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Laura Stivers

School of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, Dominican University of California, laura.stivers@dominican.edu

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Climate Change, Smart Growth, Racial Oppression, and White Privilege

Laura Stivers

Dominican University of California

We see headlines every day about the warming of our planet and our rapidly depleting supply of natural resources. By 2025 the United States population will reach 350 million, 67 million more people than in 2000.¹ Clearly, the nation will need new housing units and jobs, but the question is whether we can muster the political will to accommodate population growth in sustainable ways and also reduce our carbon footprint to address climate change. Our current American love and support of single-family homes that leads to sprawl development patterns, heavy car use, and increasingly wider highways is not sustainable. Instead, it is important to think regionally and plan more compact, transit corridor and mixed use, walkable, higher-density development. Although the concept of sustainability is not new to Americans, most advocates are more open to actions that do not substantially alter their way of life (e.g. recycle, install solar panels or low-flush toilets, drive a hybrid car). More recent developments that focus on structural changes to address long-term sustainability like smart growth are a harder sell.

In this paper I will examine how people of differing environmental perspectives—namely anti-growth preservationists and environmental justice advocates—frame their responses to smart growth, using Marin County in the San Francisco Bay Area as a case study. Then I will offer a race analysis of these frameworks based on the thesis that to address climate change through smart growth we need to challenge the ways certain

¹ Robert H. Freilich and Neil M. Popowitz, “The Umbrella of Sustainability: Smart Growth, New Urbanism, Renewable Energy and Green Development in the 21st Century,” *The Urban Lawyer*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Winter 2010), 2–3.

groups try to retain their white privilege. As foundation for this thesis I will develop the norms of reparations and restoration to argue for an equitable smart growth approach that entails structural transformation to address our climate change crisis.

The smart growth movement developed in the 1990s as a response to sprawl. Rather than a policy of no growth, it aims to shape growth without degrading the environment or increasing traffic congestion. The idea is to concentrate growth in compact walkable urban centers so that housing and transportation are near jobs, shops, and schools.

Smart growth includes a number of principles:

- Create a range of housing opportunities and choices
- Create walkable neighborhoods
- Encourage community and stakeholder collaboration
- Foster distinctive, attractive communities with a strong sense of place
- Make development decisions predictable, fair and cost effective
- Mix land uses
- Preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas
- Provide a variety of transportation choices
- Strengthen and direct development towards existing communities
- Take advantage of compact building design²

The implementation of smart growth faces challenges. Policy obstacles include the zoning practices in the United States that support density prevention and the separation of uses. Land use planning is largely controlled by local governments, many of whom resist regional planning. Smart growth requires a regional focus to coordinate compact developments with transportation options. However, many citizens in white suburban enclaves oppose a regional focus under the guise of “local autonomy.” They claim to be concerned about democratic process and local governance, denying the label of NIMBYism (not in my backyard) or the charge of race and class exclusion.

² Janice C. Griffith, “Green Infrastructure: The Imperative of Open Space Preservation,” *The Urban Lawyer*, Vol. 42/43, No. 4/1, 269.

“Plan Bay Area: Strategy for a Sustainable Region,”³ approved in July 2013, is a smart growth development plan for the San Francisco Bay Area that grew out of “The California Sustainable Communities and Climate Protection Act of 2008” (SB 375).⁴ The law requires each metropolitan area to develop a Sustainable Communities Strategy that encourages future development to be in areas that are accessible via walking and biking and close to public transit, jobs, schools, and other amenities. One goal is for accessible, affordable, and diverse housing in neighborhoods where transit, jobs, schools, and services are located near people’s homes. Another goal is protection of the region’s unique natural environment, which includes both agriculture and open space.

Marin residents, 80% of them white, generally have liberal social and political leanings and environmental inclinations. Yet, more than 61,000 people currently commute to Marin each day for work because they cannot afford to live in the county, causing unnecessary carbon output into the atmosphere each day, not to mention noise and air pollution.⁵ And whereas Marin has beautiful protected open space, across the bridge in Richmond, residents—70% of whom are people of color—live near oil refineries and truck depots. Smart growth proposals when done correctly should include preservation of land forms and attention to social equity concerns. Regionally coordinating transportation and land use planning to implement growth where there is already transportation infrastructure in place can stop sprawl that causes increased energy consumption, greater vehicle emissions, increased ozone pollution, and destruction of wildlife habitat and farmland. More compact development that is designed to accommodate all income levels can help us meet our climate change goals by having fewer people commuting to work. Furthermore, such development can result in more vibrant and diverse communities. Many environmentalists openly embrace these changes. I’ll turn next to those who do not.

³See “Plan Bay Area: Strategy for a Sustainable Region,” Association of Bay Area Governments and Metropolitan Transportation Commission (adopted 18 July 2013), http://files.mtc.ca.gov/pdf/Plan_Bay_Area_FINAL/Plan_Bay_Area.pdf.

⁴A previous law is also important: Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006, or Assembly Bill (AB) 32, is a California State Law that fights climate change by establishing a comprehensive program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from all sources throughout the state.

⁵“A Portrait of Marin 2012,” American Human Development Project of the Social Science Research Council, 7.

Environmental Frameworks in Relation to Smart Growth *Anti-Development Preservationists*

The environmental movement in the United States started under the mantle of wilderness preservation, with the creation of the Sierra Club in 1892 and subsequent lobbying to create numerous national and state parks and open space preserves. The movement developed in response to the steady creep of development and environmental destruction and pollution to every corner of the nation. The wilderness preservation movement gained impetus in middle- to upper-middle-class white communities in part because of particular ideologies associated with cities and wilderness at the time. As urban areas became more industrial and crowded, white male writers extolled the therapeutic and spiritual benefits of escaping to the wilderness for solitude and aesthetic pleasure, away from “immuring civilization.”⁶ For example, in 1930, preservationist Robert Marshall wrote:

In a civilization which requires most lives to be passed amid inordinate dissonance, pressure and intrusion, the chance of retiring now and then to the quietude and privacy of sylvan haunts becomes for some people a psychic necessity. It is only the possibility of convalescing in the wilderness which save them from being destroyed by the terrible neural tension of modern existence.⁷

Of course the “some people” Marshall refers to were primarily white men who benefited from the industrial revolution and had the means to take time off and travel to hard-to-reach wilderness locales. Others were doomed to the crowded industrial cities and the “tensions” of modernity!

Despite the narrowness of the environmental movement at its inception, it was responsible for preserving large tracts of land that have been crucial to the sustainability of many ecosystems that house diverse plant and animal species. In Marin County, a preservation movement began as early as the 1930s when “four

⁶ Robert Marshall, “The Problem of Wilderness,” in J. Baird Callicott and Michael P. Nelson, *The Great New Wilderness Debate* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 1998), 89.

⁷ *Ibid.*

women, members of the Marin Garden Club, became alarmed that completion of the Golden Gate Bridge would make Marin an easy car commute from San Francisco and bring an influx that would jeopardize the county's open hills and valleys."⁸ The vast acres of open space preserves and the existence of national and state parks are attributable to the efforts of environmentalists. For example, preservationist environmentalists were successful at keeping large developers out of West Marin, creating Point Reyes National Seashore in 1976.⁹ Furthermore, farmers and environmentalists, traditionally wary of one another, formed relationships and created the Marin Agricultural Land Trust in 1980 to protect farms while also supporting adjacent properties as wildlife corridors to preserve habitat and watershed.

Although there are plenty of preservationists in Marin who support smart growth, there are others who adamantly oppose it. The former see it is a way to accommodate the inevitable population growth without losing the hard-won gains for open space and farm preservation. The latter equate regionally-planned smart growth efforts with overdevelopment, government social engineering, and developer profiteering, sacrificing quality of life, environmental preservation, and the 'small town' character of Marin. As critic Richard Hall says, "For profit, market rate high-density housing is being pushed under the guise of sustainability and saving the planet; opposition is dismissed as fear mongering."¹⁰ Their response is to oppose regionalism and demand local autonomy and control.

Anti-development preservationists feel unfairly labeled as promoting NIMBYism or even as being racist when they oppose smart growth plans that include higher density affordable housing units. They argue that they are not advocating exclusion or being racist, but are instead concerned about democratic participation and community choice in how their communities grow. Resident Bob Silvestri writes:

⁸ Marin Conservation League, <http://marinconservationleague.org/about-us/history.html>.

⁹ See the film *Rebels with a Cause*, <http://rebelsdocumentary.org/>.

¹⁰ Richard Hall, "True Solutions for Transportation & Housing," *San Rafael Patch* (3 February 2014), <http://patch.com/california/sanrafael/facing-facts-to-solve-housing--transportation-issues>.

the existence of high-priced suburban communities like those found in Marin is true in every metropolitan area in the country. *It's the price we pay for a free society.* So this fact of life, in and of itself, is neither discriminatory nor justification for running roughshod over local zoning control.¹¹

Silvestri and others feel that higher-density affordable housing in Marin would destroy the small-town character and peacefulness of communities in Marin.

Anti-development preservationists argue that Marin County, with its livable scale and balance of developed land to open space, is a good model of sustainability. In 2010, to address climate change and cut greenhouse gas emissions, the county launched the community choice energy program, whereby customers can purchase power from renewable sources. Many residents, who have the means, have installed solar panels, low-flush toilets, and energy-saving appliances; buy food through community-supported agriculture and at farmer's markets; and drive electric or hybrid cars. They tend to support forms of sustainability that do not require much lifestyle sacrifice over smart growth and transit-oriented development that encourages denser smaller housing and minimal car use.

Environmental Justice Advocates

The environmental justice movement has been concerned primarily about environmental racism, a term first coined in 1987. The first National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit met in Washington DC in 1991. The core issue for attendees was not wilderness preservation but rather what constitutes healthy, livable, sustainable, and vital communities in the places where people live, work, and play. Environmental justice advocates have documented the disproportionate impact of environmental contamination on communities of color and the adverse health effects that have resulted. They have also noted the racial discrimination in formulating and carrying out environmental policy and have argued that the narrow vision of

¹¹ Bob Silvestri, *The Best Laid Plan: Our Planning and Affordable Housing Challenges in Marin* (self-published, 2012), 83.

environmentalism was and continues to be a product of white privilege and white supremacy.

Although environmental justice advocates support smart growth in theory, they can be critical of it in practice. They fully support smart growth projects that are truly transit-oriented and include adequate units of affordable housing. They want communities where residents can live, work, shop, and play without owning an automobile or even having to use public transit on a daily basis. Carl Anthony, founder of the Oakland-based environmental justice organization Urban Habitat, puts it this way:

The pursuit of metropolitan, regional, and neighborhood equity...is a mobilization led by social justice advocates, civil rights organizations, and labor unions concerned with issues of fairness in the way metropolitan regions grow. It seeks to address not only what communities are against but also what they are for: healthy neighborhoods with convenient access to good schools, affordable housing, parks, and grocery stores; equitable public investments; and access to opportunity.¹²

The residents the movement champions, for the most part, already use public transit and do not own a car. Having access to affordable housing near good jobs would be a boon for low-income residents and communities of color.

Environmental justice advocates argue, however, that smart growth proposals must be in conjunction with a regional movement to fight structural inequities. Without an “advocacy agenda driven by community-identified needs” low-income people are liable to find themselves stranded yet again, with smart growth development projects potentially displacing them from their homes to transit poor suburbs.¹³ Environmental justice advocates are also highly critical of development that is being done under the banner of “smart growth” yet devoted to parking and the movement of automobiles. In many areas, light rail systems that are created are

¹² Carl Anthony, “Livable Communities,” *Race, Poverty & the Environment* (Spring 2008).

¹³ *Ibid.*

only operating at 10 percent capacity.¹⁴ Without regionally coordinated and planned transit-oriented development and higher density housing being located near transit, people are likely to continue using their cars. Marin County is in the process of developing a seventy-mile light rail system, but if it is not well linked to other areas in the region or if housing is not concentrated near transit centers, it is hard to say how many riders it will serve.

Environmental justice advocates are extremely wary of smart growth efforts that lack an emphasis on regional equity and racial justice, especially in relation to housing, schools, healthcare and other amenities. The smart growth principle “Create a range of housing opportunities and choices” does not necessarily mean that the housing choices will be affordable for low-income families. For example, in November 2000 affordable housing advocates defeated smart growth management initiatives in Arizona and Colorado because they did not include sufficient low-income housing.¹⁵ Smart growth advocates often do not strongly promote affordable housing because of local opposition.¹⁶ Responsible leadership from state governments is often required to ensure low-income housing, but even then the results often do not promote racial justice.

Environmental justice advocates have cause to be concerned about smart growth plans as several studies have shown that smart growth policies have raised property values and rents and led to gentrification.¹⁷ This has especially been the case with development of urban cores, such as San Francisco and Oakland, where people of color are being pushed out of their communities as a result of rapidly increasing rents. Although the aim of most smart growth proposals is to have mixed-income housing, some developments end up providing housing for moderate-income, not

¹⁴ Edward H. Ziegler, “Sustainable Urban Development and the Next American Landscape: Some Thoughts on Transportation, Regionalism, and Urban Planning Law Reform in the 21st Century.” *The Urban Lawyer*, Vol. 42/43, No. 4/1 (Fall 2010/Winter 2011), 97.

¹⁵ Sheryll Cashin, *The Failures of Integration: How Race and Class Are Undermining the American Dream* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), 313.

¹⁶ Anthony Downs, “Growth Management, Smart Growth, and Affordable Housing,” Brookings Institute (29 May 2003), <http://www.brookings.edu/research/speeches/2003/05/29metropolitanpolicy-downs>

¹⁷ See R. Krueger and D. Gibbs, “The Sustainable Development Paradox,” 2007; A. Downs, “Smart Growth Why We Discuss It More than We Do It,” 2005; H. Pearsall, “From Brown to Green? Assessing Social Vulnerability to Environmental Gentrification in New York City,” 2010.

low-income families, and others make housing affordable for only ten years. Although the regional Plan Bay Area includes an emphasis on equity—increased funding for public transportation and more incentives for affordable housing and anti-displacement policies—it leaves implementation of smart growth development policies in the hands of local governments.

Race Analysis of Frameworks

Although anti-development preservationists sincerely support the preservation of open space and personal actions that promote sustainability (both of which are laudable), the fierce advocacy of some to protect and keep their large single-family homes and easily accessible car transportation thwarts regional and state efforts to address climate change through smart growth. Furthermore, although their concern about democratic participation and community choice in how their communities grow might appear to be legitimate values that are not intentionally exclusionary or racist, there is plenty of historical data that links promotion of local government and autonomy to exclusion and segregation. There is racism underlying much of this framework, but for the most part it is couched in language that is not overtly racist and its proponents would likely not consider themselves racist. What becomes very clear, however, in listening to their claims is a desire to protect white privilege and power, which in turn entails keeping the status quo of structural racism and neighborhood segregation intact.

If we were to look at the top 10 Marin NIMBY quotes about affordable housing compiled by the grassroots organization ‘Concerned Marinites,’ we would see the anti-development framework and for the most part no overt racist language but instead a lot of race-coded language such as “those people,” “people who rely on government welfare,” and “illegal immigration.” What stands out most clearly from this list is protection of white privilege and a deeply embedded consciousness of goodness and purity related to whiteness:

Marin’s NIMBY Top 10 Common Quotes About Affordable Housing

10. “I’m worried about traffic, noise pollution and carbon footprints.”

9. “We want to preserve our heritage, the character of our neighborhood and its small town-feel.”

8. "I'm concerned about the environmental impact on land use, air, and water."
7. "Those people will not pay property tax and we will be left to shoulder the burden."
6. "We need to fight for local control against big government who is telling us what to do."
5. "Affordable housing will put a strain on our neighborhood resources and the quality of our children's education."
4. "Building affordable housing benefits only the developers and people who rely on government welfare and handouts."
3. "Affordable housing will increase crime, encourage illegal immigration, and lower my property value."
2. "I value diversity, just not too much of it in my neighborhood."
1. "I support affordable housing, just not in my neighborhood!"¹⁸

The list voices concerns about environmental impact, a desire for local control, and a disdain for developers, all of which are stated aspects of the anti-development preservationist perspective on smart growth and higher density affordable housing. Although these are aspects of their stated framework, the other quotes on the list—about preserving “our heritage” and the character of our towns, avoiding traffic and noise pollution, and maintaining good schools, a low crime rate, and high property values—are implicit in their outlook, and are all about protection of white privilege (and its purity or “heritage”) and preservation of the status quo of racial segregation. In the following race analysis, I will critically assess the arguments for sustainability and local autonomy that anti-development preservationists make and note the difficulty of achieving structural change that addresses the climate crisis and promotes racial justice.

Sustainability

Anti-development preservationists in Marin should be proud of both their great success creating state and natural parks as well

¹⁸ From Concerned Marinites website <http://concernedmarinities.org/> (no longer exists – accessed 20 January 2014).

as open space preserves and of their individual sustainable practices, but this does not mean that Marin is a model of sustainability. The anti-development preservationists argue that more development will be unsustainable (increasing the carbon footprint with more cars, pollution, water use, etc.) and will encroach on open space. However, advocates of smart growth want to preserve open space precisely by having people live in denser developments near where they work and play so that they use fewer resources and can rely less on cars and more on sustainable forms of transportation. In light of the Bay Area's projected population growth and the fact that the average household carbon footprint is higher in suburbs than it is in urban core cities, a more robust conception of sustainability ought to include some version of smart growth.¹⁹

Environmental justice advocates argue that Marin does not house the polluting industries that support the high standard of living that residents of the county enjoy (with big homes and cars), nor does it shoulder the burden of its own waste. With such a reality, calls for preserving the small-town feel, character, and sustainability of neighborhoods in Marin is really about protecting white privilege and an idealized understanding of community. Such a vision of local community ignores the environmental hazards that residents of neighboring communities face so that Marinites can enjoy their open space and clean air. Resisting smart growth also puts the burden for addressing increasing population and affordable housing on others, further segregating neighborhoods and increasing inequality. Addressing climate change will not happen by residents simply putting up solar panels, shopping at farmer's markets, and recycling some of their waste. White privilege and racism have to be addressed if we are to truly create sustainable communities.

Local Autonomy

In recent community meetings about smart growth and affordable housing in Marin, there are repeated comments about the need for genuine community participation and a democratic open process as opposed to top-down regional or state mandates.

¹⁹ Christopher Jones and Daniel M. Kammen. "Spatial Distribution of U.S. Household Carbon Footprints Reveals Suburbanization Undermines Greenhouse Gas Benefits of Urban Population Density" *Environmental Science Technology*, 48:2 (2014), 895–902.

As one community member says “We need to get ABAG [regional Bay Area governing body] and Sacramento to understand that the unique characteristics of our communities are our strengths that can inform unique locally-driven solutions rather than obstacles to their simple-minded goals from the top.”²⁰ In the early twentieth century, many white communities used the premise of local governance and autonomy to exclude undesired land uses and populations through zoning. Zoning laws such as “one family per house,” exclusion of duplexes or apartments, and separation of industry from residential neighborhoods excluded low-income families, especially people of color, from particular neighborhoods. Of course other policies such as redlining, highways built through flourishing communities of color, and urban renewal also led to segregation and neighborhoods of concentrated poverty and wealth. The creation of local governance in suburbs, however, was clearly a way to stop financing public services to older low-income cities and a way to exclude people of color.²¹ Although zoning laws might not seem intentionally racist and classist, the results clearly are. According to ethicist Karin Case, “One of the most potent mechanisms of white supremacy is the way it becomes invisible to those in a dominant social location.”²²

Current residents in Marin are clearly calling on the well-worn trope of local governance and autonomy as a way to buttress white advantage. They are claiming that they are being oppressed by big top-down government in cahoots with developers, while failing to perceive the ways that their argument preserves a system of white supremacy. Focusing on the ways that their lifestyle is being compromised, anti-growth preservationists in Marin have tunnel vision with little to no awareness of the historical and current class and race oppression that supports their ability to live in Marin. Without a regional focus that emphasizes environmental sustainability in conjunction with equity and racial justice, we will not be able to reverse the tide of climate change because local areas will simply stymie efforts to support sustainable and equitable smart growth development plans.

²⁰ Silvestri, *The Best Laid Plan*, 98.

²¹ Cashin, *The Failures of Integration*.

²² Karin Case, “Claiming White Social Location as a Site of Resistance to White Supremacy,” In Jennifer Harvey et. al, Editors *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People On What We Need To Do* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 75.

Structural Change

Environmental justice advocates are concerned that even with a regional focus to address climate change, not enough emphasis will be put on equity, let alone racial justice. Their worries in relation to the Marin County process are well grounded because all participation in smart growth efforts is voluntary. Despite substantial transportation grant funding for making certain locations near public transportation hubs “priority development areas,” many communities in Marin have chosen not to cooperate with smart growth efforts. Although it would be a step forward if some communities agreed to smart growth development with sufficient affordable housing, environmental justice advocates are not interested in simply having token housing open for people of color in white neighborhoods. Environmental justice advocates argue for radical integration going both ways, where people of all income levels and racial backgrounds can live together in flourishing communities with natural beauty and sustainable forms of development.

Support of flourishing and sustainable communities in right relationship with the earth requires addressing the systems of white supremacy.

White supremacy in the United States is a pervasive social, political, and economic phenomenon. It is not only a personal ideology based on racial prejudice, but a *system* that involves complex and insidious cultural messages, institutional policies and practices, as well as the beliefs and actions of individuals.²³

Environmental justice advocates are not primarily concerned about integration as a goal but are instead focused on achieving healthy environments for people of color to live in. Segregation has been a way to justify unequal housing, education, healthcare, and more. Thus, a much more radical regional plan that includes smart growth with major emphasis on racial justice and equity in all aspects of our economic and political systems is necessary to avoid co-option of smart growth in support of white supremacy.

²³ Sally Noland Mac Nichol, “We Make the Road by Walking,” In Jennifer Harvey et. al, Editors *Disrupting White Supremacy From Within: White People On What We Need To Do* (Cleveland: The Pilgrim Press, 2004), 189

Addressing climate change through smart growth means challenging white privilege of living in idealized communities that are not truly sustainable or inclusive. The truth is that no one will flourish if we do not change our ways to address climate change. Rich communities will have more resources to address the negative effects of climate change but they will not be immune to the consequences. Segregated neighborhoods of concentrated wealth and poverty fosters the poisonous NIMBY rhetoric and fear of the “other.” Although the costs to poor neighborhoods are quite obvious, whites are often not aware of the costs of segregation and unsustainable suburban development. Law professor Sheryll Cashin writes, “Homogeneity breeds an inward looking self-interest. Homogeneity becomes its own entitlement—a fortress of advantage that must be defended.”²⁴ One cost is the price tag for living in a white neighborhood and the anxiety of making enough to keep up. Another cost is the negative consequences associated with long commute times—weight gain, traffic, air pollution, and accidents. Still another is the inability to relate to diverse groups of people, a loss of shared community, and fear. The truth is that only a handful of affluent people actually benefit from segregation and unsustainable forms of development.

Reconciliation, Reparations, and Restoration

Advocates of smart growth who see race and class exclusion and segregation as the problem may believe the solution to be an embrace of difference, a call for Martin Luther King Jr.’s *beloved community* where all can be reconciled in authentic relationship. Christian ethicist Jennifer Harvey calls this the “reconciliation paradigm.” Harvey argues that the current understanding of reconciliation today has generally been a white vision and that proponents tend to skip over the actual work that needs to be done in relation to reconciliation. White people often overlook structural justice and give priority to the work of relationship building between races. Furthermore, they do not take the onus of responsibility to resist and transform white supremacist systems and structural racism. Valuing one another more relationally is inadequate without attention to the ways our relationships are mediated by structures that benefit whites at the expense of people of color.²⁵

²⁴ Cashin, *The Failures of Integration*, 264.

²⁵ Jennifer Harvey, *Dear White Christians: For Those Still Longing for Racial Reconciliation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 74.

Focusing on inclusion of adequate affordable rental housing in proposed smart growth plans in Marin County, although laudable, is not sufficient. Transforming white supremacist systems and structural racism will take more than offering token housing to low-income families, many of whom might not even add racial diversity. Addressing climate change will require a more radical form of smart growth with an emphasis on equity and racial justice. We must make deep changes to the way we structure our communities, away from car use and sprawling homes and yards and towards mixed-income communities with excellent schools, transportation, jobs, and healthcare options for all. Furthermore, our dependence on fossil fuel must be challenged. An ethic that focuses on respecting and honoring our differences in support of authentic community does not get us very far in the face of entrenched protection of white advantage and the structural material realities of concentrated poverty near environmental hazards. Harvey supports instead an ethic or paradigm of reparations.

Whereas the reconciliation paradigm was connected to the Civil Rights movement for integration based on a vision of shared humanity, the reparations paradigm is more closely associated with the Black Power movement and a call for significant and transformative structural change and particularity. The Civil Rights end to legal discrimination in public accommodations did not require whites to sacrifice much. A reparations paradigm calls for justice in areas such as housing, jobs, and distribution of resources. It is about the deep material transformation that needs to happen. Furthermore, a reparations paradigm entails communities of color setting the agenda for the work of liberation, rather than deferring to white expectations and agendas. Historically, white support for the Civil Rights Movement waned when the conversation veered towards substantial structural change and decentering of white control. Proponents of a reparations paradigm argue that whites owe communities of color (must make reparations) for the structural violence and oppression that whites have benefitted from in the past and continue to benefit from still. In other words, reparations is about paying back what has been stolen. The focus shifts from cultivation of multicultural sensitivity and embracing difference found in a reconciliation paradigm to

repair and redress of harm.²⁶ The moral emphasis is on justice, not charity or compassion.²⁷

To be able to respond with integrity to the reparations paradigm, white people must understand their whiteness and how racial differences and supremacist racial structures were constructed to give them advantage. Harvey writes:

To speak of whiteness is to explicitly name the reality that white people live out real *agency-filled* choices in relation to racism and racial issues and to state that white people have a particular and active relationship to white supremacy and racial injustice.²⁸

Most whites (even many liberal whites) are oblivious to the meaning and material implications of their whiteness. Harvey notes that even when whites publicly agree with particular suggestions of structural change, they often dismiss the changes on a number of other practical grounds. For example, many Marinites agree that we need to address climate change and some believe that sustainable development and affordable housing ought to be implemented. Yet when particular projects emerge, many of these same people will resist a project based on concerns of traffic jams or overcrowded schools or on a so-called lack of democratic process for decision-making. Using reparations as the normative framework requires whites to not only analyze and understand their privilege from both a historic and a present-day lens, but also to work in solidarity with communities of color as they identify and work out solutions for the most pressing issues in their communities. In Marin, solidarity requires regional collaboration with communities of color to address the disparities that exist and to support climate change goals. An exclusivist emphasis on local control and promotion of the status quo ignores the moral claim on those with power and privilege to address harm done.

Reparations are not only owed to communities of color but also to the Earth. An emphasis on both reparations and restoration is necessary if we are to simultaneously address climate change and racial justice. Ecological restoration entails the recovery of

²⁶ *Ibid.*,129.

²⁷ *Ibid.*,144.

²⁸ *Ibid.*,135.

damaged or destroyed ecosystems. Ethicist Daniel Spencer argues for a theologically grounded restoration ethic that “retains the restoration of integrity in both human-divine and human social relationships, but expands these to include the earth and reframes them ecologically.”²⁹ Thus, ecological integrity entails “restoring and living *within* the earth’s ecological communities and processes.”³⁰ The anti-growth preservationists are correct that protecting open space is a crucial piece of restoration. They need to take the next step, however, of supporting development that encourages people to live *within* the earth’s ecological communities and processes (e.g. low carbon footprint). Spencer argues that we have a moral obligation to restore what we have damaged and that deepening our commitment to the particular places we inhabit will open us anew to the wonder of the planet we call home. Reparation entails restoring something that has been lost—the integrity of the earth and the integrity of our human place in that earth.³¹

What would embracing a reparations and restorations paradigm in relation to climate change and smart growth mean in practical terms? The first step is listening to what environmental justice groups are saying needs to happen so that we address both the climate crisis AND poverty/inequality. Reparations is about justice: redress and repair to the Earth and to communities that have suffered systematic and structural oppression and violence. Urban Habitat addresses climate justice through equitable development. Their climate justice work aims to integrate a race and class analysis into climate policy debates so that implementation of state, regional, and local policies addresses both climate change and equitable development. They also advocate for increased participation and leadership of low-income communities of color in transportation, housing, zoning, and land-use decision-making.³²

Although a state and regional agenda to address climate change is necessary, the participation of low-income communities

²⁹Daniel Spencer, “Restoring Earth, Restored to Earth: Toward an Ethic for Reinhabiting Place,” in *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth*, Edited by Laurel Kearns and Catherine Keller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 428.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ *ibid.*, 430.

³² Urban Habitat, <http://urbanhabitat.org/>.

of color in decision-making is vitally important if we want to avoid smart growth efforts that do not promote equity and racial justice. Involving these communities in decision-making is not to claim local governance and autonomy trumps a regional agenda, as the anti-development preservationists would have it. Because most urban areas in the United State are segregated by race and class, equity, racial justice, and climate justice will only happen with a regional plan that aims to coordinate housing and transportation in the most equitable way possible.

The next step is for whites to own up to their advantage and privilege and work in solidarity with communities of color to promote climate justice through equitable development. Preservation of open space can still be a top concern, but it must be in conjunction with major lifestyle changes of living in smaller homes and relying less on fossil fuel. Simply building more higher-density housing on the edges of large sprawl neighborhoods will not suffice; nor will building more housing without substantial public transportation infrastructure and incentive for people to use it. Radical transformation of our urban areas is required, and this change will only be possible if those in power adopt a deeper and more inclusive understanding of sustainability and community. NIMBY exclusivist attitudes and other excuses used to protect white privilege must be challenged. Small lifestyle changes will not make a dent in the climate crisis. Furthermore, the expected population increases in the Bay Area have to be dealt with. Ad hoc local plans simply allow communities of privilege to protect themselves from the changes that will need to occur, leaving the burden on others.

The anti-development preservationists and the environmental justice advocates both support addressing climate change and both claim to value sustainability and community. That is where the similarity ends, however. The end goal of redress and repair in a reparations/restoration approach is to have truly sustainable and flourishing communities across regional areas. The anti-development preservationist understanding of sustainability is inadequate because it is based on cars and sprawling homes, both of which are energy consumers and polluters. Their understanding of idyllic small-town community leaves many outside its borders, left to commute in for work. Rather than calling for idealistic reconciliation between people in support of a more diverse and deeper understanding of community, we must instead do the work of transforming unjust systems and structures and planning truly sustainable and equitable communities.