

# Gentrification Forum

## “Understanding Gentrification in West Oakland”

**Moderator:**

**Surlene Grant - City of San Leandro City Councilmember**

**Panelists:**

- ❖ **Steve Edrington - Rental Housing Association of Northern Alameda County**
- ❖ **Jumoke Hinton Hodge - Community and youth development consultant**
- ❖ **Maureen Kennedy - Policy consultant specializing in housing & economic development**
- ❖ **Larry Rosenthal - Executive director, UC Berkeley Program on Housing & Urban Policy**
- ❖ **Greg McConnell - Principal consultant & legislative advocate, The McConnell Group**
- ❖ **Nancy Nadel - Oakland City Council West Oakland/District 3**
- ❖ **Charlene Wedderburn - Just Cause Oakland**

**October 20, 2007**

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Transcript of Panelist Remarks

SURLENE GRANT: Good afternoon, everybody, I'm Surlene Grant; I'm the, I'm the moderator. I know most of you, or many of you, from the various kinds of work that I've done here in the City of Oakland, as either a member of city staff or as a consultant on projects that have been happening in West Oakland. So, I'm glad you came. It's a very intriguing subject, gentrification. Um, it goes right along with a lot of other hot topics of the day that have to do with housing and community development.

So, we have a great panel of distinguished, uh, folks who are involved in the community and involved in this topic in a lot of different ways. Their biographies are out in the front. You should have picked them up. Um, I'm not going to read through each and every one of them, but I will just call out who we have here, not in any particular order other than how they show up on the piece of paper. We have Larry Rosenthal, from U.C. Berkeley, uh, the Berkeley program on housing and urban policy. We have Charlene Wedderburn. Charlene is a native of, um, Oakland and grew up in West Oakland and she is here, um, in her role as a member of the Just Cause organization. We have Nancy Nadel, our councilmember representing this district. She, as our councilmember, lives in this district and she was living in this district even before she became a councilmember. She an environmentalist, a scientist, uh, by formal training, and occupation, when she wasn't being a politician. We have Greg McConnell. Greg is a consultant and legislative, uh, advocate working in housing and community development. We have Maureen Kennedy. Maureen is also, um, she is – she is short here. Her, her bio here is very short, but she has a very, uh, long history of involvement with housing and economic development issues, and we're glad she's, we're glad everybody's here. And we have Steve Ed, Edrington. Steve is with the rental housing association of northern California, and that is a business association of property owners who rent, mostly apartments, yeah? Apartments. And we have Jumoke Hinton Hodge. And Jumoke, many of you know in her community, uh, activism roles and her youth development work here in the community in West Oakland. She has, in the past, also been very involved in activities in San Francisco. So that, in brief, is our panel.

Um, when you talk, when, when we, talk about gentrification, issues of housing, places, building places, uh, in urban environments, especially, such as Oakland, it is inevitable that, uh, discussions will come up, uh, around race, uh, around income, around social status, um, and I just want to say for the sake of this discussion, we are going to allow people to refer and talk in terminology that they are comfortable with. It may not be something that you are comfortable with, but as long as it is not just outright insensitive, um, I'm going to allow it. Um, there are difficult conversations to have, and people have to say the things the way they need to say them. Um, so I just wanted to say that as a ground rule.

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We are going to start the conversation by reflecting on the terminology of gentrification that was offered by Benjamin Grant<sup>1</sup>, no relation, and, um, whether it's good or bad or however you relate to it, that's, that's our starting point, because we, we could have started a number of different ways, and this is just one universal starting point. Uh, so with that, one of the reasons this discussion, the way I understand it, one of the reasons this discussion is so important, uh, to the West Oakland community is because of the changes that have happened over the years with West Oakland. There may be some of you here who are, are really, really versed on the history of West Oakland. But, uh, West Oakland, back in the, back in the day, uh, in the early, early railroad days, when it was the terminus of the rail, of the railroad coming from east to west. Uh, West Oakland was the launching off point, or the departure point, for many people to go wherever they wanted to go in the rest of the country. And West Oakland also served as a playground for a lot of the people coming from San Francisco and the peninsula. Um, working families of various different, uh, ethnic and racial hues lived in West Oakland, so it was not necessarily, black. You have stories of Italian families, famous Italian families who lived here, famous families of European descent who lived here. Uh, as industry came, uh, more and more black people came to work in the shipyards, and the railroads, and it became pretty much a black community, and stayed that way for many, many years, and then we started to see shifts in the population, and shi, uh, shifts in the populations of people who lived here. And, um, then with, with the current housing, and the current economics of housing, we've seen shifts in the opportunities, of, uh, of, for people to own, here. And that has cause, that has caused a change in the community, and thus, this conversation today.

So, without any other comments from me, I'm just going to read out loud the definition of gentrification. It's on the top of your program. Then I'm going to ask, in some kind of random order, uh, for, uh, for the panelists to, to address the questions. They'll be give – the, the definition, I'm sorry. They'll be given roughly five minutes. Young Schuyler here is our timekeeper. Panelists, when you see, um, yellow, you'll know that you probably have about two minutes left. When you see red, it means your time is up. But we're not having a, uh, City Council meeting right now. So, I'm not going to just say "STOP". But, I hope that you would be conniz, cognizant enough to wind up your point. So, with that. . .

"Gentrification is a general term for the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, a related increase in rents and property values and changes in the district's character and culture."

All right. So these little pieces of paper have everybody's name on them, and I really haven't been paying attention to them, so I'm going to pu, pull the one in the middle, and that's. . . Gregory McConnell.

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<sup>1</sup> "What is Gentrification?", Benjamin Grant,  
[http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/flagwars/special\\_gentrification.html](http://www.pbs.org/pov/pov2003/flagwars/special_gentrification.html).

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(general laughter)

GREGORY MCCONNELL: Lucky me.

STEVE EDRINGTON: Do you want a microphone, Greg?

MCCONNELL: Uh, can you hear me alright? I prefer that, not to have to hold anything. Uh, first of all I want to thank the moderator, and I also want to thank all the people in attendance. I think this forum is a huge public service and gives people an opportunity to deal with an issue that can be very hurtful, can be divisive but doesn't necessarily have to be. I think we can, uh, take some of the emotion out of it and deal with it objectively. And also I want to thank Larry and the WOPAC, because I think some of the questions that are raised in here are really, really, really very good questions.

(applause)

GRANT: Okay.

MCCONNELL: Uh, and importantly, and, and, and at the end of the day, I hope something good comes out of all this. Uh, I read the definition that uh, Surlene just read, and you know I look at gentrification as a great big word. Ofttimes it is a big word that has a pejorative<sup>2</sup> context. Sometimes it is viewed as, to suggest that bad wealthy people are moving into a neighborhood and robbing all the good poor people. So if you ask the question in that way, should good, you know should bad wealthy people be able to rob, uh, uh, to uh, get good poor people out of the neighborhood, the ques, answer obviously is no, they shouldn't be able to do that. Then the question is, really, is that the issue?

Uh, we did, uh, some surveys, and when I say we, this is the, uh, Better Housing Coalition, which is a group of people who are involved in major uh, development of home building in the city. And we did some surveys in 2006 and we did some surveys in 2007. We asked the questions of the community, voting uh, members of the city, what they thought about some of the things that were going on in development, inside of the City of Oakland.

One of the questions we asked is, "Over the past several years, Oakland has undergone a great deal of development and neighborhood revitalization. In your opinion, have these changes generally benefited the City of Oakland or not?"

The answers were "Yes, generally benefited", 65%. "No", 25%. "Don't know", 9%.

We also asked, for each of the following statements, please tell us if you agree strongly, agree somewhat, disagree somewhat, or disagree strongly.

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<sup>2</sup> pejorative: "having a disparaging, derogatory, or belittling effect or force" – [www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

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“Builders should focus on revitalizing run-down areas rather than developing new sites.” The percent saying they agreed strongly or somewhat was 81%.

The next question was “Construction of buildings on old warehouses and industrial sites reduces blight or improves neighborhoods.”

The percent saying they agreed strongly or somewhat was 79%.

And finally, as to what was relevant to today’s, uh, topic, on this question, we asked: “I’m going to read you two statements that represent opposing views. Please tell me which of these statements you agree with most.”

“New residents have energized the city.” “Changes in makeup have neg, negatively impacted Oakland neighborhoods.” “Mixed opinions, don’t know.” And the answer to those questions was that new residents have energized the city was 65%; changes in makeup have negatively impacted Oakland neighborhoods, 22%. And mixed opinions or don’t know, 13%. We did follow-up surveys just recently, and we found that those trends continue.

I don’t know how this audience, in this district, feels about those questions and whether their answers would be the same. But I do know that recently I had a stint on the Blue Ribbon Commission<sup>3</sup>, and as a part of that, we went to every district in the city. And it was interesting to find that, in districts 5, 6 and 7<sup>4</sup>, one of the major issues that people talked about was that they wanted to bring in more middle-class opportunities, more shopping, more retail; they wanted to improve the district. Uh, specifically a lot of people showed up saying that they did not want their areas to be, quote, dumping grounds, that was their word, not mine, for, uh, over-aggressive, uh, uh, ghetto-ization, if you will.

So, I see I got a yellow card, so I’m going to wrap this up quickly. Um, what I believe from these surveys and what I believe from my participation in these meetings and what I know from my history of having lived in inner cities, having grown up in cities that did change, in the neighborhoods that did some, that did change is that there are a lot of people in Oakland who want to see the use, who want to see the improvement of blighted areas, want to see the better use of underutilized areas. They also want to see better jobs. They also want to see better housing opportunities. And I don’t believe for a minute, that the answer is to say, we gif, if we have areas that are underutilized and underserved and under-performing, that we should maintain them simply because that would be a good thing to do. Uh, from our perspective the city needs a vibrant job and

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<sup>3</sup> The City of Oakland Inclusionary Housing Blue Ribbon Commission was created on October 31, 2007, after the Oakland City Council deadlocked over whether builders should be required to set aside 15% of their new developments for low income residents.

<sup>4</sup> Oakland City Council districts 5, 6 and 7 are the southern-most districts in East Oakland, comprising most areas south of 23<sup>rd</sup> avenue, including many low-income flatland neighborhoods.

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housing base to support all of its residents. I think that we should find the ways to increase housing opportunity for people at every level. And I don't think that we can allow ourselves to be party to this conflict of whether this is a class war, or a race war, or something like that. This is an Oakland, uh, uh, effort, generally, and I'd like to see all of it improve.

GRANT: Thank you. Um, Charlene, would you to comment on, uh, the gentrification definition and, uh, how you see gentrification, if this is even what you think it is?

CHARLENE WEDDERBURN: Um, sure. Uh, what, uh?

GRANT: Do you agree with it?

WEDDERBURN: Somewhat. I mean, it, it, it is, a generally, generally, gentrification is a word that um, a lot of folks are trying to <inaudible> with and trying to understand really what fuels the mechanism called gentrification and so, um, I would like to say that it's a matter of, it appears to be a matter of relativity, and relative to whose perspective you are looking from. And if you are looking through the lens of the developer, you are looking at a particular perspective. If you are looking through the lens of <inaudible>, you are looking at a particular pers, perspective. If you are looking through the lens of a politician, you are looking at a particular perspective. And if you are looking through the lens of those who are moving into the neighborhood and, and benefiting from um, gentrification, there is still yet another perspective. And then, finally, if you are looking through the lens of those who are being negatively impacted by gentrification and who are being forced out of their neighborhoods, then you are also looking at a, um, a, another perspective. And so, um, I think the common ground here though, is that we agree, that there are those who are moving in and there are those who are moving out. And so. . . Is this my five minutes?

GRANT: This is your five minutes.

WEDDERBURN: Okay. And so, um, today, I want to thank um, WOPAC, for, um, inviting Just Cause Oakland to be a, a part of this panel. And so today, I have the perspective of one who is looking through the lens of uh, someone who was raised in West Oakland, in the projects of West Oakland. Um, I lived in East Oakland. I lived in North Oakland. I currently reside in West Oakland. Also through the lens of an African-American mother who had three children, three young men, two of whom are still in the Oakland public school system, one is at the University of uh, Michigan, on a \$41,000 scholarship, um, and he hopes to keep a 3.2 average, it's renewable every year. This past year he had a 3.93 GPA and this, uh year he is bound and determined as a sophomore to get his 4.0. So you can tell I'm a proud mother, West Oakland born and raised up, from the projects.

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(inaudible remark from audience)

And so, as I continue, um, and I'm also looking through the lens of, uh, someone who worked in the housing industry, as a housing specialist slash advocate, where, um, I assisted folks coming out of the shelter system, um, to to get housing. And I'm also looking through the lens of Just Cause Oakland members and as a member of Just Cause, uh, with the membership and with staff we really grappled with this term and what it means and, and really trying to define, uh, all the aspects of it and through our collective experiences and, uh, through, uh, our group understanding number one we determined that, uh, gentrification is a process. A process that disproportionately displaces blacks and other uh working class people but disproportionately in West Oakland blacks are negatively impacted. We also from our analysis know it to be profit-driven; gentrification is profit-driven. We also know it to be, uh, something that is supported by the government. And lastly, uh, we can see partially as the results of gentrification, skyrocketing, um, housing costs and property values.

Now, once you've defined it, it doesn't necessarily mean that you know it in a real, uh, concrete, uh, world context, and so, as the membership, we needed to put a face to this. We needed to truly understand concrete examples of what gentrification, um, looked like. And so, for me, going through the Rolodex of my uh, of my neighborhood in my mind, uh, the most recent example that I can come up with, um, with gentrification being supported by the government is when Jerry Brown<sup>5</sup> came into office with his 10k plan<sup>6</sup> and with this 10k plan to bring ten thousand units to Oakland, uh, there were those of us who asked "Are they going to be affordable? Are we going to be able to move into these units?" Um, "Are we going to be able to have the American dream and, and improve our situation?" and so forth, and Jerry Brown told us, "if you can't afford to live here, go somewhere else and live." Government supported displacement.

And then I went through the Rolodex of my mind to understand this profit-driven, before in my analysis we're going to be profit-driven. And so the most recent example that I can give is that, I sat on three of Mayor Dellums' task forces<sup>7</sup>, one of which was the economic development task force, the city task force. And, the stories that were told, were totally unbelievable. Uh, a meeting by the city employees that had first-hand experience of how developers came into Oakland, not just through Mayor Brown's um, uh, term, but prior to that as well, came into Oakland, got money on the front end, to uh, construct, uh, buildings, development, made a profit on the back end, never had to pay back the front

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<sup>5</sup> Jerry Brown, former California governor, was the mayor of Oakland from 1998 to 2006.

<sup>6</sup> Mayor Brown's "10k plan" for construction of condominiums in the downtown and uptown areas, had as its goal "to attract shops and restaurants downtown, creating a lively, 24- hour atmosphere by providing a built-in customer base of 10,000 new residents." <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/02/02/MN98764.DTL>

<sup>7</sup> Mayor Ron Dellums, former member of the U.S. House of Representatives, was elected Mayor of Oakland in 2006. Upon winning the election, he created various task forces comprised of self-appointed volunteers, to prepare recommendations for action to address city issues.

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end, had no regards to the physical infrastructure, uh, for example when there was a hundred unit, um, construction going up, there was no analysis made whether or not the sewer system, for example, could, uh, sustain such an infrastructure. Um, we see through sub-prime, uh, loans, and through predatory lending practices the <inaudible> that what happened in West Oakland and in East Oakland, but as long as it was us, as long as it was black folks that were being negatively impacted, it was okay. But as soon as white America started experiencing bank foreclosures on their homes, it became a national crisis. What Just Cause Oakland and a number of other organizations have been saying for a long time is that there is a crisis going on. And I'm going to wrap up by saying that we see this as a social justice issue. And we are still grappling with, um, what this term, the true implications and ramification of gentrification. Thank you.

GRANT: Thank you, uh, Charlene. I kept trying, I'm, I'm glad we have the big red thing, because I kept trying to make contact, and all of you I'm sure will get here at some point and get involved in what you are saying, so, please, thank you for being cognizant of that.

I forgot, in my introductory comments, to explain the process of asking questions. Um, when we were talking about the gap in the room and all that. What our initial plan is, is for you to write out your questions on a comment, on cards that have been made available by the program planners, and then we will ask those questions when we finish this, uh, presentation. So, you may have questions about the presentations that the panelists are making now. Ask write those questions down and we will ask them, um, later.

(inaudible question from audience)

GRANT: If you cannot write, uh, one of the people with WOPAC, Stefanie or, uh, Larry, I'm sure would be glad to assist you.

All right, um, moving on, we have Maureen Kennedy. I'd like Maureen to talk to, to the terminology of gentrification. Um, in addition, maybe you could talk to it from just housing, and the economics of housing, when gentrification happens. Or whatever other prepared comments you would like to make.

MAUREEN KENNEDY: Okay, okay, I'll, I'll try and be a bit, seven points in five minutes. Uh, with regard to this definition, the only quibble that I would, the primary quibble I would have is that it doesn't, it doesn't talk specifically about displacement. Uh, Paul Leonard<sup>8</sup> and I spent time, we spent about a year back in 1999 and 2000 -- really a while ago -- looking, uh, talking to people in four cities across the country both what's happening with us here in the East Bay <inaudible> reading the Chronicle, reading all the Oakland papers, uh, here at

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<sup>8</sup> Maureen Kennedy and Paul Leonard co-authored a discussion paper for the Brookings Institution Center on Urban and Metropolitan Policy and for PolicyLink, entitled Dealing With Neighborhood Change: A Primer on Gentrification And Policy Choices, April 2001.

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that time as well. We spent a lot of time on the ground talking with people on the ground, living in, in neighborhoods in Cleveland, Denver, Seattle, San Francisco Bay Area, and also Boston about this issue so a lot of what we are talking about comes out of that process. Part said, based again on what those perception was, whether displacement was part of the process of gentrification so that if you had put, say as is the case in, in Cleveland, warehouses that had been used as warehouses for years, for generations, for centuries actually, in the case of Cleveland, that were really kind of physically isolated, the fact that highly <inaudible> were moving into them didn't necessarily mean that gentrification was going on. Definitely it meant that new changes were going on. Definitely it meant that community redevelopment and development was going on, but with regard to gentrification, um, our sense was it just wasn't <inaudible> had to be there.

Um, our sense also was that gentrification was a real issue; the word, however, was problematic and other folks have kind of said that as well. Uh, what we tried to do was pull apart what we all really mean by gentrification, particularly since one, so we can be a little bit more clear about it, and two, if we ever have a hope that we're going to address it, the way to do that is to pull it apart, let's say, and one piece is, let's say, um, displacement. What can we do to soften the blow, eliminate the blow of displacement? That gets you down to the very concrete, hands on, point of actually making change.

Our definition, therefore, was that the process, the process is when high income households displace lower income residents of the neighborhood, changing the essential character and flavor of that neighborhood, pretty similar to what you were talking about.

Um, we also understood that, at the ground level, there are positive and negative consequences. Think about this for just a second. Uh, <inaudible> in Oakland, who own their home, saw, obviously, a price value increase in their home, uh, over the last, let's call it, five or seven years. Um, there were a lot of people who really recognized that they had lots more, um, financial options; they could sell their house, send kids to college, move to Michigan, whatever, um, that, that's a real positive for some people. At the same time, those same people and other people, obviously, were adversely impacted by rent increases, commercial rent increases. So we really broke the process down into about twenty different things that we heard people saying were the effects of the gentrification process. Some of them were positive, some of them were negative, some of them were positive and negative at the same time. So, as a result, where you have 65% of folks saying that generally, the process, was it gentrification specifically, or community change was a positive, net net net

MCCONNELL: Right.

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KENNEDY: That is not inconsistent with the fact that it could be really negative for some significant chunk of the population in that neighborhood. Uh, so it's really important to break it down and deal with it on a household-by-household kind of basis.

The other thing we concluded was that time was a crucial factor in this. When you have – it's almost like that frog in the boiling water – when you have community change over, happening over a thirty year period, which is for instance the case where I grew up, on Capitol Hill in D.C., you know, it's, it's, it's a very gradual process and there's not any, you know, any <inaudible> any place where you can point and say, "This is bad", kind of adverse impact. When it's bad, as it was, certainly, in many parts of the country, but by no means all parts of the country, over the last, uh, seven, eight years, it becomes much more problematic.

The key thing that we thought was an important conclusion and one that we got agreement on when we talked to uh, policy leaders, <inaudible> leaders, as well as private sector developers, when I say to them, okay, community change. Let's agree it has positive impact for some folks, financial, cultural, schools, da da da. It has negative impacts for some people, rent increases, loss of support networks, loss of jobs, da da da da da. It's not fair for the burden of community change to fall on the shoulders of those who are least able to afford it. Every single person we talked to said, "No. You're right. That's not fair." And so I think that helps us focus, where we go on this issue to a, a place where <inaudible>. You can't just stop the economy from changing but you can certainly go in and target those folks who are least capable of managing the change that's being forced on them.

GRANT: All right. Thank you. Um, our next, our next speaker will be Larry Rosenthal.

LARRY ROSENTHAL: Oh, good afternoon, everybody, I'm honored to be a part of this conversation, I'm Larry Rosenthal, and I work at U.C. Berkeley. I study housing markets and, uh, metropolitan funds and, uh, I'd like to thank WOPAC, Larry and, uh, Sophie and everybody who put time into this afternoon and for all of you coming out on a beautiful afternoon to take part. Um, I'm not really here to talk at you, I really want to talk with you, so I'll try to be brief. Uh, maybe I'll use up less time than, the, before the, the red card comes out.

I lost my home in San Francisco last year. Uh, it was an 18 year rent control unit and, uh, <inaudible> landlord told me that I could, uh, I could either buy for an exorbitant amount or I could leave. And, uh, so for those of you in the room who have felt the pinch of gentrification, um, I feel your pain, I feel my own. So I'm here with that vantage on the conversation.

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Uh, if someone walks with me like this and says, “I am being gentrified,” or “I was gentrified” or “I have been gentrified personally.” That is a claim that is entitled to respect. And it’s entitled that the community listen to it. We don’t often hear those claims because more often than not gentrification is a political claim, not a personal claim. Personal testimony is scarce. But when you hear it, when you hear, well, how did that sting, uh, occur, then listen, listen carefully. That person is speaking from the heart, and they’re speaking from their emotions.

I, I’d like to just highlight a couple of subtle things that I think are important. Um, I agree with Charlene that, that we need to think subtly and, in nuances about what gentrification is, and what the issue really involves. It’s very complicated. People speak in absolutes about social conflicts. Generally they don’t have a very careful understanding. Um, so, if you begin to speak in absolutes today, uh, you may be receiving sharp questions from me.

Um, this, I think that, that throwing the “G word” around in this conversation tends to be very divisive. And I would like to ask careful questions of those who would be promoting the use of the word “gentrification,” uh, to their political advantage. Uh, to speak carefully about – and strategically – about their choices, and whether that term, the gentrification term, actually divides more than it unites.

Um, I would go into the etymology<sup>9</sup> of um, uh, “gentrify”. It used to be that it meant, um, bringing of the middle-class to poor quarters. That’s not what I hear in this room so far, it’s bringing of the extremely wealthy to the extremely poor. Let’s couch it as violently, and, uh, kind of, with as much cache as we possibly can to get people’s attention. It comes from the same word as “gentle,” like “gentlemen,” “ladies and gentlemen,” people behaving by neighborhood custom, being nice to one another. Uh, a neighborhood becoming more gentler and perhaps, to quote the President’s father<sup>10</sup>, kinder as well. Uh, that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Uh, of course it’s viewed very pejoratively by those who are promoting neighborhood change because they are careful they have to use the word revitalization <inaudible> is to do violence to some kind of cultural value they want to continue there.

Ever since the days of urban renewal in the 1950’s we’ve come to understand that nowhere in urban America has renewed without generating conflict. Enormous conflict between the newly housed and the newly displaced. Between gentrify yours and gentrify these. Between those who want to think about urban policy in terms of place, and those who want to think of urban policy in terms of people.

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<sup>9</sup> etymology: “an account of the history of a particular word or element of a word”—  
[www.dictionary.com](http://www.dictionary.com)

<sup>10</sup> In his first inaugural address, President George H. W. Bush stated, “America is never wholly herself unless she is engaged in high moral principle. We as a people have such a purpose today. It is to make kinder the face of the Nation and gentler the face of the world.”

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Uh, our conflicts over urban renewal help <inaudible> the civil rights movements of the 1960's, and of course have changed the way we think about these issues today. Um, I think that it's sometimes very hard to translate the language and the angst of civil rights into this gentrification debate. Uh, I think that it's very hard for folks who are charging the world with gentrification to point their finger at any one <inaudible>. It's very diffuse. Uh, emotion and economics have never really gotten along very well in the civil rights movement, uh, particularly where the causes are perhaps outside of community control. Can West Oakland dictate what housing prices do? Can West Oakland dictate what regions do to, to produce jobs? A lot of this is happening to West Oakland as a spectator, and so why do we have arguments about what West Oakland can do about forces that are beyond their control. Um, I think there's an unavoidable inconvenience that is sometimes bred by our best intentions, and, uh, that's where I <inaudible> to discuss, um, gentrification today.

Here's my red card. Let me say one word, uh, about this and be quiet. Those who are most up in arms about gentrification may often end up shooting themselves in the foot. Like it or not, there are parts of this city, and many other cities, that are desperately in need of new energy, new infrastructure and new hope. Attracting builders and businesses to invest in such places is a key ingredient. If those investors sense that they are going to face endless community resistance, or that their constructive ideas for neighborhood improvement are going to be held hostage in a municipal improvement conflict, they'll take their dollars, and their energies, and their job creation, and their new housing units, and they'll just fold their tents and invest elsewhere. What is happening is those fighting the forces of gentrification stand up and claim "We won." One question I'm going to ask today is that, when we successfully defeat gentrification, what have we really won? And what have we lost?

(Murmur from audience)

GRANT: We, you can, you can comment after the panel finishes, and we'll, we'll let you ask questions then. Jumoke?

JUMOKE HINTON HODGE: Wow, um. Thanks. Ms. Yvonne.

YVONNE SMITH (from audience): Yes.

HODGE: We're going to all do our. . .

SMITH: I just want to ask you. . .

HODGE: Ms. Yvonne! We're going to do our five minutes.

SMIT: <inaudible> you're speaking over my head. I don't want you guys to do that. I don't know what pej, "pejorative" means, and "etymology."

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ROSENTHAL: <inaudible>

SMITH: <inaudible> from somewhere, but I'm from West Oakland. Bred, still live in West Oakland, and I don't understand those words. And please don't try to snub me by using words I can't understand, whether they're technical or not.

ROSENTHAL: Please don't try to take over the room with your personal experience.

SMITH: Oh!

GRANT: Okay! Okay, okay, okay, okay, okay! Okay, okay! Okay!

SMITH: Oh, excuse, pardon me! I'll go have a cigarette.

GRANT: What's her name? Ms. Yvonne! Ms. Yvonne!

HODGE: Ms. Yvonne! You're going to miss me speaking!

SMITH: <inaudible> I don't understand what you're saying, I'm supposed to tell you. You're talking over my head!

GRANT: Yes ma'am.

SMITH: <inaudible> like you said, don't worry about <inaudible>

ROSENTHAL: You're, you're <inaudible>

GRANT: Larry, Larry, Larry, please be quiet. Ms. Yvonne, we, we welcome you to come back and participate.

SMITH: I'll be back.

GRANT: Thank you. All right. Uh, to the panel. Um, you know, like in any other thing, when we, we talk in our subjects that we are, I mean she makes a good point. We talk in the subjects that we are comfortable with. We use acronyms or what ever.

EDRINGTON: Jargon.

GRANT: Just. . .

EDRINGTON: Jargon.

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GRANT: Jargon, thank you, so just be aware of that, that's a good point. We, we will get in a discussion later. We will clear up terminology later. Um, Jumoke. And I know you want Ms. Yvonne here.

Hodge: I want Ms. Yvonne here!

GRANT: Because she's your community member, but

McConnell: Why don't you, why don't you let <inaudible> you can do that too, but

Hodge: Yes, I will do that.

GRANT: Okay, we're

ROSENTHAL: Why don't you speak? I'll go in <inaudible> place on that.

GRANT: All right. All right, all right, Larry.

(voices from audience)

GRANT: Larry, yeah, I think you should. All right, we're going to let, we're going to let

ORA KNOWELL (from audience): <inaudible> wait until the end and then everybody has really forgotten what was said and not <inaudible>

GRANT: All right.

KNOWELL: So I think that everything that was said should be responded to immediately, not wait somewhere down the line when it's all over and done and said.

GRANT: We have asked that you give the cards so that in the moment if somebody says something that you want to question, we can come back and ask them about that. When we were planning this we looked at the time it would take and we didn't want to get people bogged down. Because, you know what, to be honest, any one of these speakers, um, I'm going to assume you, Charlene, for an example, because we're, we're making eye contact, any one of these speakers could say something that would lead us to have an hour discussion just on what they said. So we were trying to make sure that we had a diverse panel, of diverse viewpoints, which evidently we have, so that people could say what they needed to say, and then we could come back and have a question-and-answer period about it.

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Again, I want to reiterate the first ground rule – pretty much the only one I laid out for this morning. I said that gentrification is a painful topic. We have to use terms that often people are not comfortable in talking about in mixed company. We have to use racial terms. We have to use economic terms. Uh, we have to talk about places where people live. If it was done in a spirit that was, maybe, out of innocence or no other since, no other level of vocabulary was appropriate, is available for the person to use, that was not meant to be spiteful or insensitive or derogatory, I was going to allow it. Uh, I'm still working in that model.

So, with that, while Jumoke is out doing the community building that we know she does here in West Oakland, um, I'm going to ask, uh, Nancy Nadel to, to comment.

NANCY NADEL: Uh, I'm, I'm going to take a little bit different perspective on, on, uh, as, as you said, I'm both a resident, a 27 year resident of, uh, West Oakland, and a policy maker for the last, uh, eleven years, on the city side. Uh, and so, as, as both a resident and a policy maker, I came to this community with, um, a view of what I was handed, which was pretty ominous. And, despite that image, uh, I had a view of what we were going to see, in a community, uh, for the future. Uh, so with my family and my community members, we, uh, framed a vision based on a sustainable development. That means environmental, uh, enhancement, um, uh, social equity, and, as well as economic prosperity. I'm thinking about the decisions that being made today as being, uh, decisions that were not strictly thought through <inaudible> by the people before us.

We envisioned a community where everyone was respected, no matter their financial standing, their race, gender or age, a safe community, that had a fine grain of mixed incomes and cultures, with greater density, near mass transit, parks, boulevards, good schools, clean air, I mean that's, that's the vision. But we were, uh, faced with a mess! Uh, we, and, and it's a mess that, it's no, no one person's fault, uh, it was the result of many people's fear and racism and greed over many years. And some of it's still around.

On the defi, deficit side, we had a, a community that was, uh, ridden with incompatible toxic industry next to residents, pur, poorly managed and vast complexes of very vulnerable housing projects, uh, that, that, uh, set a stigma about affordable housing. We had high numbers of residents with, with social problems, substance abuse problems, uh, and other mental health problems. High number of absentee landlords, high unemployment, uh, pollution from the freeway. Uh, all of these problems resulted in no financial investment in the area. Very little change at all. Very little change, not, not even normal community change unless except for people dying here. And people being born. Um, we had, uh, the abandonment of retail, very dilapidated housing stock, no curbs or sidewalks or street trees, no, no investment even by the government,

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really. Uh, the only investment we had from the government was BART<sup>11</sup> and the post office<sup>12</sup> which, which tended to, to solve regional problems and screw up our neighborhood even more.

Uh, on the positive side we had many great people. Uh, beautiful housing stock even though it was falling apart. More parks per capita than in other parts of the city. A great location with respect to the central uh, transportation, et cetera. Great <inaudible>, historic landmarks, some rent control. Lots of permanently affordable units, albeit concentrated in a way that's not healthy.

So, so this is what I came into. And uh, in trying to undo that mess, uh, has resulted in some positive things and some negative things, and some things that I just couldn't change because, as one vote of eight members on the council, you just can't get everything done uh, unless you have five.

So, so, uh, we started to do some of the uh, um, <inaudible> kind of a mixed use to try to encourage some outside investment.

(microphone feedback)

NADEL: What

MCCONNELL: I think it's <inaudible>

NADEL: Um, so, so we did have, uh, some investment in curbs and sidewalks, when the freeway collapsed, we had invested, uh, we had a state investment in Mandela Parkway<sup>13</sup>, the, the city put up, uh, rehab units for single family homes, uh we had some limited success with receivership, the Hope VI<sup>14</sup> um, uh, project integrated incomes somewhat. Uh, but, but then the mayor came and, and, uh, the former mayor, uh, he had a, a quick invitation to buy up Oakland. And I know that my, my uh, my <inaudible> it takes up seven minutes. So I hope you bear with me, uh

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<sup>11</sup> The Bay Area Rapid Transit System was built above ground down the center of Seventh Street in West Oakland as part of BART construction from 1966 - 1972. Noise from the tracks effectively destroyed the commercial viability of this main street in the area.

<sup>12</sup> A mammoth post office distribution center was built in West Oakland in 1969, causing the demolition of a thousand units of low-income housing.

<sup>13</sup> Following the collapse of the Cypress Freeway in the Loma Prieta earthquake on October 17, 1989, CalTrans built a replacement freeway following a different route. The site of the old freeway was turned into a landscaped parkway.

<sup>14</sup> The Federal Hope VI program, of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, has as goals "changing the physical shape of public housing" and "lessening concentrations of poverty by placing public housing in nonpoverty neighborhoods and promoting mixed income communities." "The first HUD HOPE VI project in Oakland's history, Chestnut Linden Court boasts 83 public housing units, 68 affordable apartments, a child-care center, a bicycle shop, a police substation and facilities to provide services like computer and job training to the project's residents." <http://www.bizjournals.com/sanfrancisco/stories/2004/03/29/focus23.html>

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GRANT: Keep, keep rollin'.

NADEL: Uh, I don't really want to rush through it fast, fast track, because it's very important. Uh, uh, the, the uh, the thing, the guidance when, when you're about to, uh, invite a lot of external private investment is to also have government invest in key uh, pieces of land, a land bank, so that you can ensure some, uh, mixed income development in all, in all these parcels. I, I urged my colleagues on the council to do that; they refused to do it. Uh, we, I wanted to have eviction protections. Uh, we tried to hold the council to see if we could uh, uh, get eviction pre, uh, protections in, in policy and we couldn't. We had to pass that through the ballot. Uh, we established redevelopment areas. We have this WOPAC<sup>15</sup> as a result, uh, and, and, and some additional <inaudible> has brought our, our ability to, uh, increased our ability to, to, to try to solve some of the problems. Um, and uh, and we had built some, uh, some, some nice affordable housing. Uh, we had two housing task forces<sup>16</sup> that, that recommended, uh, inclusionary zoning for which we had no votes, a housing trust fund, for which we had no contributors except for the city, and, uh, supportive services for homeless, uh, housing, uh, for which we had support for the policy but not to fund it.

Uh, so, so, we had the, you know the other things that we did, we broke up Acorn<sup>17</sup> to, to include some, uh, first-time homebuyer housing, and that allowed us to create stores in the neighborhood. Uh, people were displaced by that, though. So, so there are negatives to it as well. Uh, there, there was some private investment in Clausen and some, uh, uh, <inaudible> infill there. We, we nurtured groups to start their own bank and their grocery.

Uh, we, we have, uh, still have a lot of problems. The, the new investment has still resulted in enclaves of different income levels. Uh, and we have people who still don't talk to each other and get along with each other, based on race and income. Uh, we still have large tracts of very low income, uh, housing, that, that, uh, have a lot of crime involved with them. And we still have, uh, um, uh, a lot of the other problems that we, we haven't afforded, we haven't, uh, been, been, been able to address. But I, I just wanted to, to put that all out there as, as a history and, and a, a moving, you know, some progress, some, some problems, but it's not all black and white, it's not all something that, that happened immediately, and it's not going to take, uh, it's not going to be fixed immediately

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<sup>15</sup> The 17-member West Oakland Project Area Committee was elected in 2002 to advise the City Council about matters pertaining to redevelopment in West Oakland.

<sup>16</sup> Councilmember Nadel may be referring to the Dellums Housing Task Force and the Inclusionary Housing Blue Ribbon Commission.

<sup>17</sup> The Acorn redevelopment area was created in November 1961. Subsequently, "the Department of Housing and Urban Development tore down about 500 homes to build the Acorn public housing complex, which ultimately became notorious for its drug users." <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2004/05/09/REGB86IG0L2.DTL> Between 1960 and 1970, over 1,000 rental units were developed on the 200 acre site. More recently, the development was rehabilitated, resulting in 293 refurbished and redesigned rental units and 83 single-family houses.

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either. Uh, there are still policies that we can implement. Uh, inclusionary zoning is really the policy that makes a huge difference. Getting the grain down to really integrating our community so that we have everybody living together and tolerating each other no matter what the income is, is really, that's what, really got to be, has got to be our goal and, and we have a ways to get there.

GRANT: Thank you, Ms. Nadel. Thank you for, I think, thank you for uh, giving us the overview of the area as well, of the district as well. All right. Jumoke?

HODGE: Okay, um, good evening, <inaudible> been here that long.

MCCONNELL: <inaudible>

HODGE: It feels a little bit like it. Um, thanks to WOPAC, um, for um, having this forum. It has been a long time coming, um, and thanks for inviting me to be on it. I, I, um, feel really honored, and, um, pleased by being on, on this panel with folks that come from different backgrounds. I feel like they are very much experts, um, I've agreed, and taken notes from, um, things that everyone has said. I agree with so much of what has, um, been discussed. I mean the idea of gentrification, um, I'm, I can be pretty simple. Um, it's the changing of the gentry. Yes, it's the changing of the people in the community, um, and that may be a change in terms of race, in terms of class, um, and, I disagree with so many, is it Charlene and other people that said you got to get underneath that, right, you have to begin to look at people, not just places, um, in this. You know, what's the face of it.

Um, gentrification in West Oakland has its positives and its negatives. I, I tend, Jumoke, through experience and opinion on this is that I tend to have much more of a negative, um, lens. I look at it in a much more negative way, based on history. Based on the fact that it is a, it is a, um, method or, or a piece of urban renewal, it's a piece of Negro removal, it's a part of redevelopment that, um, can't be done very well because from which it comes out of is so corrupt. Uh, the racism and the classism and the ideas behind planning, um, in neighborhoods and communities, a lack of investment in neighborhoods. Um, I've been, um, reading, um, Root Shock<sup>18</sup> – I don't know if people have read that book – by, um, a woman named Fullilove, who's also a medical doctor. It talks about how, um, in our communities we've been uprooted, and, and, and in a lot of ways we are, um, in shock. Communities have been in shock for decades now, at this point, and there wasn't any emergency help, there was, there hasn't been any real efforts to break – I mean, I'm sorry, to fix, I mean, for example, the broken windows, when it was simply a broken window, and now that the house has begun to fall down it costs a lot more, and it's now their fault that, um, the window just didn't simply get fixed in the first place. Right, and so it's been this um, cumulative effect of, um, just deterioration in the community. And there have

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<sup>18</sup> Root Shock: How Tearing Up City Neighborhoods Hurts America and What We Can Do About It, Mindy Fullilove, Ballantine Books, 2004.

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been a lot of community, um, um, advocates for the sixties; Yvonne Smith, um, you know, people who've been – Ms. Parkinson, people who've been in this neighborhood, working at urban renewal. Bruce Beasley. Um, doing the work to really kind of stabilize, um, to, to build community, to, to be in connection with each other and one another. Uh, but we've had systems around the things we couldn't control. Someone talked about that: the things outside of ourselves that we haven't been able to control. The lack of investment in education. I sit here, really, as an advocate for looking at the public school systems, and in particular West Oakland public schools, as, um, feeding into, um, the negative aspects of gentrification, feeding into the negative aspects of urban renewal. We don't have a system for young people, uh, whether they're black, white, brown, or green in this community to really do anything to, to sustain themselves. It is a hit or miss. We have, um, many, many young people in this community that could be going to schools in West Oakland where scho, new schools could be built, but 300 middle school students and families choose not to go to school in West Oakland, because the education is so poor. Because the facilities are run down. Because there is poor education that's happening. And so, when we, when you look at those numbers like that, you know we could, we could gentrify ourselves, right? We could be the middle class, we could be the working class, we could be the poor folks within this community, all by ourselves. But we don't have the basic services, we don't have the basic things for the quality of our lives to be better, and that is, um, as I think Charlene spoke to it really well, it's a political issue. You know, it is a private issue in terms of investment. It's like, what has, what has the city government done? What did it do over the last two to three decades of, um, of, of really making sure that this was a viable community. Right? So, gentrification now can come in, private developers can now come in and do something. In my opinion, what they need to do is to be at the place where they're building up this community, right? And I think we'll have more time to talk about that. But it's schools; it's, if asthma is the leading illness in this community, then we need to have a state-of-the-art asthma center. And that plan needs to happen before you talk to me about condominiums.

GRANT: All right, thank you, Jumoke. And now we'll hill, hear from Steve Ing, Edrington.

EDRINGTON: Thank you. Um, I want to thank WOPAC for having us and I want to thank the audience, for listening to all points of view on this issue, because I think this is important.

Uh, many people think gentrification is a dirty word. But it's really as dirty as those who drive people apart and promote racism, and I read, brought a copy of the Just, Just Cause Oakland poster flyer<sup>19</sup>. I'm happy to show it. Um, this sort of thing promotes hate and racism. It's illegal and just plain wrong to steer

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<sup>19</sup> The poster in question appeared on street poles in West Oakland in December 2006. It made claims such as "Since 2000, 25% of Oakland's Black Population has been forced to leave!" and "Gentrification = Predatory Development".

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people in and out of communities based on race or ethnicity. So I'd like to point that out, quickly, this here.

Gentrification simply means the transformation of a rundown or aging neighborhood into a more prosperous one, through investment into the community. I actually think this is a good thing, in my experience, when I bought a property, painted it, put in new landscaping. Neighbors came by and thanked me, and said "Thank you for cleaning it up," including homeowners as well as residents.

So the question becomes, is gentrification really bad for neighborhoods, or is it simply one more urban myth? There has been an exodus from many Oakland neighborhoods, and I don't think gentrification has much to do with it. People do not, do not like to live in ugly, hime cri, high crime neighborhoods with few services and bad schools for their kids. Many have been victims of violence themselves, have family, neighbors have been hurt or killed. They live in fear. They, many want to move away as soon as they can afford to. It might be better for them to stay and invest in their community, but some simply want out, and Vallejo and Fairfield<sup>20</sup> start looking pretty good. All of us, I think, can understand that. You have to believe, you'd have to believe that anyone who buys property in such neighborhoods is crazy or dumb. But, fortunately, some have vision, and invest in what's possible to have yet a better tomorrow. They take risks; some succeed, and some fail. Many people vilify developers as being money-hungry, and greedy. The truth is they take ri, many risks, and many of those projects do fail, although many succeed. Fortunately, many proj, properties succeed, and when they do succeed, everybody wins.

Gentrification is not causing minorities to leave West Oakland's, at West Oakland, it's our policies. Let's talk about diversity. In 2001, the Oakland Tribune ran an article entitled "Which city in Alameda County is the whitest?" Anybody guess, out there, which city in Alameda County is the whitest?

Hodge: Alameda.

EDRINGTON: Okay.

Voice from audience: How do you define white?

EDRINGTON: Well, I

Voice from audience: Do you define white by the numbers of people?

EDRINGTON: All right, we won't get into that. I'll give you the article later. The answer in the Oakland Tribune article was Berkeley. You may not think rent

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<sup>20</sup> Vallejo and Fairfield are communities to the north of the San Francisco Bay Area that offer cheaper housing than more centrally located areas, at the price of longer commutes.

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control<sup>21</sup> has much to do with minorities having difficult housing, but it has a huge impact. Berkeley's rent control ordinance has a stated goal of cultural and ethnic diversity. In 1970, city of Berkeley, 23 1/2% of the population was African-American. In 2005, that number bro, moved to 13%. If the City of Berkeley is a cul, is the cultural center for progressive politics and liberalism, what happened to 16,000 African-American?

The same thing is happening in Oakland. Rent control, we're losing lots of diversity. Measure EE<sup>22</sup> passed; we can pote, point to high, higher crime and ant, anti-development policies that beat up developers and things like in, uh, ex, inclusionary zoning, I call it exclusionary zun, zoning hurt the supply of housing. People are moving out of Oakland, not because of gentrification, but because of bad housing pollies, policies, such as rent control, high crime, and an under-performing education system. Thank you.

GRANT: Okay. Can we give all our panelists a hand?

(audience applause)

GRANT: Thanks. Thank you.

(A lengthy question-and-answer period followed, then closing statements from the panelists.)

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<sup>21</sup> Berkeley's Rent Stabilization and Eviction for Good Cause Ordinance was passed in June 1980. "The Ordinance regulates most residential rents in Berkeley, provides tenants with increased protection against unwarranted evictions and is intended to maintain affordable housing and preserve community diversity."

<http://www.ci.berkeley.ca.us/rent/geninfo/guide/guide1-3.htm#intro>

<sup>22</sup> Oakland's Just Cause Eviction Law went into effect on January 1, 2003. It provides many renters with protections from certain types of evictions, but excludes renters of newly constructed rental units, as well as renters of units in owner-occupied duplexes and triplexes.