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# Displacement Matters: The Socioeconomics of Gentrification in Richmond, California

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Displacement Matters: The Socioeconomics of Gentrification in Richmond, California

A senior project submitted to the faculty of Dominican University of California  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bachelor of Arts  
in Humanities and Cultural Studies

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## ABSTRACT

The focus of this research paper is the escalating displacement of African American residents in the City of Richmond, California, whose ancestors helped to make the Richmond Shipyards into one of the most essential shipbuilding operations in the United States during World War II. Utilizing current briefs, regional/national newspaper articles, and literature from the field of urban renewal, this paper examines the impacts of gentrification on already marginalized people of color. By studying the current unease about gentrification in Richmond and profiling regional case studies, this paper will provide important insights for more equitable urban revitalization that does not displace vulnerable community members.

*Preface*

When I set out to write this paper I knew clearly in my mind what I needed to say. That is, lower income African Americans in Richmond, Harlem, and Rainier Valley in Seattle, continue to be pushed further and further out into the margins of society due to gentrification aka the “whitening” of communities. This displacement is based upon socioeconomic sidelining and institutionalized racism. Tell me, how is it possible that lower income African Americans can possibly ever get ahead, when they keep being left behind? In all honesty, I hedge on the weight of my words in this paper. I find myself challenged in ways unimaginable to say what I mean, and mean what I say, for fear of white backlash from my friends, neighbors, and more importantly, African Americans living in Richmond. As I continue to struggle in a desire to say what needs to be said, I was recently reminded that I am not reinventing the wheel in the conversation of gentrification, I am reinforcing the current debate.

In general, I call things like I see them and the way that I have long viewed the effects of gentrification is in the sum of the parts that make up the whole. One half is positive in that urban renewal essentially erases blight and adds value to both the overall community through safer streets, better schools, and a thriving local economy. The other half is highly negative. If unchecked, urban renewal in Richmond will encourage unmitigated gentrification. This lack of control will lead to an imbalance of racial diversity, and further lend to the corrosive effects of segregation. In closing, I feel that it is imperative to encourage divergent discourse when it comes to the timely topic of gentrification in Richmond. Therefore, I cannot consciously sit on the sidelines of my white privilege and allow fear to silence my voice while fellow members of my

community continue to be pushed out of a city that they and their predecessors valiantly helped to prosper and define.

Yours in solidarity,

Alicia Kae Miller

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	Introduction	6
II.	Migration and Industrialization	7
	a. First Californians	7
	b. Conquistadors	7
	c. Profiteers	8
	d. The Pittsburgh of the West	8
	e. Dust Bowl	9
	f. WWII Economic Gains: A Path to Prosperity	10
	g. Post WWII Losses: A Cycle of Poverty	11
III.	The Economics of Displacement: Segregation by Design	12
	a. The Social Side Effects of Gentrification	13
	b. A Historic Population in Decline	14
	c. Shifting Demographics	14
	d. If You Build It, They Will Come	16
	e. Fair and Affordable Housing	17
IV.	Regional Impacts of Gentrification	19
	a. A Loss of Community and a Dream	19
	b. Flipping the Dream	20
	c. A Dream, Deferred	22
V.	Conclusion	23

## INTRODUCTION

You might be asking yourself what exactly is “gentrification”? According to Webster-Merriam dictionary, gentrification is defined as “the process of renewal and rebuilding accompanying the influx of middle-class or affluent people into deteriorating areas that often displaces poorer residents.” Further, *KQED News* staff writer Jane Solomon asserts the moniker “*gentrification* emerged in 1960s London when a German-British sociologist and city planner, Ruth Glass, described the displacement of the poor in London as upper-class people moved in to refurbish houses in previously working-class areas.” Glass notes that “one by one, many of the working-class quarters of London have been invaded by the middle-class ... until all or most of the working-class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.”

As discussed in the aforementioned abstract, the focus of this research is the escalating displacement of African American residents in the City of Richmond, California. While their predecessors helped to make the Richmond Shipyards into one of the most essential shipbuilding operations during World War II, modern-day African Americans face an altogether very different conflict in Richmond today. This paper will illuminate socioeconomic disadvantages that have led to decades of racial bias and marginalization of lower income black community members. Additionally, historical context is provided to illustrate how the racial landscape of Richmond evolved from the Ohlone Indians to present day. This historical perspective sheds light on how Spanish oppression, and white settlements, gave way to the systematic elimination of the Ohlone Indians. Just as the Ohlone were pushed from their homeland, low income African Americans are being displaced from Richmond today.

## MIGRATION AND INDUSTRIALIZATION

*Growth is inevitable and desirable, but destruction of community character is not. The question is not whether your part of the world is going to change. The question is how. - Edward T. McMahon*

### *First Californians*

The most commonly known First Californians in Richmond are the Ohlone Indians. Historians suggest that approximately 5,000 years ago the Ohlone inhabited areas in and around Richmond “with a culture based on strong community ties, spiritualism, and rich artistic creativity” (City of Richmond). Life among the Ohlone remained fluid until the arrival of the Spanish in 1772. This land discovery by the Spanish later signaled the first instance of gentrification in Richmond, and foreshadowed the near annihilation of First Californians in an all-out war for Spanish land acquisition.

### *Conquistadors*

With the arrival of Spanish explorers in 1772, a slow trajectory toward the ultimate industrialization of Richmond began its ascent. The meaning of the Spanish flag “PLUS ULTA” or “More Beyond” represents both the demise of centuries-old Ohlone way of life, and the rise of Caucasian European domination in Richmond. *Richmond Confidential* author Wendi Jonassen writes by “1817, the Spanish settlers established the Mission Dolores Rancho in Richmond, and extensive grazing began altering the land.” As white immigrants forcibly took over land previously farmed by the Ohlone, the epic loss of food sources coupled with the introduction of European disease, brought forth a sharp decline and death in the Ohlone population.



### *Profiteers*

In the Autumn of 1850, California officially became the 31<sup>st</sup> state to be admitted into the Union. As settlers came west to California, expedient travel alternatives became necessary:

In 1895, Augustin S. Macdonald visited Point Richmond and conceived the idea of a transcontinental rail terminal and ferry service to provide a direct route from Richmond to San Francisco. Macdonald presented his idea to the Santa Fe Railroad and in 1899 the railroad established its western terminus in Point Richmond. The first overland passenger train arrived in Richmond from Chicago in 1900. In 1901, Santa Fe moved its shops to Richmond and the Standard Oil Company built its refinery. (City of Richmond)

The arrival of a passenger train from Chicago to Richmond literally laid the track for Standard Oil Company to transport oil throughout the United States from its prominent refinery just off the shores of San Pablo Bay that is still in operation today.

### *The Pittsburgh of the West*

The City of Richmond was already an established industry-friendly town when it incorporated in 1905, and the “company town” imprint left by the Santa Fe Railroad and the Standard Oil Company is of great significance from both economic and racial perspectives.

As town landmarks popped up around businesses, “Rancho San Pablo's vast grain fields were subdivided into uniform city lots” (City of Richmond). By 1907, the Chamber of Commerce gave Richmond the moniker “The Pittsburgh of the West,” due to the explosive economic and population growth of the city. According to Dr. Eleanor

Mason Ramsey, “Richmond’s Standard Oil refinery reportedly hired very few workers who were not of European ancestry even as it became the community’s largest source of jobs” (Graves 28). While “Santa Fe, the non-white pioneers’ major employer, relied so heavily upon these laborers to lay rails and cook in the workers’ camps that by 1902 nonwhites constituted more than half the company’s work force” (Graves 28). Further Santa Fe offered housing for workers with “specific areas dedicated to Mexican American, Japanese and Native American workers” (Graves 28).

By structuring job placement for mainly workers of European descent, a majority of the European American population settled adjacent to the refinery in Point Richmond that is today know as “an upscale waterfront enclave of historic buildings and cafes that looks like a movie set” (Rogers). With European Americans mainly residing on or near the waters of San Pablo Bay, the racial bias imposed by the Standard Oil Company at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century helped to perpetuate oppressive segregation that is so prevalent in Richmond today.

### *Dust Bowl*

As the Great Depression settled into the fabric of the United States, the once fertile soil of the Southern Great Plains ceased to exist. The employment boom and allure of the Golden State beckoned as drought and unrelenting dust storms pushed the people of Plains to their breaking point as “one-quarter of the population left...packing everything they owned into their cars and trucks, and headed west toward California” (*Public Broadcasting Service* “Mass Exodus From the Plains”). Furthermore, this historic “exodus was the largest migration in American history. By 1940, 2.5 million people had moved out of the Plains states; of those, 200,000 moved to California” (*PBS*).

As the dispersion of Dust Bowl migrants arrived into Northern California, people of all color including African Americans, turned to “The Pittsburgh of the West” as a new place to call home. Dr. Shirley Ann Wilson Moore observes “by the mid-1940s, with the coming of the Kaiser shipyards, Richmond’s black population had increased dramatically” (8). With the onset of World War II, it was clear that African American labor was a vital economic cornerstone in the expansion Henry J. Kaiser’s shipbuilding enterprise.

*WWII Economic Gains: A Path to Prosperity*

For many Americans Richmond represented a new beginning whereby anyone, including African Americans, had as good a shot as anyone to fulfill the ever-elusive American Dream. In the recesses of this dream, racial bias persisted as increasing numbers of both blacks and whites simultaneously relocated to California in search of economic prosperity. As outlined by Richmond Community activist Lucretia Edwards in 1956, the tensions that had previously existed in the southeastern states did not dissipate upon arrival to the San Francisco Bay Area:

The shipyard workers were recruited throughout the United States, and a great number came from the southeastern part of the country. A high proportion was African American, primarily from the rural areas of Texas, Arkansas, Oklahoma, Louisiana and Mississippi. From the same states and at the same time, Caucasian workers were recruited, and southern blacks and southern whites carried their historical and cultural frustrations and hostilities with them. (2)

By the late summer of 1945 Japan had surrendered and World War II effectively came to an end. Just as the Allies celebrated their victory over the Axis Powers, the

flourishing City of Richmond boasted a bustling populace of “106,000 in 1945, with blacks numbering nearly 8,000” (Moore 8).

The exponential population growth of Richmond from the turn of the century to this time period is due in large part to the establishment of rail, oil, and shipyard industries. Notably, the importance of the Kaiser Shipyards during World War II helped Richmond to further define itself as an indispensable city filled with proud, working-class Americans. Within the span of four decades, this West Coast “boomtown” had grown by 103,850 inhabitants. Given the significant contributions of African Americans during World War II, Richmond exemplified a perfect example of how African Americans could both thrive economically, and help to further shape Richmond in a meaningful way.

#### *Post WWII Losses: A Cycle of Poverty*

The economic gains and meaningful influence of African Americans during the 1930s and 1940s in California was woefully short-lived. As Richmond began to see a pullback of ship manufacturing prior to the declaration of victory by the Allies in 1945, African Americans found themselves in yet another wave of life-changing circumstances.

By “mid-1944, Richmond’s wartime boom was showing signs of slowing as Kaiser instituted its first round of cutbacks” (Moore 94). Furthermore by “1945 Kaiser was laying off workers at the rate of 1,000 a month, so that by the spring of 1946 only nine thousand remained on shipyard payrolls. African Americans, who comprised an estimated 10 to 20 percent of the shipyard workforce, were first to be discharged and last to be recalled” (Moore 94). This job loss highlights the extreme difficulties and racism African Americans workers were forced to contend with. Initially they were recruited as essential workers during wartime efforts, yet they were the first employees

to be laid off as the employment boom of WWII came to an end. As black residents were increasingly pushed downward into unemployment, thus began a cycle of exclusion, poverty, and displacement in a city that once promised the American Dream.

## THE ECONOMICS OF DISPLACEMENT: SEGREGATION BY DESIGN

*The ability of community members to design the structures and institutions that shape their well-being is integral to belonging.* - Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society

As one reflects on the community of Richmond from the arrival of the Spanish to the current condition, the link that connects the past to the present is purely economic. By design, this link has led to an imbalance of power. To many African American slave descendants, anywhere had to be better than where they were. The Great Migration offered the opportunity to abandon the ensnarement of ongoing racial segregation and provided the hope of economic prosperity. Thus, it is important to recognize the critical connection between the Ohlone Indians and over one hundred years of residency by the historic African American community in Richmond. The motivation of the Spanish in 1772 was the acquisition of land which is similar, if not identical, to the mindset and thought process of many city leaders, planners, and developers across Richmond and the United States today.

While it is clear that the City of Richmond has economically benefitted from its historical base of racially diverse residents, like many cities across the United States, Richmond segregated early in its founding. One of the many negative impacts of this segregation is the lasting effects of homogenization. Despite the 1948 US Supreme Court “Shelley v Kraemer” ruling that determined courts could not enforce racial covenants on real estate, segregation has continued to fuel a socioeconomic imbalance throughout Richmond. *Slate’s* Chief Political Correspondent, Janelle Bouie asserts “whites in particular live in mostly white neighborhoods, with little if any movement into

significantly or even predominantly black areas.” Similarly, in Richmond, Moore and Gamhir report African American residents continue to live in largely African American neighborhoods such as “Hilltop, Parchester Village, North Richmond, and the Iron Triangle” (10).

The black and white housing hominization in Richmond today can definitively be traced back to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the racially biased hiring practices of the Standard Oil Company.

#### *The Social Side Effects of Gentrification*

Since developers in early Richmond included restrictive covenants into deeds of sale, racial lines were drawn and segregated housing began to emerge as African Americans were pushed away from the San Pablo Bay and further into the hills of Richmond. As housing patterns began to dot the landscape, Dr. Shirley Ann Wilson Moore describes prewar North Richmond as a “rural, ethnically diverse area where blacks lived alongside Portuguese, Italian, and Mexican Americans” but as the 1940s came to a close, “nearly 14,000 African Americans lived in the city, one fifth residing in North Richmond” (313).

Unfortunately, North Richmond has never been incorporated into the City of Richmond thus it lacks basic services and has long suffered from economic decline.

*Richmond Confidential* reporter Robert Rogers writes North Richmond “comprises about 3,000 people, and carries the dubious distinction of having the lowest per capita income in Contra Costa County, about \$9,000.00, or less than one-third of the county average.” Given this level of poverty and the open space that surrounds this unincorporated area, it is palpable that as land in the San Francisco Bay Area becomes increasingly

restricted, developers will look to resurrect Richmond brownfields and in doing so, push out low income African Americans.

### *A Historic Population in Decline*

African Americans in Richmond have been out-migrating for nearly decades. Moore and Gambhir write “the number of African Americans in Richmond fell by 12,500 people between 2000 and 2013, a drop of 35%” (23). Further, African Americans currently account for only 24% of the population in Richmond, which represents a steep decline compared to “47.9 percent in 1980 and 43.8 percent in 1990” (Hudson).

As affordable housing options continue to deteriorate, low income African Americans are:

    facing the same situation that San Francisco and New York City are in.

    Not only does Richmond exemplify what gentrification looks like in its early stages, it also reveals that the roots of gentrification lie in institutionalized racism, poverty and socioeconomic inequality. Thus, tackling gentrification will entail addressing the root causes rather than implementing one or two policies, after the fact. (Hudson)

While the intent of urban renewal may be of economic benefit to communities, without safety net policies in place for the most vulnerable community members, displacement by way of gentrification is sure to follow.

### *Shifting Demographics*

Since education is generally tied to socioeconomic status, the University of California’s Berkeley Global Campus (BGC) 2014 project proposal in Richmond would afford the city bragging rights as an “international hub where some of the world’s leading universities and high-tech companies will work side-by-side in a campus setting”

(Early158). Although plans for the 34-acre global research campus were scrapped in 2016, this concept is reflective of the San Francisco Bay Area whereby the socioeconomic imbalance between the working and higher education classes continues to permeate the community at large.

With the quality of life in Richmond slowly pivoting from subpar to viable, inexpensive real estate becomes a lucrative option for investors. The practice of buying up inexpensive real estate, places additional burden on vulnerable community members. As one looks back to “2006 and 2007, absentee owners comprised just over 10% of people buying homes in Richmond, but by 2012 they much up more than 40% of buyers” (Moore, Gambhir, and Tseng 5). This influx of absentee owners translates to a steady stream of generally college-educated tenants moving into Richmond. This new rental resident base drives up the cost of the rental market demand because they can afford to pay higher than average rent which ultimately prices and pushes out lower income African American residents. When one considers the exponential increase in the cost of housing alongside minimized educational and employment prospects it is not difficult to understand how a cycle of poverty can be prolonged:

Adults with more than a bachelor’s degree in Richmond are highly concentrated in a few neighborhoods. In the Iron Triangle, fewer than one out of seven adults have a bachelor’s degree or higher. In Parchester, North Richmond, North and East, and parts of El Sobrante, the rates of adults without a bachelor’s degree are higher than the city average of 68.6% (Moore, Gambhir, and Tseng 12).

With an increased population of college-educated residents relocating to Richmond, Early cites Randy Shaw, a San Francisco Bay Area community organizer,



and attorney, who suggests that “those seeking affordable housing along with a diverse culture will not find a better Bay Area locale” than Richmond (158). As Richmond increasingly becomes a desirable and affordable location for young, cosmopolitan professionals, the scales are weighed in favor of gentrification.

As a consequence, Richmond risks pushing out the remaining 24% of African Americans that currently reside in Richmond. Without the inclusion of African Americans, Richmond loses its place in history, thus becoming just another city lost to gentrification.

### *If You Build It, They Will Come*

Due to a decrease in violent crime in recent years, and a lack of affordable housing elsewhere, Richmond has become “a better place to live for current residents” asserts *Truthout* reporter, Adam Hudson. Hudson is quick to point out that the change in viewpoint toward Richmond has “resulted in Richmond attracting rich investors and development projects that could lead to the displacement of current residents.” If a powerful economic renaissance by way of urban renewal were to occur in Richmond, the possibility of full blown gentrification is highly probable.

A 2016 *Mercury News* report by Karina Ioffe suggested that the price of housing in Richmond grew by “26 percent in the past year...one of the highest jumps anywhere in the Bay Area.” This sizeable increase is directly contrasted by a pervasion of poverty as “6,740 renter households – 37% of the total renters – earn less than \$35,000 annually and spend more than 30% of their income on housing. In North Richmond and most of the central and south Richmond areas, there are areas with more than 80% renters” (Moore, Gambhir, and Tseng 4). As low income resident displacement continues to spiral out of control, Anne Omura, Director and Attorney of the Eviction

Defense Center claims, “100 percent of her clients who are evicted from their homes in Richmond are low-income black and Latino residents” (Cervano-Soto). Omura who is a 20-year housing rights attorney, indicates that she is seeing the same pattern in Richmond that she recognized previously in Oakland.

As African Americans continue to out-migrate, Mahlia Posey of *Richmond Confidential* reports “cities like Antioch, Stockton, Vallejo and Fairfield” are the first choice for affordable housing outside of the East Bay. Just as the San Francisco Bay Area has seen a sweeping tide of gentrification in San Francisco and Oakland, without the benefit of affordable housing, the current population of low income residents, primarily African Americans, is at risk for further displacement from Richmond, and quite possibly the San Francisco Bay Area.

#### *Fair and Affordable Housing*

Gentrification may very well guarantee increased home values and safer streets, but there must be safeguards in place to ensure that the advantages of urban renewal are of benefit to the community at large and not built on the backs of lower income residents. One way to ensure equitable urban revitalization is by gaining alignment between policymakers and community groups. By coordinating efforts toward the implementation of anti-displacement protections and policies, Richmond citizens will be able to maintain their residency and mutually benefit from positive change in their community. For example, in response to the Moore and Gambhir’s research brief, the City of Richmond established an ordinance entitled “The Richmond Fair Rent, Just Cause For Eviction and Homeowner Protection Ordinance.” Later, a majority of the Richmond City Council voted to turn this ordinance into “Resolution No. 75-16” that resolves “to submit to the City of Richmond electorate at the general municipal election

to be held on November 8, 2016 an initiative to establish rent control, a rent board, and just cause for eviction requirements in the City of Richmond.” This initiative was later designated “Measure L.”

Despite a hard-fought campaign on both sides, Measure L passed “with over 63 percent of the vote, making Richmond one of several Bay Area cities poised to adopt new rent control measures after Election Day” (Schuknecht). Additionally, “proponents of rent control say that Richmond’s new law will provide much-needed relief to low-income tenants who are being pushed out by rising housing prices throughout the Bay Area” (Schuknecht).

While many in Richmond felt justified with this historic vote, the euphoria of this resounding defeat was short-lived. In January of 2017:

a powerful landlord group that lobbied hard against the measure and similar ordinances in the Bay Area, filed a lawsuit with the Contra Costa County Superior Court...alleging Measure L is “unconstitutionally vague, [and] violates the Constitution’s due process clauses,” among other grievances.” (Edevane)

The view taken by the Sacramento-based California Apartment Association (CAA) was obviously contrary to a majority of the voting populace in Richmond who overwhelmingly voted in favor of institutionalizing Measure L. This legal maneuver by the CAA demonstrates a complete disconnect from the will of the people who empathize with the rising cost of housing in Richmond and the displacement burden that it places on low income community members.

## REGIONAL IMPACTS OF GENTRIFICATION

*Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives. - Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.*

### *A Loss of Community and a Dream*

Historically, individuals living on the bottom of the socioeconomic spectrum have been particularly vulnerable to the exploitative effects of gentrification. In the case of Richmond, positive change to the quality of life of lower income African Americans has only come when white wealth is invested back into their immediate neighborhood.

Thus, the overarching result of urban renewal is that just as impoverished African Americans begin to envision transformative change, they can no longer afford to live in a place called home. Dr. Stephen Sheppard, analyzes this further in his 2012 paper entitled "Why is Gentrification a Problem?":

gentrification is more interestingly considered as a problem for the neighborhoods and communities that are potentially subject to gentrification, rather than the individual poor households that reside in or might move away from areas subject to gentrification. The risk of displacement from gentrification was capable of changing the incentives that residents have to engage in any of the variety of activities that can improve a community. The risk of displacement that is characteristic of gentrification imposes a social cost on the neighborhood. This cost is borne by the community as a whole and not by only those persons who are poor or those who are displaced. (23)

By being pushed out of their respective communities, African Americans are never afforded the opportunity to contribute in a meaningful way. For those that stay, the painful loss of community leaves a lasting imprint.

As we have learned, without affordable housing options Richmond risks further displacement of its historic African American community whose forbearers helped to put the “Pittsburgh of the West” on the map. The contributions of working class African Americans in Richmond epitomize the American Dream as captured in 1931 by American writer and historian, James Truslow Adams, “that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement” (214).

For Dust Bowl deserters, The Great Migration provided hope in the acquisition of the American Dream. For a time that dream seemed within reach, but with the end of World War II, the income trajectory for many African Americans moved from upwardly mobile in the 1930s and 1940s, to a regressive cycle of poverty in the 1950s that continues to this day. There is little doubt in this writer’s mind that Richmond would have not have become what it was during World War II, a bastion of power and symbol of pride, without the commitment of black Richmonadians.

Author Ta-Nehisi Coates writes “The Dream thrives on generalization, on limiting the number of possible questions, on privileging immediate answers” (50). Coates question of generalization begs the reality of the American Dream, and for what cost does one have to pay to actually purchase rights to this fairy tale?

### *Flipping the Dream*

As gentrification restricts and pushes out lower income residents, one of the most debilitating restrictions is house flipping. According to a 2015 Richmond Pulse article, Edgardo Cervano-Soto reports “people who come in and buy a house, renovate it, put in about \$30,000 and leave with \$200,000.” House flipping has long been a pain point in low income neighborhoods. As wealthy investors flip homes, non-white, lower income

residents are displaced. Thus, the cultural and racial diversity of a neighborhood is lost further proving Coates assessment that the American Dream is nothing but a lie perpetuated by someone else's truth "for so long I have wanted to escape into the Dream, fold my country over my head like a blanket. But this has never been an option because the Dream rests on our backs, the bedding made from our bodies" (Coates 11).

As gentrification flourishes, low-income African American families are pushed out further from economic centers, and deeper into societal margins. *Salon* writer Larry Schwartz declared in 2016 "20% of neighborhoods in America's 50 largest cities were experiencing significant gentrification, with housing costs rising and poor residents being driven out." One cannot help but deduce that this construct is intentional as racial segregation is accelerated with the displacement of low income African Americans. Further, this marginalization ensures that economic prosperity is next to impossible, thus the cycle of generational poverty continues.

*Los Angeles Times* reporter Andrew Khouri wrote in September 2016 that Los Angeles house flipping is vigorous, "bidding wars are common and sales prices have topped last decade's bubble — a threshold surpassed by only certain neighborhoods, including the Westside and gentrifying neighborhoods in Northeast Los Angeles." Thus, house flipping is merely a numbers game for investors. As the dark side of house flipping is revealed, this get rich quick scheme pushes out and destabilizes communities leaving low income residents with an even larger wealth inequality than previously existed.

*A Dream, Deferred*

While San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond share a similar history within the pages of the African American Great Migration story, Richmond is distinct in that it is “further from the economic center of the region, with more modest housing stock, and still wrestling with a reputation for industrial pollution, struggling schools, and issues with crime” (Moore, Gambhir and Tseng 5).

From its incorporation in 1905 to present day, Richmond, The City of Pride and Purpose, has always been a blue-collar town that drew middle class Americans to its abundance of job opportunities and affordable housing. As San Francisco and Oakland have gone the way of gentrification, skyrocketing rental and real estate market prices have fundamentally priced many African American residents out of those cities. Richmond however, has long provided a beacon of hope for many low-income residents seeking to both live and work in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Tragically, this glimmer of hope continues to fade as many low income African Americans struggle to become homeowners due to the historic practice of “redlining” introduced by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) between 1934 and 1968. Alexis C. Madrigal of *The Atlantic* writes “the FHA **explicitly** refused to back loans to black people or even other people who lived near black people.” Thus, the consequences of racially biased housing practices continue to impact African Americans today. The impact sets further limitations on the ability of African Americans to participate in great white hope of the American Dream.

## CONCLUSION

Given that Contra Costa County concludes “\$80,400 for a family of four is considered low income” (Sciacca), it is no wonder that low income African Americans are leaving the region in record numbers. As displaced African Americans out-migrate from the San Francisco Bay Area, *Oakland Tribune* reporter Josh Richman writes “Antioch, in Contra Costa County's eastern reaches, saw its black population double while nearby Brentwood's almost quintupled. Manteca's black population more than doubled, Tracy's by 91 percent, Stockton's by 30 percent.” For now, the cost of living in these cities is lowered and affordable housing is within reach.

As the San Francisco Bay Area at large continues to bask in the wealth and whitening of this region, the insufferable loss of African Americans is a tragedy in the making. To maintain racial diversity and cultural balance, the city leaders and residents of Richmond must ensure that the passage of Measure L and will of the people is not overturned by developers hoping to cash in on the backs of low income residents. Further, Baltimore, another American city grappling with gentrification, is creatively curbing African American displacement by adopting a Community Land Trust (CLT) model. As reported in *The Nation* by Michelle Chen, the model is as follows:

the resident owns the property, while the community retains the land.

The resident pays an annual leasing fee, plus other mortgage and maintenance expenses. When the property is sold, price is controlled through a prearranged agreement with a community authority, with representation from neighbors and “public stakeholders” such as local



officials or community-development organizations. The homeowner can share in any appreciation of the sales value.

Through the promotion of a community-sponsored approach to urban renewal, the tide of African American displacement in Richmond can be stemmed and equitable urban revitalization can begin. As emphasized in the UC Berkeley Haas Institute research brief, for Richmond “to grow in an equitable way, it is critical that local policymakers and community groups act swiftly to implement local anti-displacement protections and policies to enable residents to stay and benefit from neighborhood change” (Moore, Gambhir, and Tseng).

As we have learned, gentrification in San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond is not an anomaly. As urban renewal and gentrification take hold, a demand for basic necessities such as: safer streets, and improved schools is leveraged. This demand translates to an increased quality of life for those living in areas targeted for urban renewal. While it is debatable whether or not the side effects of gentrification are positive, negative, or a balance of the two, the critical question is why should affluence negate basic human rights? An enhanced quality of life should apply to all Americans, not just those that can afford it.

Since we are all part of a larger whole, a thriving community should be a right, rather than a privilege that is ensured to every citizen of Richmond. The “G” word, gentrification, should encompass all facets of the commons and positively benefit society as a whole, regardless of where one falls on the scope of social stratification.

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