



A Community Lost: Urban Renewal and Displacement in San Francisco's Western Addition District

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Introduction

On January 1, 2009, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's Western Addition Project A-2 will sunset. According to the Redevelopment Agency's website, the original purpose of the project was "to reduce blight by making building and streetscape improvements that would attract new business customers, residents and visitors to the Fillmore," and their work in the neighborhood "has set the stage for the rebirth of a rich and vibrant street life." (SFRA 2008b) Yet today the neighborhood still struggles with many of the same challenges that sixty years ago were cited as evidence of 'blight' and used as justification for redevelopment: high unemployment, pervasive crime, and poverty. And the struggle over who lives in and owns the Fillmore still rages on.

This paper is an examination of urban renewal in San Francisco's Western Addition district, and its effects on the neighborhood and its residents through the present day. The first part recaps the history of the federal program and its implementation in the Western Addition. I will begin by reviewing the social and economic trends that preceded urban renewal, as well as the legislation that established it. Subsequently, by analyzing the key actors, presenting a brief history of the district, and reviewing the original plans for redevelopment, I will illuminate why the proponents of urban renewal wanted to redevelop the Western Addition, and what they hoped to achieve. Then, by surveying a variety of documents produced by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and its critics, I will detail the mistakes that were made in the processes of displacement and relocation, and the unfortunate consequences for the neighborhood and its residents.

The second part of the paper explores how the failures of urban renewal are prompting and affecting present-day housing and economic development policy in the Western Addition and greater San Francisco. This includes a general survey of efforts to halt the flight of San Francisco's African American population, counter the negative impacts of urban renewal in the Western Addition, and ensure that past mistakes are not repeated in other San Francisco neighborhoods. Finally, I will examine the relationship between past and present, and recommend future policies for community and economic development in the Western Addition.

Part One: Fillmo' No Mo'*The Changing Metropolis*

Urban renewal, as its name implies, was designed to empower local governments to reverse the trend of physical and economic decline in the central districts of cities around the nation. In the middle part of the twentieth century, housing and employment in metropolitan areas shifted away from cities. As the middle class and industries fled to the suburbs, cities experienced disinvestment, declining tax revenues, and the deterioration of housing and infrastructure. The motivating factors and goals of urban renewal were clearly linked to the changing nature of the American city; it is worthwhile, then, to first explore the context of these social and economic changes.

The origins of the present-day suburb date back to the 'streetcar suburbs' of the late-nineteenth century; subsequently, the Garden City movement idealized the pastoral community as the model for modern living. In the mid-twentieth century, the advent of federal investment policies in homeownership financing systems and infrastructure shifted suburban development into overdrive. The National Housing Act of 1934 created the Federal Housing Authority (FHA), which insured home mortgages, thus providing a government-backed finance system for homeownership. Later, the 1944 Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or the G.I. Bill, spurred further expansion of the home-owning middle class. Additionally, the federal government prompted massive development of a national system of highways, first through the Highway Acts of 1916 and 1921, which encouraged states to develop highway systems, and later through the 1956 Interstate Highway Act, which appropriated \$25 billion for highway construction. (Teitz 2008) The popularity of the automobile and the mid-century commodification of the home gave birth to a new interpretation of the American Dream—"a house with a white picket fence"—and propelled the ascendancy of the suburb.

As the geography of residential development was shifting, so too was the nature of the American economy. After World War II, the industrial sectors—which had historically been located in the inner cities and provided blue-collar employment opportunities for populations with low levels

of education—gradually moved to the suburbs. From 1947 to 1967, 111 percent of growth in manufacturing employment occurred in the suburbs. (Mollenkopf 1983) Additionally, manufacturing experienced an overall decline in growth and, in the 1960s, began to shrink, due to the increase in international competition. The ‘new’ manufacturing industries, including defense, aircraft, and electronics, from the start chose the relatively cheaper development opportunities of the suburbs. San Francisco experienced the effects of these trends; in the post-war years, as the Hunters Point Naval Shipyards closed and other manufacturing employers moved to the South Bay, the city lost tens of thousands of blue-collar jobs. (Arthur D. Little, Inc. 1966)

Not everyone, however, ran off to a house in the ‘burbs. The postwar period witnessed the increasing domination of corporations over most sectors of the economy; by 1974 the five hundred largest corporations controlled 71 percent of manufacturing assets and 76 percent of the employment. (Mollenkopf 1983, p. 30) While they moved their plants to the suburbs, most corporations chose central city districts for their expanding headquarters. The service industries associated with corporate commerce—finance, industry, real estate, and other business services also experienced significant growth. Cities that hosted these industries experienced a growth in white-collar employment opportunities, massive investment in physical development, and an associated increase in tax revenues. As the power of transnational corporations grew and the global economy became more interconnected, cities around the country and the world strived for relevance and eminence: only cities that were home to powerful corporations were truly *global* cities. (Sassen 1999)

Along with the corporate headquarters, other groups, their mobility restricted, remained in central cities: people of color. Although in 1917 the Supreme Court of the United States declared racial zoning to be unconstitutional (*Buchanan vs. Warley*), the practice of segregated housing development was continued through racial covenants and deed restrictions. (Massey 2008) The federal government itself, through the FHA and the Home Ownership Loan Corporation, introduced the practice of redlining, by which local banks were discouraged from making loans to people in non-white neighborhoods. Thus, people of color—African Americans and Latinos in

particular—were not only prevented from buying new homes and relocating to the suburbs, but also were denied opportunities to invest in the ownership and improvement of their own central city neighborhoods.

As cities' middle and upper classes and manufacturing jobs fled to the suburbs, their tax base shrank and they experienced relative disinvestment. People of color were left with segregated, deteriorating neighborhoods, and shrinking local employment opportunities. Among myriad complex factors, these structural changes to the economy and asset systems are often cited as the central causes of urban poverty and the development of slums. (Halpern 1995; Teitz and Chapple 1998; Massey 2008) Over the past five decades, federal and local governments have undertaken a series of community development initiatives to assist poor people and communities—from President Johnson's 'War on Poverty' to President Bush's 'Faith-Based Initiative'—yet the problem of urban poverty persists.

Urban Renewal: A Noble Goal, or a Land Grab... or Worse?

The most generous and forgiving interpretation of urban renewal would identify it as the first of this series of initiatives: urban renewal was designed to eliminate poverty by spurring the physical improvement of low-income communities. Sociologists and planners had for nearly a century highlighted environmental determinism as a primary cause of poverty. (O'Connor 1999) In the early twentieth century, sociologists at the University of Chicago established and popularized theories of 'social ecology' that identified poverty as the natural byproduct of competition, the breakdown of traditional methods of social control, and neighborhood instability that are common to central city districts. (O'Connor 2001) Some observers argued that poor neighborhoods helped to create a *culture of poverty* from which it was nearly impossible to escape. Urban renewal, according to this interpretation, was a valiant, if flawed, attempt to create a mechanism for the elimination of poverty by clearing slums and creating new and improved urban environments to replace them.

An examination of the implementation of urban renewal demonstrates that many actors, particularly those at the local level, were motivated not by a desire to uplift the poor, but rather to

use the program as a tool in the contest to establish their locality as a global city. By replacing slums with new housing and infrastructure (including highways, subways, and conference centers), a local administrator could transform the city into a more attractive global marketplace. A piece of land near the downtown district that was occupied by a poor neighborhood was a prime candidate for revalorization in support of and in accordance with private, commercial development. (Weber 2002) The sociologist Saskia Sassen (1999, pp. 180, 182) has noted how globalization has thus led to a conflict between corporations and citizens over who has rightful claim to cities:

One central concern in my work has been to look at cities as production sites for the leading service industries of our time, and hence to uncover the infrastructure of activities, firms, and jobs that is necessary to run the advanced corporate economy. [...] Major cities in the highly developed world are the terrain where a multiplicity of globalization processes assume concrete, localized forms. [...] If we consider, further, that large cities also concentrate a growing share of disadvantaged populations—immigrants in the United States, African Americans and Latinos in the United States—then we can see that cities have become a strategic terrain for a whole series of conflicts and contradictions.

Many of the districts that were redeveloped were heavily populated by African Americans; thus some have argued that the real motivation behind urban renewal was racism. This sentiment led to the appearance, by 1950, of the oft-repeated phrase (most famously by James Baldwin in the 1960s) “Urban renewal is Negro removal.” (Fullilove 2004) The argument had real basis in fact: some local governments, when rating the quality of existing neighborhoods, included the presence of non-whites among the characteristics that would qualify an area for redevelopment. (Weber 2002) Several documents that were produced to advocate for urban renewal in San Francisco illustrate racist motives. For example, a 1966 plan for subsequent redevelopment activities warned against the consequences of the city’s changing ethnic makeup. As part of their case for action, the authors point out that, based on population trends, by 1978 African Americans would make up 16.5 percent of the population, while a more desirable ‘target’ amount would be 13 percent (for whites, the trend was 71 percent and the target was 76). (Arthur D. Little, Inc. 1966) That same year, the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association

(SPUR) produced a report entitled “Prologue to Action” arguing that, to enable the city to compete effectively, city government should influence growth so that San Francisco’s population “will move closer to ‘standard white Anglo-Saxon Protestant’ characteristics”. (Hirten, Farrell, and Weese 1966)

It is overly simplistic, however, to make the blanket statement that urban renewal was a racist policy. Thousands of legislators, city administrators, private sector actors, and other advocates and stakeholders were involved in the implementation of urban renewal, so it cannot be said to have just one underlying goal or motivation. Clearly there were a multitude of factors that contributed to the creation of the program and its subsequent successes and failures; each player had a different set of interests driving his or her actions.

Legislative and Theoretical Foundation

The first legislation to empower local governments to take an active role in slum clearance and the construction of replacement housing was the Housing Act of 1937. Also known as the Wagner-Steagall Act, the legislation authorized local housing authorities to purchase land—exercising eminent domain when necessary—and contract private construction firms to clear existing structures and build new, government-managed housing. Some of the resulting projects—e.g., Stuyvesant Town in Manhattan, and Golden Triangle in Pittsburgh—would later provide working models for the implementation of urban renewal around the nation. (O’Connor 1999)

Almost immediately following the passage of the 1937 legislation, a debate over the further expansion of government power to clear and redevelop land was engaged in earnest in a variety of arenas, including congressional hearings, symposia, and on the pages of journals relating to planning and governance. Local government administrators, supported by the National Association of Real Estate Boards, vocally advocated for federal intervention to address the physical decline of inner cities. By 1943, the text of the bill that would authorize federal support for local redevelopment activities was largely written. Alfred Bettman, who at that time was the chairman of the American Institute of Planners, was the primary author. (Foard and Fefferman 1966) Bettman had already made a significant contribution to the expansion of the power of local

governments to shape the city's physical form. Nearly twenty years earlier, his amicus curiae brief in support of the city of Euclid helped to sway the outcome of the 1926 Supreme Court case (*Village of Euclid, Ohio v. Ambler Realty Co.*) that established the legality of local zoning laws. (Buckley 2008) In a way, urban renewal was an extension of the theory behind zoning: cities should be empowered not only to guide local development, but also to play an active role in its execution.

After years of maneuvering and negotiations in congress, the 1949 Housing Act—which, in theory, committed the nation to providing suitable housing for every American family—passed by a slim margin. The debate was not over Title I, which outlined the urban redevelopment program, but largely over Title III, which authorized the creation of 810,000 units of public housing over six years. (Mollenkopf 1983; Foard and Fefferman 1966) Conservatives in Congress, as well as powerful interest groups, including the real estate and banking lobbies, vociferously opposed public housing. Subsequently, they were successful in curtailing federal support for the program; by 1960, only 250,000 public housing units—less than one third of the total authorized—had been constructed. (Gotham 2001) Throughout the urban renewal era, the inadequacy of public housing policy would amplify the negative consequences of slum clearance.

Title I allocated \$1.5 billion for grants to communities for the redevelopment of blighted areas (an amount that was increased by subsequent amendments to the legislation). The bill required accompanying legislation at the state level (in California, the Community Redevelopment Act of 1945) to authorize city and county governments to establish a local Redevelopment Agency; these agencies were empowered to purchase and sell land, exercise eminent domain, rehabilitate or raze buildings, and contract private developers to construct housing, commercial areas, and infrastructure. To qualify for a federal grant, a locality was required to produce a redevelopment plan that was approved by a local legislative body, was in accordance with a general plan for city development, and included provisions for the temporary relocation of any displaced families. Federal subsidies would cover up to two thirds of project costs, with the remaining costs covered by local government expenditures and earnings from the sale of land to private developers.

Crafty local administrators could count all sorts of public expenditures (including any outlay for public improvement anywhere in the city) toward the required 33 percent match, lowering project costs for their municipality and private sector partners. (Foard and Fefferman 1966; Sogg and Wertheimer 1966; Mollenkopf 1983) Thus, urban renewal was on its face a winning enterprise for local governments: they could use other people's money to improve housing and facilities, and increase the local tax base. The legislation was also a windfall for private developers and real estate brokers; they would be granted access to purchase some of the most prime land in cities across the nation, often at below-market prices.

Numerous inadequacies in the legislation, however, resulted in a program that was disastrous for the residents of the communities to be redeveloped. The central problem lay in the determination of which areas were to be redeveloped. The legislation called for the redevelopment of 'blighted' areas; however, that term was never clearly defined. Subsequently, the label was applied recklessly and inconsistently to areas that were politically powerless; all too often, cherished homes and thriving neighborhoods were bulldozed. In San Francisco, the Redevelopment Agency even adjusted project area boundaries based on real estate values and in response to the requests of influential political actors. (Hartman 1984) The practice of indiscriminate slum clearance compromised the utility of urban renewal as an antipoverty program.

Other problems with the legislation related to the vague language and non-binding nature of several key stipulations. While Title I stated that the federal government would only fund redevelopment projects that were "predominantly residential," that phrase was left undefined, enabling local administrators to develop cleared land almost entirely with commercial and infrastructure projects. (Foard and Fefferman 1966) Subsequently, sixty percent of the land cleared from 1954 to 1967 went to nonresidential purposes. (Mollenkopf 1983, p. 42) Through the program's first ten years, 126,000 units of housing were destroyed, while fewer than 30,000 were constructed in their place. (Anderson 1966; Gans 1966) Also, the leadership that carried out urban renewal was almost universally unrepresentative of the populations whose communities were most negatively affected: people of color, and the poor. (Fullilove 2004) Although the legislation included a stipulation requiring community oversight, in practice that was not realized

until community advisory committees were introduced in the late 1960s. Finally, the text of the original legislation called for a plan for the relocation of *families*, thus leaving unrelated individuals—e.g., residents of single-room occupancy hotels—to fend for themselves. (O'Connor 1999)

Amendments to the federal legislation in 1954, 1959, and 1964 addressed many of these issues. The Housing Act of 1954 amended the program to emphasize rehabilitation; at that point, the term 'urban renewal' was introduced (in place of 'redevelopment'). Other amendments enacted specific requirements relating to citizen oversight, and required more thorough plans for the relocation of all displaced residents. (Foard and Fefferman 1966) For many individuals, families, and communities, however, those changes came too late; homes and communities could not be un-razed. Additionally, many localities ignored the new stipulations and continued to implement redevelopment by stretching the rules of the earlier, flawed legislation. (Gans 1966)

The Pro-Growth Coalition

Long before the 1949 legislation was enacted, coalitions began to form in cities around the nation to advocate for redevelopment. Politicians, corporations, construction firms, labor unions, and other power brokers were motivated by varying interests, but were able to align themselves, their political capital, and influence toward a shared goal: the global city. In San Francisco, the Bay Area Council—an organization designed to promote the interests of the Bay Area's powerful corporations—was the centerpiece of the local pro-growth coalition. The Council's objectives included the establishment of a more robust transportation system—which they achieved by the mid-1950s with the establishment of the Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART)—and the expansion of the downtown commercial district; thus its members threw their weight behind urban renewal. (Mollenkopf 1983; Hartman 1984) The city had experienced very little commercial investment during the prior decades; in the forward to a 1947 pro-redevelopment report, Michel Weill, then the President of the Planning Commission, argued "no city in the United States needs urban redevelopment more urgently than San Francisco, and no city stands to gain more by it." (Scott 1947a)

In 1956, two powerful San Franciscans—Charles Blyth and James Zellerbach—formed the Blyth-Zellerbach committee to advocate for urban renewal; Chester Hartman (1984) called it “the Redevelopment Booster Club.” The membership was largely made up of the same individuals who sat on the Bay Area Council: the city’s most powerful business executives. Their influence over and strong alliance with certain local politicians were demonstrated in 1959 when Mayor George Christopher admitted that the committee had essentially chosen his latest appointee to the Redevelopment Commission. (Mollenkopf 1983; Hartman 1984) Also in 1959, the committee launched and funded the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR) as a platform through which corporate players could assert policy positions, release publications, and more actively participate in the redevelopment planning process. Subsequently, in federal grant applications, SPUR’s contribution to the creation of redevelopment plans was cited as fulfillment of the requirement for citizen participation!

The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (“the Redevelopment Agency”) was founded in 1948; yet a decade later the city had barely begun a single redevelopment project. John Mollenkopf, in his examination of pro-growth coalitions (1983), pointed out that the coalition on its own was typically insufficient as a driver of government action. In many cases, the successful implementation of urban renewal required a local political entrepreneur to gather and utilize political capital and shepherd projects forward. In 1958, the Blyth-Zellerbach committee hired a consultant—Aaron Levine, an urban planner from University of California who had successfully agitated for urban renewal programs in Philadelphia—to examine the lagging pace of redevelopment in San Francisco. The resulting report warned of San Francisco’s increasing obsolescence, and pinned much of the blame for inaction on inadequate staffing, authority, and leadership of the Redevelopment Agency. (Levine 1959) Soon, the executive director of the agency and chair of the Redevelopment Commission both resigned, making way for the entrance of the chief political entrepreneur of urban renewal in San Francisco.

In 1959 Justin Herman was appointed director of the Redevelopment Agency, a role he filled until his death in 1971. He had formerly served as the federal manager of urban renewal projects in the western region; in that role, he had been a vocal critic of San Francisco’s slow pace of

redevelopment. Herman proved to be an extremely capable administrator: under his leadership, the Redevelopment Agency became a powerful, aggressive agency; expanded significantly, to over four hundred employees; stacked the Redevelopment Commission with pro-growth allies; acquired land around the city; and commenced activities in eight different project areas. (Hartman 1984) By some measures he was extremely successful; he marshaled redevelopment projects that significantly expanded downtown commercial real estate, increased the tax base of several redevelopment project areas, and established a major corporate conference center. His pursuit of these goals, however, often led him into direct conflict with community advocates and other city departments; in his dealings with these groups he was characterized as egomaniacal, devious, and heartless. (*Neighborhoods* 1999; Jacobs 1978; Hartman 1984)

With Herman at the helm, funded by the federal government, and a powerful pro-growth coalition behind it, the Redevelopment Agency set out to transform the urban landscape of San Francisco. For much of the agency's existence, its primary target has been the Western Addition.

The Western Addition: A Brief History

Around 1860, the area of San Francisco west of Van Ness Avenue and north of Market and Duboce Streets was surveyed and became part of San Francisco. It became known as the Western Addition, and by the latter part of the nineteenth century was a quasi-suburb of the more densely populated and commercially active downtown. As the city spread to the north and west of the area, what was western became central to the geography of San Francisco. The district thus is readily accessible by foot or transit to several other districts. The Western Addition also features a relatively attractive climate, as the hills to its west often serve as a barrier to the city's notorious fog.

After the Earthquake

The first of a series of transformations of the Western Addition occurred following the 1906 earthquake. While the earthquake and fires leveled most of the city, the Western Addition was left largely unscathed. Its attractive, stately Victorian houses, which generally had been constructed to house one or two families, were subdivided to board the flood of refugees. Many

businesses and government offices relocated to Fillmore Street, and the neighborhood became central to the city's commerce and government. (Lichfield 1962; Oaks 2005; Mollenkopf 1983; Scott 1947a) The area immediately surrounding Fillmore Street, from Fulton Street north to Bush Street, became known as the Fillmore, a subset of the Western Addition.

San Francisco's downtown was rapidly rebuilt in the years following the earthquake, and the city's commercial center and government offices shifted back eastward. The new character of the Western Addition, however, persisted. Fillmore Street remained a commercial thoroughfare. Some of the emptied storefronts and lots were occupied by theaters, dance halls, and even an amusement park—the Fillmore Chutes—and the neighborhood became a popular entertainment center. (Pepin and Watts 2006) Housing remained dense and affordable, and thus the neighborhood was the point of entry for many of the city's new residents. In 1940, of approximately forty thousand district residents, about a quarter were foreign-born. About one eighth (5,087 people) of the population was Japanese, and the district contained about half (2,144 people) of the city's small African American population. (Mollenkopf 1983) Jerry Flamm, a resident from that period, likened the neighborhood to "San Francisco's little United Nations." (*Neighborhoods* 1999)

According to the 1964 report released by the Redevelopment Agency in accompaniment of the redevelopment plan for Western Addition Project Area A-2, "this period marks a turning point in the history of the Western Addition and the beginning of a long trend of decline." (SFRA 1964b, p. 1) The increased population density and mixed commercial and residential use was the first evidence of the blight that the Redevelopment Agency cited as justification for the leveling of the neighborhood. Many historians and community residents, however, would argue just the opposite: the 1906 earthquake marked the beginning of the neighborhood's ascension, which would culminate in the period from 1945 to 1965, when the neighborhood—a thriving, if overcrowded, cultural center—became the "Harlem of the West."

Internment, Migration, and the Jazz Era

World War II ushered in a second transformation of the Western Addition. On February 19, 1942,

President Franklin Roosevelt authorized internment of Japanese-Americans; within two months, San Francisco's entire Japanese-American population had been forcibly relocated from the city. Thousands of people and families deserted their homes and businesses, and a swath of the Western Addition was left uninhabited.

Any available housing stock, however, was quickly occupied by the city's newest arrivals. San Francisco experienced the effects of the great migration of African Americans to cities across the country in search of employment opportunities in war-related industries. While many of the new residents established an African American community in the Bayview district near the Hunters Point Naval Shipyards, a significant portion settled in the small, previously existing community in the Western Addition. From 1940 to 1950, San Francisco's African American population jumped nearly tenfold, from 4,846 to 43,502. In the Western Addition, the population went from 2,144 to 14,888; as a proportion of the district's population, the number jumped from 6% to 34%. Of the census tracts that made up the Fillmore, African Americans made up about two thirds of the population. (Mollenkopf 1983, pp. 203-4) Additionally, the African American population may have been undercounted, given the high frequency of subdivision of households and housing units.

The new African American population made a deep imprint on the neighborhood's arts, culture, and overall community. A dozen clubs and music venues opened, most of them on Fillmore Street, and San Francisco quickly became the premier Jazz center of the west coast. Many of the great touring Jazz musicians of the era made frequent visits to the Fillmore; the city also developed its own stable of talent. (Pepin and Watts 2006)

During the 1950s the neighborhood's African American population continued to grow, and the community's roots grew deep into the Fillmore. Small businesses thrived; in 1953, the three-block stretch of Fillmore Street between Geary and Bush was home to 63 distinct businesses. (Minton 2008) The neighborhood suffered from unemployment and poverty due to the cessation of war industries; nonetheless among the residents there existed a strong sense of community and attachment to the area. As the sociologist Herbert Gans (1966, p. 548) pointed out in his critique

of urban renewal, “however poor the condition of the flat, the slum is home, and for many it provides the support of neighboring relatives and friends, and a cultural milieu in which everyone has the same problems and is therefore willing to overlook occasional disreputable behavior.”

The Federal Bulldozer in the Western Addition

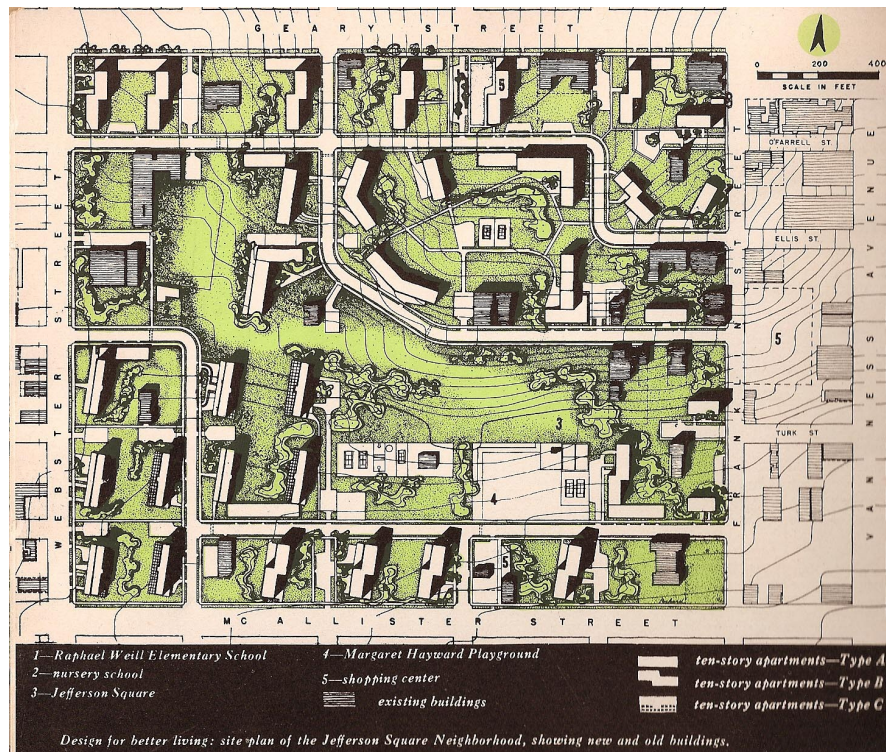
The Western Addition, with its prime location just west of downtown, and a politically weak population, was in the cross hairs of the pro-growth coalition. In 1947, the city engaged local planner Mel Scott to study the potential redevelopment of the neighborhood. The result was a seventy-page report that outlined the necessity, feasibility, potential processes, finances, and challenges of urban redevelopment, and also made a series of recommendations; step one was the designation of the Western Addition as a redevelopment area. The report cited the juxtaposition of mixed uses, poor condition of the housing stock, and high incidences of crime and unemployment as evidence of blight. Although Scott admitted that much of the neighborhood could not be considered to be a slum, rehabilitation was not an option: “Nothing short of a clean sweep and a new start can make the district a genuinely good place in which to live.” (p. 8) The report was accompanied by an illustrated pamphlet that painted for the public a rosy picture of the future product of urban renewal; it even offered “a view of tomorrow”: (Scott 1947b, p.1)

It is a green city. Broad lawns, trees, flowers, ample terraces form a setting for your ten-story apartment house. You look down on tree-lined walks and attractive spots for relaxation. One of the walks leads to a recreation area in which there are tennis and badminton courts, inviting you to join the neighbors in a brisk game next Saturday afternoon.

Scott’s report was illustrative of several planning trends of the early twentieth century. The plan included a representation (see figure 1) of a complete redesign of the area around Jefferson Square—clearly derivative of Clarence Perry’s concept of the neighborhood unit—to be laid out around Raphael Weill Elementary School. The interior streets would be curved to discourage through traffic, and “few children living in the limited access area would have to cross more than

one residential street to get to school.” (1947a, p. 38) Scott’s vision for the future Western Addition was essentially a dense and modern Garden Suburb, right next to downtown San Francisco.

Figure 1. Plan for Jefferson Square (Scott 1947b, p.10)



The report even laid out the characteristics of the population of the future community. The new Western Addition was designed to retain San Francisco’s middle-class families that might otherwise flee to the suburbs. In 1950 the median income in San Francisco was \$3,009, and in the Western Addition, \$2,105 (Mollenkopf 1983); according to the plan for the *new* Western Addition, the average family would have an income of \$3,500 (Scott 1947a, p. 56). The document explicitly recognized that only 15 to 20 percent of the district’s current residents would be able to afford the new housing construction that it proposed. Of those residents, it was noted: (p. 66)

The presence in the Western Addition District of a high proportion of negro and foreign-

born families presents a special problem. As was pointed out earlier, about 26% of the population in this District consists of Negroes, and another 9% Japanese, Chinese, and other foreign nationalities. In view of the characteristically low income of colored and foreign-born families, only a relatively small proportion of them may be expected to occupy quarters in the new development.

In the Western Addition, then, urban renewal was “Negro Removal” *by design*.

In the face of public outcry from a variety of constituencies—including the African American community of the Western Addition, who saw the writing on the wall—on June 3, 1948 the Board of Supervisors declared the Western Addition to be a blighted area and designated the district for redevelopment. (Mollenkopf 1983; Doherty and Block 2001) Redevelopment of the neighborhood was implemented in two phases. The first phase, Project A-1, commenced in 1956 and closed in 1973. It covered about 16 square blocks, and resulted in the widening of Geary Boulevard, the construction of the Japan Center and, eventually, a number of housing developments.

However, Justin Herman’s vision for redevelopment of the Western Addition was much more grand. The second phase, Project A-2, commenced in 1964 and is still open today, set to conclude on January 1, 2009. Under the scope of this project, nearly the entire Western Addition—almost 70 square blocks—was placed under the authority of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency. The stated goals of the massive project were as follows: (SFRA 1964a, p. 4)

1. Provide the framework within which restoration of the economic and social health of the Project Area and its environs will be accomplished by private actions.
2. Guide and stimulate the development of sound and attractive residences available to persons of varied income and ages, with emphasis on the provision of moderate-priced private housing for families of moderate income and for the elderly.
3. Guide development toward the production of a satisfying and urbane living and working environment preserving and enhancing the unique social, cultural, and esthetic qualities of the City.

4. Stimulate and attract private investment to improve the City's economic health and expand the tax base.

In retrospect, the city and the Redevelopment Agency failed to achieve these goals in a timely matter, sufficiently, or, arguably, at all. Even more damning, the city utterly failed the residents of the Western Addition by mismanaging the housing and relocation of the individuals, families, and businesses affected by the plan.

Relocation: A Fiasco and a Sham

"Without adequate housing for the poor, critics will rightly condemn urban renewal as a land-grab for the rich and a heartless push-out for the poor and nonwhites."

-Justin Herman, 1963

The above quote adorns the wall of the recently constructed Fillmore Jazz Heritage Center as part of its "History of the Fillmore" exhibit; Justin Herman has been credited with remarkable prescience based on this statement. However, he fulfilled his own prophecy: the Redevelopment Agency, under Herman's leadership, was chiefly responsible for the failure to plan for adequate replacement housing and relocation services for the thousands of individuals and families displaced by urban renewal. When community advocates called for an increase in resource allocation for housing and relocation, the Redevelopment Agency fought them at every juncture. Nor was Herman the first to make the prediction; nearly every redevelopment plan, from 1947 onward, stressed the importance of providing adequate replacement housing, marking the Redevelopment Agency's failure to do so all the more shameful.

There were several major flaws in the Redevelopment Agency's plans for the relocation of displaced individuals. Firstly, the destruction of housing units was not phased; thousands of units were seized and destroyed in a short period of time, and many years passed before replacement housing was constructed in the district. If the agency had implemented the plan in phases—destroying some units, and replacing them with new development before the next phase of destruction began—some continuity in the neighborhood may have been sustained, lessening the negative impacts of redevelopment. (Fried 1966)

Secondly, the relocation plan relied on invalid concepts of turnover and vacancy. The resources for relocation cited by the relocation plan included “the exploitation of the normal vacancies in the San Francisco private housing market, totaling 20,980 over a three-year period with 13,896 in the \$60 to \$124 rental bracket.” (SFRA 1962, p. 2) However, this analysis confuses mobility within the housing market with actual vacancies. It is invalid to use standard vacancy rates when considering how to re-house a newly displaced population; subsequently, in 1968 HUD barred the use of this type of methodology in local relocation plans. (Hartman 1984) Also in 1968, a group called the Citizens Emergency Task Force for a Workable Housing Policy conducted a survey of the housing market; they found that the actual vacancy rate of standard units with a monthly rent of \$100 or lower was zero percent. (CETFWHP 1969)

Thirdly, the statistics in the relocation plan relating to average income were skewed. The information was presented district-wide. In reality, the project area included two distinct neighborhoods: the Fillmore—with its largely nonwhite, low-income population—as well as the area between Octavia Street and Van Ness Avenue, which featured a largely upper- and middle-class white population of residents and business owners. Almost every block designated for demolition fell within the Fillmore, while the buildings slated for rehabilitation fell disproportionately in the wealthier area. Therefore, the average income of the people who would need to find replacement housing—and thus, the number of available housing units that would fall within their price range—was extremely overstated. (Mandel and Werthman 1964)

Fourthly, the relocation plan ignored the harsh reality of segregation in San Francisco. The housing options of people of color—African Americans, especially—were limited by restrictive covenants and the practices of real estate brokers and landlords. By tearing down the Fillmore, the Redevelopment Agency eliminated a large percentage of the housing units available to San Francisco’s African American community. As a result, the city’s other African American communities were further stressed, overcrowded, and ghettoized. Thus the conditions decried as ‘blight’ were not eliminated, but rather spread to other neighborhoods and exacerbated.

Finally, the Redevelopment Agency relied on inappropriate types of housing to relocate the

displaced residents. The relocation plan cited the eventual availability of replacement units in the project area; however, very few of those units were designed for low-income individuals and families. The plan also relied heavily on the use of public housing and single-room occupancy hotels to re-house the displaced population. A 1964 survey found that very few of the residents to be displaced were actually willing to relocate to those types of residences. (Mandel and Werthman 1964) Project Area 2 was home to over 1,100 senior citizens, the majority of whom had limited incomes. The population had specific housing needs, and the Redevelopment Agency recklessly displaced them from their homes despite the fact that it would be impossible for them to find suitable replacement housing at rents they could afford.

Even more deplorable than the flaws in the plan was the manner in which it was carried out. Driven by a desire to move the population of the project area out as quickly and cost-effectively as possible, employees of the Redevelopment Agency were dishonest with the residents and the general public, and utilized devious tactics. As Mollenkopf (1983, p. 176) pointed out,

Renewal planners and administrators faced a difficult bind: on the one hand, all the political and economic incentives pointed toward supplanting a 'blighting' population and its 'blighting' land uses with a higher-status population. On the other hand, they could not acknowledge to those about to be displaced, or perhaps even to themselves, that they were engaging in highly regressive social engineering. Renewal entrepreneurs resolved this bind largely by denying it. Official agency plans systematically underestimated the likely displacement and overestimated housing alternatives for those displaced.

The manipulation of data relating to relocation of displaced residents was a practice common to redevelopment agencies around the nation. (Anderson 1966) In 1959, the United States General Accounting Office conducted a review of the Western Addition Project A-1. An investigation of a random sample of 69 displaced families found that 33 had been relocated into substandard housing; the Redevelopment Agency had reported that 97 percent of displaced families had been located into standard housing. (CGUS 1960) The Redevelopment Agency also used dirty tactics in negotiations with property owners. For example, if the agency had acquired most of the properties on a given block, it would destroy all of the buildings surrounding the other properties, thus depressing their value; subsequently, owners had no choice but to accept

compensation from the Redevelopment Agency that amounted to far less than their properties' former value. (Hartman 1984)

Eventually, community members organized to oppose the Redevelopment Agency's displacement tactics. The Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) formed in 1967 to advocate for the cessation of the destruction of the Fillmore and an increase in the number of affordable housing units. In 1968 WACO filed for an injunction against further destruction of the neighborhood or federal funding for the Redevelopment Agency, on the grounds that the agency had failed to meet the federal requirement to provide a sufficient relocation plan. (Hartman 1984) Justin Herman was dismissive of the threat: "No little popular group is going to put together a multi-million dollar project. They aren't going to stop one, either." (*Neighborhoods* 1999) In December 1968, however, a federal judge ruled in favor of WACO and granted the injunction; though it lasted for only four months, the lawsuit required the Redevelopment Agency to pay more attention to relocation.

While WACO and other advocates were unable to save the Fillmore—by the late 1960s, most of the neighborhood had already been demolished—they did achieve some key concessions. The Redevelopment Agency sold some land parcels to nonprofit and African American housing developers; by 1980 the number of affordable housing units was nearly double the number that had originally been planned. The Redevelopment Agency also established a mechanism for genuine community oversight: the Western Addition Project Area Committee monitored development projects and relocation activities in the neighborhood. (Mollenkopf 1983) The most lasting (though not necessarily effective) concession was a program designed to enable displaced residents to eventually return to the neighborhood.

In 1963 the Redevelopment Agency established the Property Owner and Occupant Preference Program (the Certificate Program). Through the Certificate Program, businesses displaced by urban renewal would have the first opportunity to purchase and rent commercial space in any development project funded by the agency. (SFRA 2008a; Rosen 2007) In 1967—presumably, due to pressure from community groups such as WACO and the associated lawsuits—the

Redevelopment Agency expanded the program to include residential occupancy. As of December 2008, the agency has issued 4,729 to individuals displaced by Western Addition Project A-2; 1,099 of those have been exercised. (Anderson 2008)

The Aftermath

Urban renewal effected a complete upheaval of the community in the Western Addition. While the exact number of displaced residents is unknown—the Redevelopment Agency’s reported figures have been inconsistent, and they likely did not capture data for many individuals and families—the final combined tally for the two project areas is between 20,000 and 30,000 residents. (Lichfield 1961; Mollenkopf 1983; Hartman 1984; *Neighborhoods* 1999) In 1980, the district had five thousand fewer housing units than had existed thirty years earlier (about a 30 percent decrease); the approximately two thousand affordable units that had been constructed were sufficient to house less than one quarter of the displaced population. (Mollenkopf 1983) Not until 2000 did the total number of units rebound to levels approaching those of 1950. (US Census Bureau, *2000 Census of Population and Households*)

After the Redevelopment Agency acquired and cleared properties, the pace of redevelopment was disastrously slow, and the vision of a revitalized community never materialized. Banks were reluctant to provide financing for developments in an otherwise disinvested, leveled neighborhood. The central plot on Fillmore Street—formerly home to the neighborhood’s busy commercial center—remained undeveloped until the late 1980s; today, about half of the storefronts in the Fillmore Center are empty. Some properties laid fallow for decades, which, for former residents, added insult to the injury of displacement. Development of the final parcel was completed just last year.

Some of the impacts of relocation are relatively quantifiable; moving costs money. Property owners were compensated with ‘fair market value’ of their property; however, the Redevelopment Agency employed tactics to ensure the lowest possible payment. Had homeowners had the opportunity to remain in and rehabilitate their Victorians, many would likely be worth millions today, assets to be passed on to successive generations. Renters were

given relocation payments ranging from \$50 to \$1,000; however, about sixty percent of the residents self-relocated without any public assistance. (CETFWHP 1969; Mollenkopf 1983) Hundreds of small businesses, forced from their established locations, collapsed, compromising the livelihood of their owners. Of the 883 business certificates distributed through the Redevelopment Agency's Certificate Program, only 4 percent have been exercised. (SFRC 2008a)

While the post-relocation data for the residents displaced from the Western Addition are incomplete, it is likely that the vast majority of renters experienced an increase in monthly housing costs. In 1964 Chester Hartman surveyed every academic relocation study relating to slum clearance; all but one of the 33 studies found that most of the displaced population experienced rent increases. In 1960 Nathaniel Lichfield, a British city planner and a visiting scholar at University of California, Berkeley, compiled data from the Redevelopment Agency's relocation reports on the approximately 4,000 household who were displaced by Western Addition redevelopment project A-1. Of the households for which post-relocation data were known (about 22 percent), 83 percent reported an increase in monthly rent. The proportion of households with a rent/income ratio of greater than 30 percent jumped from 21 to 35 percent; the proportion with a ratio of greater than 50 percent increased from 5 to 12 percent. (Lichfield 1961)¹

The psychological impacts of relocation, although they are less tangible, may have even more lasting and debilitating effects. Researchers have found that some displaced residents react to the loss of their neighborhood as to the death of a family member or dear friend: they experience depression and withdrawal. In the early 1960s, two key studies—Herbert Gans's *Urban Villagers* and Marc Fried's *Grieving for a Lost Home*—called attention to the psychological impacts suffered by the people displaced from Boston's West End; they, along with Jane Jacobs' seminal

¹ Unfortunately, it seems that no comparable compilation of data exists for project A-2, which displaced approximately triple the number of households at a time when San Francisco's housing vacancy rate was even lower. An examination of the Redevelopment Agency's relocation records from this period is warranted, but falls outside the scope of this paper.

work, helped to turn public opinion against neighborhood clearances. The West End, like the Fillmore, was a thriving but disinvested community near the central city that was designated as blighted and destroyed. Fried (1966) subsequently found that nearly half of the displaced residents experienced “a fairly severe grief reaction or worse.” (p. 360) While no comparable study has been conducted regarding the destruction of the Fillmore, a brief survey of newspaper articles and books reveals plentiful examples of residents who lament the loss of their neighborhood. (Fullbright 2008a; Dearen 2008; Wagner 1998; Pepin and Watts 2006) Also, Lichfield’s study (1961) found that the majority of the households displaced by project A-1 resettled in blocks immediately adjacent to the project area. (For over 800 of those households, that meant that they would subsequently be displaced a second time.) The propensity of individuals and families to relocate nearby is evidence of their strong attachment to their community.

The most immeasurable impact of relocation was the loss of social capital. Social capital—relationships and shared norms that are coordinated for mutual benefit—is a resource that facilitates economic development, political power, and general health and wellbeing for individuals and communities. (Sampson 1999; Briggs 2004) While the term ‘social capital’ is relatively new, the idea is not; Lichfield, in his *Cost Benefit Analysis in Urban Development* (1962, pp. 41, 49), warned that the “social cost of relocation” and the loss of “the advantages of family and ethnic group associations” was impossible to calculate. In the context of the Fillmore in the middle part of the twentieth century, social capital was spatial in nature; it was cultivated through residents’ interactions at the businesses, in the homes, and on the streets of the neighborhood. When the Fillmore was destroyed and its residents flung around the city, the region, and the nation, the economic engine and the support systems of the community were eliminated; no relocation payment could compensate for that loss. Mindy Fullilove (2004) employed an arboreal metaphor (particularly appropriate given urban renewal advocates’ appropriation of ‘blight’) and explained urban renewal’s disruption of communities as “root shock”: (p. 191)

People, too, need roots. Human communities, like the tree, cannot produce their “crown” without the massive network of connections that move nourishment from the earth to the

entire organism of the group. The evil of urban renewal is that people were stripped of their roots, and forced, without aid, to struggle through the period of shock to replant themselves as best they might.

Fullilove makes a convincing case that many of the economic and social challenges that the nation's African American community currently struggles with can be traced back to the disruption of the social capital and support systems of the archipelago of African American neighborhoods in inner-city districts around the nation; thus, the effects of the disastrous implementation of urban renewal are still felt today.

Reggie Pettis, a longtime resident of the Fillmore, is the proprietor of the Chicago Barber Shop, one of the few businesses formerly located on Fillmore Street that has been able to reestablish itself in the neighborhood. He coined the phrase "Fillmo' No Mo'" to summarize that sad fact that a formerly great neighborhood has been lost; (*Neighborhoods* 1999) the Fillmore—the culture and the soul of the past neighborhood—cannot be revived.

Part Two: Right of Return

San Francisco is losing its African American population. In 1970 the city was home to almost 100,000 African Americans; over the past 40 years, San Francisco has gradually lost about half of that population (see Appendix 1). During the 1970s and 80s, that trend was somewhat unique to San Francisco; in most major cities, the African American population was still growing during those decades.² The early onset of out-migration may be related to the destruction of the Fillmore in the name of urban renewal; countless residents and observers have made that attribution. (Fulbright 2007; Ritter 2007; Clark 2008; Muhammad 2008; Shaw 2008) ‘Black flight’ from San Francisco continues today however, decades after the cessation of the practices of slum clearance and regressive social engineering. Part two of this paper is a survey of some of the efforts to reverse this trend and revitalize the Fillmore.

African American Out-Migration Task Force

In June 2007, Mayor Gavin Newsom created the San Francisco African American Out-Migration Task Force. The Task Force, whose membership included religious and secular leaders from the African American community, public officials, and community development professionals, was directed to identify and examine the factors causing the out-migration, and to subsequently make recommendations for the development of a comprehensive strategy for mitigating further out-migration and making San Francisco attractive to African Americans who are planning to relocate. (MOCI 2007; 2008) To support the Task Force, the Mayor’s Office of Community Development recruited researchers at the Ethnic Studies and Africana Studies Departments at San Francisco State University (SFSU). At the August 2007 Task Force meeting, the researchers presented their findings, including: (Akom and Ginwright 2007)

- According to a survey of 350 African American residents of San Francisco, 36 percent of respondents indicated that they were likely or somewhat likely to leave San Francisco within three years.³
- African Americans continue to leave San Francisco because of a lack of employment opportunities, scarcity of affordable housing, and the poor quality of public education.

² See: US Census Bureau, *City and County Data Book* for 1970, 1980, 1990, 2000, et al.

³ For comparison, the typical annual rate of mobility from one county to another for the state of California is currently 5 percent. (US Census Bureau, *2007 American Community Survey*).

- According to national trends, African American out-migration is most likely to occur among the middle-class. In San Francisco, however, income level was not predictive; low-income residents were just as likely to leave the city.

In spring 2008 the Task Force released its report, including a set of recommendations relating to housing, education, jobs and economic development, cultural and social life, and public safety. Among the housing recommendations, the Task Force asked for legislation to improve the Certificate of Preference program; they recommended that benefits be extended to descendants of certificate holders, the expiration date of certificates be extended, and the establishment of a down-payment assistance program specifically for certificate holders. In the months since, two of these three recommendations have been implemented. The Redevelopment Agency expects to implement the third, the extension of benefits to descendants of certificate holders, by spring 2009; (Blackwell 2008c) however, according to one local affordable housing advocate, “the agency has been saying for two years that it would be done within six months.”

Unfortunately, the mayor has not identified any specific method for the development of policies or programs to implement the other recommendations. Subsequently, at a public hearing held by Supervisor Chris Daly on August 7, 2008, some community members, including the chair and members of the Task Force itself, questioned whether the will to implement policies to halt out-migration really exists, and called the Task Force a “farce.” (SFGTV 2008) Minister Christopher Muhammad even accused San Francisco’s government of complicity with private developers’ deliberate efforts to drive African Americans out of the city (although he offered no evidence to substantiate his claim). (Muhammad 2008)

The Certificate of Preference Program

On October 21, 2008, San Francisco’s Board of Supervisors passed an ordinance that extended the rights of beneficiaries of the Certificate Program. As a result of the legislation, certificate holders will now be given preference in all of the city’s below-market-rate and subsidized housing rental and homeownership programs. These units are typically distributed via a lottery system for all eligible applicants; the legislation grants that any eligible certificate holders be

placed at the top of the list, jumping ahead of lottery entrants. The individuals and families displaced by urban renewal, and their advocates, might ask why this legislation was not passed sooner. An examination of the events leading up to the passage of the ordinance demonstrates that it was enabled by ‘a perfect storm’ of actors and events.

The legislation was first thought up by community-based advocates of San Francisco’s African American community. A group of African Americans who worked or volunteered for various human services nonprofit organizations in the city had been meeting informally to discuss the problems facing San Francisco’s African American community. They were quite familiar with the very same issues that the SFSU researchers highlighted: the lack of employment opportunities, scarcity of affordable housing, and the poor quality of public education. Eventually they called themselves the Osiris Coalition, named for the myth of the Egyptian god whose body parts were torn apart, spread around, and eventually gathered and reassembled. (Julian Davis 2008)

One of the coalition participants was Pat Scott, Executive Director of the Booker T. Washington Center. The center, founded in 1919 to provide various community services to the African American community in the Western Addition, planned to develop a handful of affordable housing rental units at its location. Affordable housing rental units that are developed in San Francisco are distributed through a lottery of eligible applicants; typically, only a small percentage of applicants are African American. Scott and her colleagues were concerned that no African Americans would end up in the units being developed in a complex that had historically served that community. They were aware that about two thirds of certificate of preference holders were African American. Thus, the legislation was conceived not only as a means of expanding the reparations delivered to people whose homes and community were seized and destroyed, but also to preserve the African American presence in the Western Addition. (Julian Davis 2008; Scott 2008) In spring 2007, members of the Osiris Coalition approached Supervisor Ross Mirkarimi of district five, which consists largely of the Western Addition, and asked him to sponsor the legislation. He indicated his support, but did not immediately take action. Also during this period, members of the coalition attempted to build support for the legislation within

the Redevelopment Commission and at the Mayor's office.

In August 2007, the Redevelopment Agency's Executive Director, Marcia Rosen, stepped down; Mayor Newsom appointed Fred Blackwell to replace her. Blackwell had been the Director of the Mayor's Office of Community Development; in that post, he had staffed the African American Out-Migration Task Force. In other positions in the public sector and at Bay Area foundations, he had developed a record as an advocate of progressive strategies for community development. Also, he is African American. Members of the Osiris Coalition felt that they now had an ally at the Redevelopment Agency. Within one month of Blackwell's appointment, the coalition sent him a congratulatory letter that included this information request: (Davis et al 2007)

We are writing you to formally request that you take immediate action to disclose to the public at large the Redevelopment Agency's list of displaced Fillmore residents and merchants from the A-1 and A-2 project areas, as well as the agency's list of all certificate of preference holders. We understand that there are some lingering questions as to the legality of disclosing this list but ask that you take immediate action to answer them.

We are concerned, as you are, about the declining African American population in San Francisco. We see reparations for property seized from African Americans by the Redevelopment Agency as a critical component of current efforts to restore the African American population of this city. This cannot be accomplished without access to information about the identity of individuals who were displaced. Given the documented failure of the certificates of Preference program to effectively restore ownership of property, we ask that you make public access to this information a top priority of your Directorship.

In the past, the leadership of the Redevelopment Agency had denied access to the list of certificate holders to public advocates who had requested it. In response to one such request in 1993, they asserted that "the right to privacy of the individuals involved clearly outweighs the public interest served by disclosing such information." (Graumann 1993) According to Regina Davis (2008), Executive Director of the San Francisco Housing Development Corporation (SFHDC),

We tried to get that list for years. But Marcia Rosen was like, "No way, no how."

Under Blackwell's direction, however, the agency took a new stance. In respect for their privacy

rights, the agency sent a mailer to every certificate holder on file informing them that their name and contact information would be released to partnering nonprofit housing agencies unless they took action to opt out of the information release. Subsequently, the list of certificate holders was released to the Osiris Coalition. (SFRC 2008c) Again, Davis:

I have to give credit to Fred. He had a political mandate to get it done, and he took advantage of it.

The information request had two results. First, nonprofit organizations and housing advocates could attempt to reach out to certificate holders to ensure that they were aware of the benefits to which they are entitled. SFHDC and Urban Community Housing Corporation are both using the list to seek out certificate holders and inform them of the expansion of their benefits. When they find a certificate holder who is interested in buying a home in San Francisco, they offer counseling, financial literacy training, and homeownership education workshops, and connect their clients with lenders. The organizations have already helped a small number certificate holders purchase homes; they hope that the legislation, and the expansion of the portfolio of units available to certificate holders, will quicken the pace of placements. (Regina Davis 2008; Dearman 2008)

The second, and perhaps more consequential, result of the information request was that it put further pressure on the Redevelopment Agency to improve its management of the list of certificate holders. For many years, the data pertaining to displaced residents of the Western Addition had been stored in a long row of stacks of drawers of microfiche, an analogue media that must be accessed using an optical reader (see images in appendix 3). In order to confirm the eligibility of a certificate holder, or to process an inquiry or request, the data search process for Redevelopment Agency staff was extremely tedious. In the past year, the Redevelopment Agency has been in the process of digitizing this data and creating a database that is more readily accessible to staff.

Additionally, the Redevelopment Agency is expanding its efforts to find and serve certificate holders. In 2008 the agency hired two full-time staff members to respond to certificate-related

inquiries and conduct outreach regarding benefits eligibility. As the senior staff member responsible for oversight of the program put it, “the goal is not to deny certificates, but to help people secure them.” (Anderson and Harris 2008) The Redevelopment Agency has also allocated money to engage a third-party firm to seek out certificate holders with whom the agency has lost contact (about 62 percent). One of the challenges the agency faces is that many certificate holders, the experience of displacement still fresh in their minds, are extremely reluctant to have any dealings whatsoever with the agency. The third party firm will work with churches and community organizations, and their search will extend nationally. Blackwell predicts that this will be implemented beginning in spring 2009; some community members are frustrated by the delay, as many below market rate housing units will become available over the next few months.

In June 2008, the Redevelopment Commission, on the recommendation of Redevelopment Agency staff, made several changes to the certificate program. (SFRC 2008d) These include:

- The duration of the validity of residential certificates has been set to expire after two years past the date of project completion; that period has been extended by 15 years.
- The rights of Residential C certificate holders—the children of original heads of household—had formerly been limited based on the certificate utilization of their parents; those limitations have been removed.
- New types of materials can now be used to demonstrate certificate eligibility; school transcripts, birth certificates, military records, and other types of documentation are now accepted, as long as they show a displacement address. The appeals process for individuals who had been denied certificates has been improved.
- The agency reaffirmed the basic principle of the program: eligibility for a certificate requires evidence of displacement due to some action taken by the agency or on its behalf.

In addition, the June resolution authorized agency staff to investigate the feasibility of expanding the program to include the grandchildren of original heads of household. That would include the demonstration that the descendants of the original displaced households can be said to have suffered from the displacement; the determination of the number of additional certificates to be issued; and an evaluation of whether the supply of newly-created affordable housing is sufficient

to meet the demand of the expanded group of certificate holders.

The Legislation Moves Forward

On April 8, 2008 Mayor Newsom surprised observers by introducing his own legislation to expand the rights of certificate holders. (SFBOS 2008a) His relatively conservative proposal, however, fell far short of what the Osiris Coalition had conceived. Newsom proposed that certificate holders would receive preference for 30 percent of units generated by the city's inclusionary housing program (a city program requiring that, in new developments of a certain size, 15 percent of units be designated for below market rate sale or rental). One week later, Mirkarimi introduced his legislation (see Appendix 2 for the full text), which expanded preference to all of the city's below market rate sale and rental programs. (SFBOS 2008b) Also, he indicated that he would seek the expansion of the certificate program rules to make the children and grandchildren of certificate holders eligible for certificates of their own. (This was misrepresented in the local media as one piece of legislation; (Fulbright 2008b) however, while the Board of Supervisors has jurisdiction over citywide housing programs, the Certificate Program and any changes to its rules fall under the jurisdiction of the Redevelopment Commission.)

Mirkarimi's proposal triggered alarm and outcry from affordable housing advocates around the city. The central problem was that there had been no opportunity for an inclusive discussion about how the legislation would impact other low-income communities around the city. Some critics, although they support the premise of reparations for displaced residents, argue that the legislation is flawed: the city should be investing in rebuilding the leveled communities, yet it costs nothing to grant one group preference over another. As one advocate pointed out, "the city is only slicing the pie differently, but they should be enlarging the pie." (Fujioka 2008)

Community groups representing specific constituencies feared that such a significant expansion of the Certificate Program would lead to certificate holders' monopoly on affordable housing slots. In reality, though, that is very unlikely to occur. (Blackwell 2008c; Melgar 2008a) Consider that:

- Currently, only three to five certificates are exercised each year.
- Each of the affordable housing programs for which certificate holders receive preference has its own eligibility requirements that are not waived for certificate holders (a subtle but crucial point which, Fred Blackwell points out, is not often appreciated or communicated in the media). For example, participation in programs offered by the Mayor's Office of Housing is limited to various percentages of area median income (depending on the program). Other programs are not accessible by those with any significant assets (including 401K plans). For many units, the participant must be a first-time homebuyer.
- Two thirds of certificate holders are African American. Given the massive exodus of that population from San Francisco, it is likely that certificate holders and their descendants are spread across the region and the country. It is unlikely that very many are even interested in relocating to San Francisco.
- Many of the homeownership programs are less attractive because they limit the owner's equity share, or have resale restrictions.

If benefits were expanded to the descendants of displaced individuals, the number of certificate holders might expand from about 5,300 to as many as 100,000. Even then, though, it would be shocking if the number of certificate holders who both 1) have a desire to return to take advantage of the program, and 2) qualify for specific housing programs, ever amounts to even 10 percent of the number of below market rate units that go to lottery each year (between 500 and 1000).

Nevertheless, there was resistance to the expansion of the Certificate Program. Myrna Melgar, Director of Homeownership Programs at the Mayor's Office of Housing, was tasked with the management and mediation of negotiations over the legislation among community housing groups; she remembers it as the most difficult task of her professional career. (Melgar 2008a) Several of the groups participating in the negotiations (see appendix 4 for a complete list) felt that their constituents were, like the residents of Western Addition Project Areas 1 and 2, negatively affected by past mistakes in the city's housing and community development policies, and thus should also be eligible for some preference program. Community organizations in the

Mission cited the gentrification of their neighborhood during the late '90s and early part of this decade, and the displacement it caused. Community organizations in South of Market (SOMA) recalled the displacement that occurred in their neighborhood resulting from the urban renewal projects of the 1970s. Melgar recalls, "it was a sad argument over which group had been oppressed the most." (Melgar, 2008a)

A compromise was reached when pro-legislation groups made two concessions. First, if at any point certificate holders are filling 50 percent of affordable housing slots, a Board of Supervisors hearing will be triggered for reassessment of the legislation; as noted above, this extremely unlikely to occur barring a massive reduction in the number of affordable housing units that come online each year. Second, they agreed to cease their pursuit of the extension of benefits to the descendants of certificate holders until the Redevelopment Agency can make the case that the descendants did suffer from the displacement, even though they were a generation removed; and that the city's supply of affordable housing can support the expansion. (The Redevelopment Agency is currently conducting research and expects to complete the case by spring 2009 (Blackwell 2008c)). Once a consensus was reached, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to approve the legislation.

Thus, forty-one years after the residential certificate program was first established, the rights of certificate holders have been significantly expanded; in the coming months, the number of beneficiaries will likely increase dramatically. While community advocates in the Western Addition would have preferred that these changes were made long ago, it was only in 2008 that all of the necessary ingredients were assembled: an organized coalition of community representatives, the attention garnered by the Out-Migration Task Force, a champion in the legislative body, a supportive mayor, and a progressive at the helm of the Redevelopment Agency. Several of the community advocates that I spoke to were hopeful that, given this advantageous climate, they could press for further positive community developments in the Fillmore.

Asset-Building Programs

In June 2008, the Redevelopment Agency launched a down-payment assistance program specifically for certificate holders. Using the proceeds from the sale of a parcel of land in Western Addition Project Area A-2, the agency created a \$4,000,000 revolving loan fund that will provide first-time homebuyers with up to \$100,000 towards the purchase of a home. No interest or payments would be due until sale, transfer, or certain types of refinancing of the property, or at the end of the 45-year term. Interest is to be paid in the form of shared appreciation, based on the proportion of assistance provided relative to the original purchase price of the property. For example, if the loan fund provides 30 percent of the purchase price of a home, the borrower would repay the principal amount plus 30 percent of any increase in the value of the home over time. Another portion of the proceeds of the parcel sale was used to create an individual development account program for certificate holders. The program provides a match of up to \$5,000 for home purchase, and is eligible to individuals with an annual income that exceeds the limits typical of other IDA programs. (Blackwell 2008a; SFRA 2008c)

Economic Development Programs

Urban renewal displaced over eight hundred businesses from the Western Addition, many of which lined Fillmore Street. A walk up Fillmore Street today reveals that more than half of the storefronts of the Fillmore Center, the massive commercial and residential center that fills the two-block stretch from Eddy to O'Farrell, sit empty. Observers cite various culprits: the lagging economy; insufficient investment in marketing of the area; unrealistically high rents charged by the property owners and management company; and the fact that the new commercial district is still emerging. (Julian Davis 2008; Dearman 2008; Blackwell 2008c) Whatever the reasons, the empty storefronts exacerbate the frustration felt by many residents over what they perceive as an historical unwillingness or inability of the Redevelopment Agency to make a significant contribution to economic development in the neighborhood.

Over the past decade, however, and increasingly over the past year, the Redevelopment Agency has established economic development programs for the Fillmore. In the late 90s the Redevelopment Agency designated the area between McAllister, Post, Steiner, and Webster

Streets as the Fillmore Jazz Heritage Preservation District “to highlight the significant role that jazz music played in the District and to continue the legacy of jazz by creating an entertainment district comprised of dining, jazz music and shopping venues and activities.” (SFRC 2008b) In 2003 the agency opened the Jazz Heritage District Promotional Office to market the area, manage events, and support the local business association. Most recently, in July 2008 the Redevelopment Agency used fees from one of the private developers of Project Area 2 to create a \$360,000 “Community Benefits Fund.” A selection committee comprised of local community representatives will use the fund to make grants of up to \$25,000 to provide start-up capital to new small businesses and nonprofit organizations in the Jazz Heritage Preservation District. Grantees must meet a number of other eligibility requirements, and are required to participate in three business development workshops. The Redevelopment Agency began publicizing the program in October. (SFRC 2008b; SFRA 2008d)

The Redevelopment Agency has also made more significant investments in business development on Fillmore Street. In 1997, the agency made a loan to Rassales Restaurant; since 2005, the agency has made loans to three other restaurants and music venues, including the new Fillmore Street location of the world renowned Yoshi’s Jazz Club. The agency’s total outstanding investment in the four establishments is currently more than \$9 million. Unfortunately, as outlined by a recent Redevelopment Agency memorandum, (Blackwell 2008b, p.2) the restaurants face a multitude of challenges:

In addition to the newness of the businesses, the actual concept of coming down to the Jazz District for entertainment purposes is still new to potential customers. The Jazz District suffers from a perceived stigma as an area plagued by crime and potentially dangerous. Even before our current economic crisis, the Jazz District was looking at a 5 to 6 year time horizon for sustainable improvements in the district.

Each of the restaurants has recently requested refinancing of their existing loan, an additional loan, or both. Blackwell acknowledges that the closure of one of those businesses due to the economic crisis would be “a giant step backwards,” and hopes that the Redevelopment Agency can help the restaurants maintain solvency until they become profitable. (Blackwell 2008c)

HOPE SF

The legacy of urban renewal is also affecting the development of new housing policy in San Francisco. In 2007 Mayor Newsom announced the creation of the HOPE SF program to renovate some of the city's most dilapidated public housing projects. The city is conscious of residents' lingering mistrust of city-managed redevelopment projects, particularly as the housing projects are primarily inhabited by African Americans, many of whom recall the destruction of their old enclave in the Fillmore. As such, the program's founding document includes an explicit commitment to community oversight, one-for-one unit replacement, and phased implementation. (SFPHTF 2007)

Conclusions

"Thousands of units of affordable housing have been developed, and there has been lots of investment and economic development but none of that has been able to make up for the tremendous sense of loss the people who lived in the Western Addition feel in terms of the cultural fabric."

-Fred Blackwell

Urban renewal irrevocably transformed the physical, social, and economic landscape of the Western Addition. While some observers attribute the flight of African Americans from the city directly to the destruction of the Fillmore during the 1960s, the rate of out-migration has actually increased since 1990. The complex challenges facing low-income families in San Francisco—e.g., the short supply of affordable housing, the scarcity of blue-collar employment opportunities, and an inadequate public education system—have likely done far more to drive African Americans from the city than has the legacy of urban renewal.

It is true that the days of the “Harlem of the West” are permanently passed. Yet the Fillmore still has the potential to be a thriving, diverse neighborhood. The recent economic development and asset-building initiatives introduced by the Redevelopment Agency are steps in the right direction; they may help the neighborhood regain some of its past glory. The expansion of the Certificate of Preference program may result in an increase in the number of former residents, or

their descendants, who return to the neighborhood or the city. However, that policy also raises difficult questions. Should the Redevelopment Agency provide some other type of retribution to those displaced residents (or their descendants) who are not interested in returning to San Francisco, or in taking advantage of the city's affordable housing programs? Is it fair to reduce the pool of affordable housing units available to other low-income residents in order to make up for the crimes of the past?

To go further toward rectification of the mistakes made in the implementation of urban renewal, the City must take bold steps:

- On January 1, 2009, the day Western Addition Project Area-2 sunsets, issue a public apology from the mayor on behalf of the city to the former and current residents of the Western Addition, the people and businesses displaced by urban renewal, and their descendants. This symbolic gesture might help to heal the psychological wounds still felt by former residents and their descendants.
- Invest significantly in the infrastructure and environment of the district, including the creation of a public park above Geary Boulevard at Fillmore Street, the extension of MUNI light rail to a station in the Fillmore, and the renovation of all public housing projects in the district. By making the district and its housing more attractive places to live, the city might entice more certificate holders to return to the city.
- Upgrade the staffing and facilities of the Ella Hill Hutch Community Center to bring the organization on par with the Bay Area's leading community centers, e.g. Oakland's Youth Uprising.
- Utilize inclusionary zoning and value capture programs to prevent gentrification and ensure that the neighborhood's low-income residents benefit from the revitalization.

There is nothing can be done to restore the displaced residents' lost social capital or relieve the "root shock" they experienced decades ago. By making a significant investment in constructive renewal, however, the city might achieve some of the original goals of the redevelopment plan, and strengthen the Western Addition community.

Lessons for People, Policymakers, and Planners

Forty years ago the residents of the Western Addition were powerless to stop urban renewal and the destruction of their own neighborhood; only after community leaders mobilized a significant public campaign were they able to make their voices heard. This serves as a harsh lesson of the importance of civic engagement. Local politics are important! People must do what they can to ensure that their local government will not put the interests of wealthy contributors and political heavyweights ahead of the interests of the residents of the community. The lesson of the Western Addition is motivation to become an educated voter, and to be aware of and get involved in local organizing campaigns.

For policymakers, urban renewal in the Western Addition is a great example of what *not* to do. Blanket destruction of a community's housing and commercial district is not the way to eliminate poverty. On the contrary, low-income communities need a residential environment that is stable and supportive. The federal government should make a significant investment in the expansion and rehabilitation of public housing, an antipoverty measure that has been woefully under-funded and mismanaged since it was instituted decades ago. Congress has recently reduced funding for the HOPE VI program; the Obama administration should push for a reversal of that trend, as well as the institution of a one-for-one replacement requirement to prevent any reduction in the number of subsidized units.

Finally, the implementation of urban renewal in the Western Addition demonstrates the tragic consequences of myopic, exclusionary planning. All human beings have the right to share in the determination of the physical and theoretical development of the environment and society in which they live. The planning process must be genuinely participatory. Responsible planners can help to counteract the disproportionate influence of the wealthy over politics, planning, and development by listening to the voices of the most vulnerable and powerless segments of the population.

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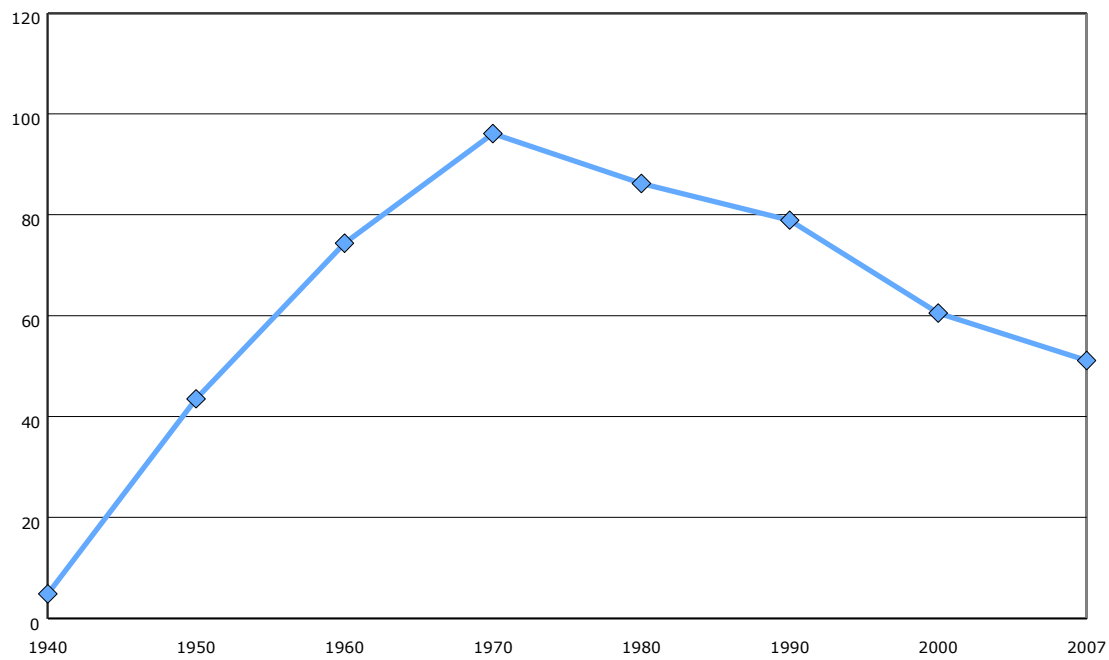
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Appendix 1

African American Population in San Francisco, 1940 – 2007 (in thousands)



Source: US Census Bureau, 1940-2000 Censuses of Population, 2007 American Community Survey

Appendix 2: Full text of October 21, 2008 ordinance expanding the Certificate Program.

[Citywide Affordable Housing Preference for Certificate of Preference Holders]

Ordinance providing that all City affordable housing programs give preference in those programs to Certificate of Preference Holders under the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's Property Owner and Occupant Preference Program by adding Administrative Code Section 24.8 to provide that all City affordable housing programs administered by the Mayor's Office of Housing or other City Department give preference in those programs to Certificate of Preference holders; and amending Administrative Code Sections 43.3.4 to provide for preference in the affordable housing and home ownership bond program; Section 10.100-110 to provide for preference in the expenditure of funds from the Mayor's Housing Affordability Fund; 10-100-370 to provide for preference in the use of HOPE SF funds; and amending Planning Code Sections 313.12, 315.4, 315.5, and 315.6 to provide for preference in the Citywide Affordable Housing funds generated by the Jobs-Housing Linkage Program and the Residential Inclusionary Affordable Housing program and in the allocation of all on- and off-site inclusionary housing units in those programs.

Appendix 3: Photographs of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's archives.
Taken by the author on 1 December 2008.



Appendix 4: Nonprofit organizations and public agencies that participated in summer negotiations over the expansion of the Certificate Program (Melgar 2008b)

Asian Law Caucus
Booker T Washington Community Center
Chinatown Community Development Corporation
Council of Community Housing Organizations (Choo Choo)
Dolores Street Community Services
Mayor's Office of Housing
Mission Anti Displacement Coalition
San Francisco Housing Development Corporation
San Francisco Organizing Project (several Latino and African American congregations)
San Francisco Redevelopment Agency
San Francisco Urban Community Housing Corporation
South of Market Community Action Network (SOMCAN)
St. Peter's Housing Committee