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## Black flight

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*Presentation to UCSF medical students Feb. 15, 2008, [published in Germany Feb. 7, 2010](#) [2]*

*Eleanora "Billie" Holiday sang of "strange fruit" hanging on Southern trees. I now sing of "strange birds" flying over San Francisco's sky ...*

### Part I: The 'City by the Bay'

"It was only when the Redevelopment Agency began to acquire buildings, evict occupants, and demolish structures, and urban renewal became a living, frightening reality, that real participation of the area's residents began, as they organized to defend themselves." – Chester Hartman, "City for Sale," University of California Press 2002



[3]

Blacks fought back in a valiant effort to stop the "urban renewal" they called "Negro removal" in the Fillmore. But the Redevelopment bulldozers had their way. Redevelopment Director Justin Herman explained in 1970, "This land is too valuable to permit poor people to park on it." - Photo: San Francisco Examiner

The "City by the Bay," San Francisco, is an international seaport resting on a peninsula between the Pacific Ocean and the San Francisco Bay with a population of 723,959 people. According to a 2005 demographic study, fewer than 40,000 are Black. Once upon a time, over 100,000 Black people lived in San Francisco. Where have they flown?

In 1966, a business-supported, self-appointed citizen's action committee called the San Francisco Planning and Urban Research Association or SPUR wrote in its booklet called "Prologue

for Action": "If San Francisco decides to compete effectively with other cities for new 'clean' industries and new corporate power, its population will move closer to standard white Anglo-Saxon Protestant characteristics. Selection of a population's composition might be undemocratic. Influence on it, however, is legal and desirable for the health of a city."

An economic analysis conducted in San Francisco by ICF Consulting was released on April 5, 2006. It found that African Americans in San Francisco made on average 40 percent of what whites earned in 2004 and that African Americans constitute only 6 percent of the city's population – down from a maximum of 18 percent in the 1970s.

Nationally, African Americans make 60 percent as much as whites. The study concluded that the wages of racial minorities lag behind White workers, in part, because they tend to have less education.

The analysis found, however, that Asians with comparable education earned less than Whites in San Francisco. Thus, the existence of institutional racism and barriers to entry based on race in both public and private sector hiring is clearly substantiated.

The study also concluded that the high housing costs and access to quality education drive the exodus from the city of African Americans and families with school age children. Nearly 78,000 residents have left San Francisco since 2000.

Don Santina is a cultural historian and third generation San Franciscan who received a 2005 Superior Scribing Award for his Black Commentator article, "Reparations for the Blues." According to his article in the Black Agenda Report, "[Ethnic Cleansing in San Francisco](#) [4]," "Not so long ago San Francisco was home to about 100,000 Blacks and the Fillmore district was a thriving Mecca of African American life. Today, Fillmore is gone, wiped out by 'Negro Removal' in the guise of redevelopment, and the city's Black population has shrunk to 40,000.

"The last bastion of concentrated Black life, Hunters Point, is slated for an ethnic cleansing designed to rob African Americans of not only a spectacular view of the Bay, but of any hope of remaining in the city."



[5]

Billie Holiday was a "regular" in the Fillmore.

The Fillmore was the flourishing center of Black culture in the decades following World War II. Called the "Harlem of the West," it was the economic, social and political "capital" of Black San Francisco and the site of Black-owned businesses including restaurants, night clubs, barber

shops and beauty supply houses, markets, auto repair services and clothing stores. Jimbo's Bop City featured performances by jazz icons like Billie Holiday, Charlie Parker, John Coltrane and Dizzy Gillespie.

According to the Bayview Hunters Point Resident Stock Ownership Corp.'s Administrative Complaint against the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency dated Aug. 20, 2004, "The 1970 SFRA plans for the A-2 Western Addition project called for displacing 13,5000 people. Opposition by the Western Addition Community Organizations (WACO) reduced the number of displaced people to about 10,000. Those who were not fortunate to find accommodation in other Black neighborhoods, such as Bayview Hunters Point, were forced to leave town."

The Western Addition Community Organizations formed in 1967 in an attempt to prevent the wholesale removal of mostly poor African American families from the City's Western Addition where the Fillmore Center highrise project is now located. In the first redevelopment case in the nation to force a city to the settlement table, WACO filed an administrative complaint followed by a class action lawsuit, which led to an injunction. As a result of this legal settlement, 10 vacant newly cleared blocks of land were transferred to local community based, African American owned, non-profit development corporations, which built several thousand units of community owned affordable housing.

According to the Black Agenda Report: "The people who lived in the Fillmore were dispersed to the East Bay cities of Oakland and Richmond and to Bayview Hunters Point. As the Redevelopment Agency smashed homes and businesses, it issued thousands of certificates of preference to the people of the Fillmore. These certificates were documents which gave the displaced businesses and families a promise of preference for renting or buying other redevelopment property within the City and the right to return to the neighborhood from which they'd been evicted."



[6]

In the Fillmore, known worldwide as "Harlem of the West," Black businesses provided all the goods and services the community needed. The thousands of Blacks invited to San Francisco during World War II to work in the shipyard had been expected to leave after the war. When they didn't, the Redevelopment Agency was assigned to drive them out. - Photo: David Johnson

Of the 883 certificates given to Black owned businesses, only 39 resulted in business relocations. Of the 4,719 certificates issued to families, only 1,099 families returned to homes in the redeveloped project area. The remaining 590 businesses and 3,055 families were forever displaced and lost in follow-up by Redevelopment. "The Fillmore" no longer officially exists. Renamed the Western Addition, it has been fully gentrified or "repeopled," a verb invented and used by Redevelopment operatives.

The SFRA turned next to 26 acres planned for San Francisco's South of Market, home to over 4,000 poor residents and pensioners, 700 small businesses and 5,000 workers. These residents were mostly retired and living out their years in Single Room Occupancy hotels. Many were people of color.

As Chester Herman writes in "City for Sale": "Under the rubric of 'slum clearance' and 'blight removal,' the Redevelopment Agency turned to systematically sweeping out the poor, with the full backing of the city's power elite. The area was referred to by planners, newspapers and City officials as 'skid row' and the people who lived there as 'bums,' 'drifters' and 'transients.' These carefully cultivated negative images allowed the planners of Yerba Buena Center to present their project as a two fold public service. They were providing economic revival through construction jobs and increased tourist and convention business, and they were helping the city clear out an undesirable element."

According to Hartman, "Thus, the welfare of the elderly, single poor working people of South of Market was placed in the hands of the city's corporate and financial interests. The area's residents were kept in the dark about their fate. An Examiner series on South of Market residents quoted people as saying: 'We don't know what they're going to do,' 'We're all confused,' 'When the plans are ready, they're ready.'"

It was only when the Redevelopment Agency began to acquire buildings, evict occupants and demolish structures, and "urban renewal" became a living frightening reality, that real participation of the area's residents began, as they organized to defend themselves.

## **Part II: Government sponsored genocide**

"To rise, we must hold a vision of ourselves spreading our wings, reaching for the sky, saying, 'I Can.'" - Editor-in-Chief Susan Taylor, Essence Magazine

"If you don't know who you are as a people, you don't know who you are as a person." - Dr. LaFrancis Rogers-Rose, professor of African American Studies, Princeton University

Fast forward to 2007. The median monthly rent in San Francisco is \$2,200. A small "affordable" condo sells for \$650,000 to \$800,000. The city's median income is about \$75,000 as jobs in light and heavy industry have disappeared, replaced by biomedical technology and a new urban professional class who have returned from the suburbs lured by a corporate "gold rush" of middle management positions.

An initiative slated for the June 2008 ballot would integrate the Redevelopment Project Areas for the Hunters Point Shipyard and the Bayview Hunters Point Redevelopment Project's Candlestick Park Activity Node giving 750 acres of the most underutilized land to a corrupt corporation called Lennar.

By the 1980s, the largest population of African Americans in the state of California owned

homes, property and businesses in the Bayview Hunters Point district of San Francisco. African Americans constituted over 60 percent of the district's 34,000 residents and were surpassed in number only by African Americans in Los Angeles.



[7]

San Francisco's Black population has dropped faster and further than that of any other major U.S. city - from 16 to less than 6 percent. The white elite, feeling threatened by a Black community determined to thrive despite Southern style segregation, used - and still uses - economic and environmental racism, police abuse and redevelopment policies to drive Blacks out of the city. - Photo: David Johnson

Under the tenure of an African American mayor and District 10 supervisor, the African American population in BVHP demonstrated its steepest decline to its current level of 48 percent. The Area Median Income (AMI) in Bayview Hunters Point is approximately \$15,800 annually, thus affordable housing units must be made available at yearly lease or rental rates of \$7,500 to retain the present population. The Redevelopment Agency calculates affordable housing in the BVHP Project Area based on an AMI of \$30,000.

Why do Blacks sell out Blacks? William Reed postulates in the article, "Do Poor and Wealthy Black Americans Live in Two Different Worlds?" that a widening gulf exists between the values of middle class and poor Blacks. More and more there are two classes of African Americans - the ones with education and jobs and those with neither.

A Pew Research Center survey found that Black college graduates have values that are more closely aligned with those of middle class Whites than those of lower income Blacks. A majority of Black Americans at the top of the economic ladder blamed individual failings, not racial prejudice, for the lack of economic progress made by lower income African Americans.

The survey also found the condition of the Black middle class to be more fragile than that of Whites. Middle income African American families have difficulty passing on their middle income status to their children. About 45 percent of Black children who grow up in middle class families will slip into a lower income bracket in adulthood. Only 16 percent of White children slip into a lower socioeconomic bracket as adults.

"Unnatural Causes" is a four hour documentary series exploring America's racial and socioeconomic inequities in health. Produced by California Newsreel, it highlights research which

shows that social conditions – the jobs we do, the money we're paid, the schools we attend and the neighborhoods we live in are as important determinants of our health as are genetics, behaviors and even our medical care. The single strongest predictor of our health is our position on the class ladder. Whether measured by income, schooling, or occupation, those at the top have the most power and resources and on average live longer and healthier lives.

W.J. Wilson proposes in "The Truly Disadvantaged" that racially segregated neighborhoods create conditions adverse to health in a number of ways. These communities are often geographically isolated and have fewer resources and assets such as quality schools, grocery stores, libraries, childcare centers, parks and recreation facilities and public transportation networks.

Segregated low income neighborhoods often host toxic industries, freeways and municipal landfills. Overall, residents of high poverty neighborhoods live about eight fewer years than non-poverty neighborhoods. They also suffer more preventable events like infant mortality, pedestrian injuries and homicide. Because residents of segregated neighborhoods are often marginalized in the political decision making process, they are limited in their ability to effect change in their environments and circumstances.

The African American community in BVHP suffers from a disproportionate burden of diseases linked to environmental factors that may result in temporary and permanent disability. Air monitoring studies document that select toxic air contaminants and criteria pollutants regulated by state and government agencies exist in ambient air at concentrations exceeding the 80th percentile.

These airborne toxins include sulfur dioxides, ground level ozone, particulates, asbestos, ionizing radiation and the cancer causing volatile organic compound benzene.



[8]

In September 1966, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, which had employed 10,000 workers from the surrounding neighborhood, was laying off much of its work force. When police shot 16-year-old Matthew Johnson in the back and killed him, the people of Hunters Point rose up against police brutality and the denial of jobs and decent housing. The mayor called in police sharpshooters and National Guard troops with tanks to quell the rebellion. – Photo: Jean Anthony Dulac, courtesy San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library

Diseases linked to environmental toxins exceed national averages, including birth defects, cardiopulmonary diseases, asthma and allergies, cancers and immune disorders. The incidence of birth defects in the Bayview Hunters Point community exceeds city averages according to state studies and supports the existence of teratogenic environmental influences in the region.

Infant mortality rates for African Americans, Asians and Latinas living in BVHP exceed citywide rates. The Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Air and Radiation now links premature infant deaths and particulate exposure.

A 2004 study of premature infant deaths conducted by the San Francisco Chronicle newspaper identified a "cluster" of cases in the South Basin region of the project area.

The BVHP project area is the site of 429 hazardous waste facilities and is home to one federal and two state Superfund sites and the Southeast Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The oldest and most polluting natural gas fired power plant in the state of California, the PG&E Hunters Point Power Plant, closed in 2006 and was the site, last week, of the collapse of a deconstruction platform that killed one and injured two workers.

In 1998 an explosion at the PG&E plant sparked a social and environmental justice movement that has been reinvigorated by activists opposing the siting of three combustion turbine peaker plants in Southeastern San Francisco and advocate for the cleanup to health based standards of the Hunters Point Shipyard.

The study, "Condition Critical: Asthma in the Bayview Hunters Point Neighborhood, 1993-1995," was published in May of 1998 and confirmed the disproportionate health impact of this disease in BVHP. The BVHP Project is expected to worsen air quality through the unmitigated impacts generated by the new release of toxic air contaminants and the potential for airborne dispersal and volatilization of hazardous materials documented in the Final Environmental Impact Report for the project.

The project will worsen air quality indirectly through the creation of multiple stagnated and obstructed transportation and circulation routes identified as unmitigated in the Final Environmental Impact Report.

In 1996 I led an appeal to the United Nations Commission to End Racial Discrimination against the City and County of San Francisco and the Redevelopment Agency's attempts to implement the Bayview Hunters Point Redevelopment Project and Rezoning.

The appeal contended that the closure of public schools in Bayview Hunters Point, the high incidence of children in foster care, the transportation of children to schools outside their neighborhood, the closure of stores and businesses by the Third Street Light Rail Project, a jobless rate estimated by a UCSF study to be as high as 40 percent – in contrast to a City unemployment rate of 5 percent – and the 2000 census documented decline in the African American population to 48 percent, in concert with a substantiated high incidence of police brutality, fulfill United Nations criteria for genocide.



[9]

When Blacks wouldn't leave San Francisco voluntarily, the Redevelopment Agency laid waste to nearly a thousand Black-owned businesses and the homes of more than 5,000 Black families in the Fillmore - historical precedent that informs today's fierce opposition to the Redevelopment Plan for Bayview Hunters Point, where Blacks fled who were driven out of the Fillmore. - Photo: San Francisco Redevelopment Agency

The appeal charged the BVHP Redevelopment Plan with shifting the tax base for the entire 1,400 acre project area (Area A and B) from the city to the state and replacement of San Francisco's city government legislative, judicial and executive branch balance of power for land use decisions for the project area to the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA), a secretive quasi-governmental entity that does not comply with local Sunshine Ordinance mandates for public notice and public participation in decision making and is governed by a commission of mayoral appointees that has been subjected to multiple Ethics Commission investigations into charges of financial and political conflict of interest in development projects in the city over the last three decades,

According to "[Redevelopment: The Unknown Government](#)"<sup>[10]</sup>, "Once a redevelopment project area is created, all property tax within it goes directly to the agency. This means that all increases in property tax revenues are diverted to the agency and away from cities, counties and school districts that would normally receive them.

"Tax increment financing also directly impacts municipal budgets by diverting city revenues into redevelopment agencies. That part of the tax increment that would have gone to the city's general fund - averaging 12 percent - is lost and can now be used only by redevelopment agencies. Thus, there is now money to build malls and hotels, but less for police, firefighters and librarians. Cities cannot use redevelopment money to pay for salaries, public safety or maintenance, which are by far the largest share of municipal budgets."

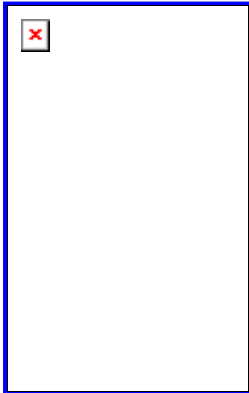
Tax Increment Finance Diversion and land and property seizure are identified as the mechanism of financing for the Bayview Hunters Point Redevelopment Project in its EIR. While the agency denies its intent to utilize eminent domain in land and property acquisitions, California state law enables the SFRA to exercise eminent domain actions for the first 12 years of implementation of the project.

Additionally, the SFRA has established guidelines for the use of eminent domain on non-residential properties that have failed to meet code standings and for properties in regions zoned for non-residential use. This includes the Third Street Corridor of the project, which has

been rezoned neighborhood commercial but includes residential units that may face risk of eminent domain action.

The BVHP Project threatens to deprive the African American people of Bayview Hunters Point of land, historical legacy and culture in a region where they have predominated as an ethnic group since the World War II era. The project fails to provide a framework housing commitment to one-for-one replacement housing for displaced low income residents and identifies in its EIR that "the projected need for affordable housing may exceed that provided by the Project in the Project Area; however, there are no standards of significance for the provision of affordable housing and, therefore, this is not considered to be a significant adverse impact."

Low and very low income African Americans who have predominated as an ethnically distinct group of people in the region of the proposed land seizure by the Agency will face displacement, dispersal and forced migration under the implementation of this plan. The appellants contend the government action proposed in the BVHP Project parallels in anticipated outcome the successful genocidal campaigns waged by legitimate government entities to depopulate, disenfranchise and displace ethnically distinct communities in Armenia, World War II Germany and Poland, Bosnia, Cambodia, Southern Sudan, Rwanda and in Darfur Province, Sudan.



[11]

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Thus, the appellants argue the BVHP Redevelopment Plan fulfills United Nations working and operational definitions of a government sponsored genocidal campaign.

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