispossession of Black geographies must be read along the long historical legacies of population control, land grabs and motivations to dispose of people. To counter and neutralize the articulation and resistance to disposability, the mythology of development and the privilege of private property promote subtle social dynamics that divert revolutionary imaginaries by justifying the dispossession. Thus, the continued dispossession of Black subjects is not only important to how racial capitalism shapes place, but also how the extraction from Blackness is necessary to maintain value within the housing system. Acts of refusal to this dispossession, therefore, must also be read as part of a politic that connects Black knowledges and communal practices across places.

Since dispossession and socially assigned disposability constitute how power shifts geographically, these conditions cannot be disconnected from larger, geopolitical struggles. Understanding the stakes of these shifts through urban change allows for critical work to reflect the revolutionary struggles and radical social visions being produced under these very conditions. Racial capitalism will continue to disrupt radical movements as political institutions are motivated to protect capitalists and neutralize commitments to communal practices working to see beyond current modalities that (re)shape geographies. The liberation from these logics of genocide can only be realized through political education aimed at informing radical imaginaries and the need to obliterate the discourse of disposability. As many other scholars and activists

before have articulated, either these intuitions must be dismantled or they will continue to devour communities that are marked for destruction and harm. The only ethical possibility for moving towards collective liberation is through seeking radical social transformation and privileging the knowledges of peoples who experience dispossession.

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Chapter 2

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