

# The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights

African Americans in San Francisco,  
1945–1975

**Paul T. Miller**



# **The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights**

# Studies in African American History and Culture

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*To Dr. D. Philip McGee and Samuel Mark Hopkins  
for inspiring this book and to Penny Fong and  
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# Abbreviations

BBA	Black Businessmen Association
BPWC	Business and Professional Women's Club
BWOA	Black Women Organized for Action
CLC	Church-Labor Conference
CCU	Council for Civic Unity
CORE	Congress for Racial Equality
CP-USA	American Communist Party
FEPC	Fair Employment Practices Commission
HUD	Housing and Urban Development
ILGWU	International Ladies Garment Workers Union
ILWU	International Longshore and Warehouse Union
MCS	Marine Cooks and Stewards Union
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NICB	National Industrial Conference Board
NLC	Negro Labor Council
OFJ	Officers For Justice
SF-AAHCS	San Francisco African American Historical and Cultural Society
SFFD	San Francisco Fire Department

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SFHA	San Francisco Housing Authority
SFNLAF	San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation
SFPD	San Francisco Police Department
SFRA	San Francisco Redevelopment Agency
SNCC	Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee
SPUR	San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association
SUP	Sailors' Union of the Pacific
UMF	United Freedom Movement
WACO	Western Addition Community Organization
WAPAC	Western Addition Project Area Committee
YMCA	Young Men's Christian Association
YOC	Youth Opportunities Center

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A book such as this one where there was little previous work to go on and few people with whom to consult must be the author's passion if it is to be completed. That is the case here. Countless hours were spent combing through library archives and examining microfilm. Having read every single copy of the *San Francisco Sun Reporter* from 1951–1976, some more than once, I can testify to just what an important source of information for and about the Black community it was during this time. Without the journalists and staff that produced that newspaper this book would have never been possible.

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This book emerged out of the compelling stories that fuelled the civil rights struggle in San Francisco and the necessity to commit these stories and this history to memory in the long view. African American San Franciscans were both dignified and determined to take their places as first class citizens in a city that, although it did not always live up to its reputation, was world-renowned for its cosmopolitan attitude and social tolerance. It is their stories that this book tells, stories about racial discrimination running up against the will to overcome it. I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to write this history and hope that it sheds light on the lives and accomplishments of San Francisco's postwar African American community.

It is important that I acknowledge and thank some individuals whose help with this project, although indispensable, went far beyond it as well.



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Although I am grateful for the guidance I received along the way to completing this book, I should note that any errors of fact or interpretation herein are entirely my own responsibility.

# Introduction

The war industries associated with World War II brought unparalleled employment opportunities for African Americans in California's port cities. Nowhere was this more evident than in San Francisco, a city whose African American population grew by over 650% between 1940 and 1945. With this population increase also came an increase in racial discrimination directed at African Americans, the most pernicious of which was in the employment and housing sectors. The situation would only get worse throughout the 1950s and 1960s as manufacturing jobs moved to the East Bay where race restrictive housing policies kept African Americans from moving with them. In San Francisco, most African Americans were effectively barred from renting or buying homes in all but a few neighborhoods, neighborhoods often characterized by dilapidated structures and over-crowded conditions. Except for the well educated and lucky, employment opportunities for African Americans were open only at entry levels for white collar positions that required little public contact or in unskilled and semi-skilled blue collar positions. Despite such challenges, San Francisco's African American population nearly doubled between 1950 and 1960. This community would push hard against the doors of discrimination and find that with concerted effort they would give way. During the 1960s and 1970s, civil rights groups formed coalitions to picket and protest thereby effectively expanding job opportunities and opening the housing market for African American San Franciscans. This book examines the challenges and exigencies of San Francisco's growing African American community from the end of World War II through 1975 in areas such as housing, employment and education as it struggled to secure civil rights in what was largely and sometimes erroneously considered one of the most progressive cities in the nation.

This book is not a comparative analysis of Bay Area cities as many books about San Francisco turn out to be. Rather, it focuses narrowly on San Francisco to the exclusion of other cities with sizable African American populations such as Oakland, Berkeley or Richmond so that the reader might get the clearest picture possible of this important population at this critical juncture in history. It is an effort to examine San Francisco's African

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American population in specific detail so that we can begin to discern the distinguishing characteristics of that population and where it holds parallels with other cities in the Bay Area and beyond. Although this book tells the story of the African American community's struggle for civil rights, it goes much further than that. This book reveals the circumstances that everyday African American San Franciscans encountered directly after World War II on through the early 1970s. It is a story about coping with inadequate housing, about trying to find a job in the face of blatant institutional discrimination and about standing tall in the face of racially motivated violence and police brutality. It is also, of course, the story of protest and progress.

This work contributes not only to the body of scholarship in African American Studies and history but also intersects with research in urban studies and sociology. Its ethnographic component, consisting of four long interviews with people who were residents of the city between 1946 and 1975, gives readers a first-hand account of how some African Americans experienced San Francisco after World War II and uncovers socio-cultural nuance that archival research alone could not provide. With a detailed account of San Francisco's postwar African American community, this experience can now be compared and contrasted with the experience of other African Americans living in urban centers in order to discern important similarities and differences across time and geography.

Three factors differentiate the experiences of African American migrants to San Francisco from other African American urban migrants to Northern or Western cities. It is thus particularly important to examine the hows and whys of San Francisco's African American community if one is to understand the larger picture of the city's history. First, unlike many Northern cities that experienced episodes of racial violence during and after the first "Great Migration," San Francisco experienced a relative degree of social harmony between African Americans and European Americans until after the World War II (Broussard; 1993, 2–3). In fact, during the 1930s and 1940s, activists of all ethnic groups formed interracial organizations specifically to head off racial strife (Broussard, 1993 & Melendy, 1999). Second, San Francisco's African American population remained under 1% of the total population until after 1940. From very early on, the city's preoccupation with its large Chinese population, a population that experienced the brunt of the city's racism until the late 1940s, meant that most African Americans were shielded from the violence that occurred in other cities such as Chicago, Tulsa and Detroit during the first half of the twentieth century (Pfaelzer, 2007). Third, because tens of thousands of African Americans migrated to the Bay Area to fill war industry jobs, San Francisco's African American population increased markedly faster—over 900% by 1950—than it did in other West Coast cities. Such an enormous influx over such a short period of time led to increasingly frequent instances of racial intolerance and discrimination directed at African Americans. By the early

1950s, as San Francisco's African American community grew ever larger, it came under more frequent attack by racist individuals, the police department, the real estate industry and both public and private employers.

The spectacular growth of San Francisco's African American population was led by an influx of people who came to the Bay Area from Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Missouri and Mississippi to find war-work, often securing jobs in shipyards or on the waterfront (Daniels; 1986, 165). However, at the conclusion of World War II, thousands of African Americans were laid off and consequently faced with a difficult decision—return home to the racist South or make the best of it in a city where housing was rigidly segregated and the employment market was contracting. Overwhelmingly the newcomers chose the latter.

Problems continued to compound into the next decade. Most postwar African American San Franciscans found themselves locked in one of two enclaves: Bay View-Hunters Point or the Western Addition, also known as the Fillmore. In addition, during the 1950s and 1960s, mirroring a national trend in urban redevelopment projects, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency carried out an urban renewal policy that would uproot thousands of families from their homes in the Western Addition, the hub of the African American community. The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's A-1 and A-2 projects were opportunities for business elites to reclaim potentially valuable land while moving out what they considered an undesirable segment of the neighborhood, the African American population. As Hartman (1984) notes, "It was becoming apparent that urban renewal could be used to displace the city's minorities and recapture the centrally located residential areas they had inherited after whites moved out" (17). Furthermore, beginning in the 1950s, many local manufacturing jobs previously held by African Americans during the war were relocated to East Bay cities like Oakland, San Leandro and Newark and filled almost exclusively by a white work force.

Excluded from jobs and often denied even poor quality housing, it was only logical that San Francisco's African American community would organize to make improvements in their lives. Although civil rights activism in San Francisco had prewar roots, the 1960s gave birth to a more vigorous and demanding activism that placed African Americans at the forefront of the struggle for racial equality. By the mid-1960s, civil rights organizations agitated for equality in employment and better living conditions. One case in point was the 1964 protest movement led by a young African American woman, Tracy Sims, and the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination. Under the Ad Hoc Committee's multi-coalition banner, activists of all ages and ethnic groups protested against job discrimination at high profile locales including the Sheraton-Palace Hotel and Cadillac Row, a stretch of Van Ness Avenue that was home to several automobile showrooms.

Chapter one examines the experiences of San Francisco's growing African American community directly after World War II. With housing in

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short supply and rigidly segregated, African Americans faced the dual challenge of securing a place to live while also trying to find or maintain employment in a city where jobs, once plentiful in the war industries, began to evaporate. The lack of employment opportunities led to a mixed bag of outcomes. For example, some people turned to crime to support themselves while others, seeing the obvious racial discrimination in employment, protested to force businesses, especially those located in the Black community, to hire more African Americans.

Chapters two and three describe the concrete conditions for African American San Franciscans during the 1950s. In particular, chapter two notes the growing number of incidents of police brutality directed against African Americans, the exclusion of African Americans from union jobs and the increasing problem of crime in the African American community. Chapter two also details the problems many people had while trying to find employment and the ways they coped with such problems. Chapter three examines the city's housing crisis as it impacted African Americans during the 1950s. Specifically, chapter three shows how policies implemented by the San Francisco Housing Authority excluded African Americans from public housing until 1954 and how race restrictive covenants and redlining barred them from renting or buying in predominately white areas.

Chapters four and five focus on civil rights, issues of employment and police/community relations. Chapter four illustrates how San Francisco's African American community organized to fight against employment discrimination climaxing with a series of 1964 direct action campaigns that targeted high profile establishments including the Sheraton-Palace Hotel and automobile dealerships along San Francisco's famous "Cadillac Row." Chapter five explains how urban renewal under the direction of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency acted to displace thousands of African American families in the Western Addition under the A-1 and A-2 plans. Condemning hundreds of buildings as "blighted," the SFRA was able to destroy thousands of low-cost housing units and replace them with higher rent units intended for working-class white professionals. Chapter five also describes the African American community's continued civil rights activism and the rise of a more radical approach for demanding equal rights including the 1968 student strike at San Francisco State University that resulted in the formation of the nation's first Black Studies Department.

Chapter six focuses on housing issues facing African American San Franciscans during the 1960s. This chapter evidences how urban renewal removed swaths of some of the only housing that was affordable and open to African American families and displaced scores of African American-owned business from the Fillmore district. Most of these businesses would never return. Chapter six also shows that while the rental market for African Americans was still characterized by racist practices, some headway was being made and property owners were increasingly held accountable in court for denying prospective tenants units based on race.

Chapter seven presents a picture of the African American community in the first half of the 1970s. Although San Francisco was declining in terms of total population, its African American population continued to grow. This continued growth ran up against a decline in blue-collar jobs, many of which moved to smaller cities in the East Bay that excluded African Americans from housing on the basis of race. At the same time, San Francisco was becoming the West Coast's center for administrative and financial work creating jobs for which many African American San Franciscans were not adequately trained or were excluded from based on race. Although African Americans had made significant progress in being considered for jobs previously unavailable to them—jobs such as those in the building trades—the shrinking stock of manufacturing and industrial employment opportunities in the City made finding such jobs difficult at best. Chapter seven also shows that African Americans faced a similarly grim situation with respect to housing. Despite a less racially restrictive housing market, the dwindling stock of affordable housing due in part to redevelopment project demolitions and the continued racism on the part of many property owners still made finding housing in the first half of the 1970s an arduous task for many of the City's African American residents.

# 1 The Postwar 1940s

World War II brought with it tens of thousands of migrants to West Coast cities such as Portland, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Many migrants were escaping grinding poverty in states like Arkansas, Louisiana and Texas and came looking for employment in the aircraft industry or Naval shipyards from Seattle down to San Diego. This war-time boom precipitated the largest westward movement of African Americans in US history and nowhere was this migratory movement more evident than in San Francisco, a city whose pre-war African American population was 4,846 or less than 1% of the City's total population (Taylor; 1998, 254).

Historian Nathan Huggins, who lived in San Francisco during the 1940s, notes, "Before 1942, the Fillmore had a few hundred black families scattered throughout an essentially multi-ethnic, working class neighborhood" (*San Francisco Examiner & Chronicle*, 1982, Marinship). Joseph James (1945), who moved to San Francisco in 1939 and was the local NAACP president from 1943–1946 recalls that:

Negroes were so widely scattered that the visitor to San Francisco at that time would have easily received the impression that there were almost no Negroes in the city. There was only one point of relatively high concentration of Negro residence—the well-known Fillmore District; but even this was in no sense a Negro area. Here white people were most numerous, with the Japanese ancestry group second with upwards of five thousand. There were, also, small numbers of Filipinos and Chinese. Negroes did not number more than one thousand. (166)

Getting to San Francisco was no easy task in the early 1940s but the lure of high-paying war-time jobs and greater civil rights drew people who were often young and had little to lose by moving. When they did move, the most common mode of transportation was by bus or train (Broussard; 1993, 141). Daniel Collins, one of the few African American professionals to move to San Francisco in the early 1940s, was onboard Union Pacific Railroad's "The Challenger" in 1942 and described the scene as such:

They were people looking for a job, who could take a one-way ticket to California, with no destination in mind except to California. You knew there were war jobs out here, knowing you could get a job. And on the Challenger, on that train, there was not a single seat, every seat was taken. And, in fact, the men's room, there were two or three seats around the men's room, they were filled. There was a guy sittin' on the can so if you had to go, he had to get up. That's how crowded that train was. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

James (1945) notes that many of the newcomers migrated from Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas to take advantage of employment opportunities and to escape racial hostilities in the south (168). Typical of a migrant's story, a 36-year-old mechanic explains how he came to San Francisco noting, "I was working on a farm down around Atlanta and making \$23 a week, sometimes less, sometimes with no job at all . . ." "Then I saw the newspaper ads. 'Jobs in San Francisco,' they said. They said they'd train me, give me work, more pay; I knew I'd get more freedom" (*San Francisco News*; 1956, . . . To Be Black). The article goes on to note that he and his wife, like many other families, then moved to California to take advantage of the employment opportunities in the shipyards and factories of the Bay Area.

Less ordinary is David Johnson's reason for coming to the City. Johnson came to San Francisco from Jacksonville, FL for the first time as a Navy seaman in 1944 on his way to the Philippines. He describes this first brief stay, noting, "I happened to meet some people in San Francisco and so I fell in love with the city. And I had a strange feeling about the city, that somehow this city would play an important part in my whole life" (D. Johnson, personal interview, 2005). After being released from the Navy Johnson went back to Jacksonville to resume life but he would bristle under the segregated nature of the South and, armed with the GI Bill, decided to strike out and make a better way for himself. He notes,

I knew I wanted to be a photographer; that was clear. But I wasn't sure where I would get the training given the fact that the schools in Florida were segregated and I had very little resources. Except the most important resource I had was the GI Bill. So I had my tuition no matter where I chose to go to school. (D. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Johnson had been interested in photography since he was a kid and even spent what little money he saved on a subscription to *Popular Photographer* magazine. In one issue he read that a photographer named Ansel Adams was going to be the director of the Photography Department at the California School of Fine Arts in San Francisco. Johnson recalls,

So I wrote him a letter indicating that I was interested in coming to San Francisco to study photography and that I was a Negro. I wasn't sure



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what the racial climate was in San Francisco. Three thousand miles was a long ways to come to say ‘Sorry bud, we’re not interested’ even if I had the GI Bill. It turned out fine. (D. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Not only did the school part turn out well for Johnson, Adams also arranged for him to stay at his home with Minor White, Pirkle Jones and Ruth-Marion Baruch in the exclusive Sea Cliff neighborhood so that he would not have to look for an apartment when he first arrived. With that, David Johnson became the first African American student to study with Ansel Adams, one of the most famous landscape photographers of the twentieth century.

Even though David Johnson’s move to San Francisco was more extraordinary than that of most African American migrants, one commonality that he had with most newcomers was his Southern roots. It was perhaps these geo-cultural ties, ties that came with different customs and behaviors than San Francisco’s long-time African American residents were used to, that would create some social tension within the City’s African American community. Among the established residents’ complaints were that the migrants were loud, vulgar, lingered on street corners and dressed sloppily (Broussard; 1993, 170). Broussard (1993) states that “Established black residents were often condescending toward black migrants or criticized their behavior as uncivil or countrified,” in some instances even blaming the newly arrived for increased racial discrimination (170). As one long-time resident would note, “We never had any prejudice until late years when the Negroes started the flack and flocking in here and raising hell” (Daniels; 1990, 173). Dr. Daniel Collins observed this very phenomenon when he first arrived in San Francisco. As he tells it:

But there were . . . about 2,500, maybe 3,000 old San Francisco people, Blacks who were comfortable with San Francisco. They had worked out a nice living pattern for themselves. In fact, those old-timers, for the most part, were very hostile to the new-comers. The new-comers were rather boisterous, you know, and they had not been tamed. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

It came as no surprise that white residents were less than thrilled with the City’s burgeoning African American community and once newcomers established themselves in San Francisco there was no hiding from racial animosity. In 1948 Enola Maxwell and her two siblings took a train from Baton Rouge to join their mother who was working in a San Francisco laundry. She notes, “We heard San Francisco was so wonderful, having just come from the South. But there wasn’t a lot of difference between here and there. Segregation, discrimination, but it was subtle” (*SF Chronicle*; 2002, Civil Wrongs Inspire). Additionally, profiling the City at the war’s end, Joseph James (1945) states, “After a brief period of bewilderment at the sudden appearance of thousands of articulate Negroes quoting from

the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States, Caucasian San Francisco turned to the machinery already at hand for the subjugation of the Oriental and applied it to the Negro" (168).

Most of the newcomers moved into war-time housing in the Hunters Point neighborhood near the shipyards or into the Western Addition, an area also known as the Fillmore district. France (1962) notes that "In the early part of 1942, nearly all the Japanese were removed from the West Coast, and the housing they had occupied became available to the new war workers. Negroes were the most direct beneficiaries of this newly available housing," moving into the Western Addition area once known as "Little Osaka" (59–60). By 1943, about 9,000 African Americans were crowded into the same area previously occupied by 5,000 Japanese and city health officials classified over half of the Fillmore's housing stock as substandard (*SF Examiner*; 1982, Marinship). More generally, city planners reflecting back over several decades noted what African Americans and many other San Franciscans could have told them then when they wrote, "From the early 1930's until the end of WW II, San Francisco did little to improve or even maintain its community facilities. As a result, the city entered the postwar years with a physical plant that was inadequate for the needs of a growing and vigorous community (Shelley Papers; box 4). However, the newcomers were, if nothing else, practical about the circumstances they found themselves in and made the best of what they had. For example, in response to the housing situation France (1962) states, "Already this area [the Fillmore District] was overcrowded and many of the dwellings were substandard, yet the shelter afforded was better than none at all" (60).

It was not that African Americans wanted to be sequestered in racially homogenous areas. Such confinement was, at least in part, the result of restrictive covenants, agreements meant to keep African Americans penned in only a few well-defined neighborhoods. The problem was so acute that in 1945 the American Council on Race Relations released a pamphlet entitled "Hemmed In: ABC's of Race Restrictive Housing Covenants" in an effort to explain the deleterious effects of this practice and how to combat it. In it, the Council's Community Services Director Robert Weaver defines race restrictive covenants as "compacts entered into by a group of property owners, subdivision developers, or real estate operators in a given neighborhood binding them not to sell, rent, lease or otherwise convey their property to specified groups (usually colored people) for a definite period unless all agree to the transaction" (2). James (1945) asserts that in San Francisco, "local real-estate operators imported a special type of restrictive covenant from St. Louis for use against Negroes" (168).

Although the influx of African Americans was new, discrimination in San Francisco's housing market was all too familiar. Daniels (1990) indicates that the discriminatory practices used against African Americans were initially developed to thwart an entirely different ethnic group—the Chinese. He notes that

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Restrictive covenants played an important role in preventing migrants from locating in certain neighborhoods of the city. White property owners agreed not to sell to non-Caucasians, in covenants that were part of an old San Francisco tradition, first developed to keep the Chinese in Chinatown. (169)

Indeed, once this old prejudice was revised to fit the new circumstances, it was very effective in limiting the housing choices and thus living conditions of African Americans.

A prime example of restrictive covenants in action occurred in Portola Heights, a district in the southeastern section of the city. In 1946 this area was newly developed and comprised mostly of small individually owned homes that cost around \$6,000. In February of that year, local residents were urged to attend a meeting of the Portola Heights Boosters Club to discuss the residential restrictive covenant of the district. The following note, printed on a handbill that was left in mailboxes, urged white residents to action. It read:

The master deed of this area states that only members of the white Caucasian race are allowed to reside in this district, except as servants. These Restrictions Have Been Violated. If you are interested in maintaining the value of your property, it will be to your advantage to be present at this meeting. (Selvin Collection, SFSU Labor Archives)

Though none of the “violators” identified were African American, it seems that two Filipino men married to white women and a Chinese couple were more than their white neighbors could tolerate.

Whether the covenants were imported from St. Louis or elsewhere, whether enacted against Filipinos, Chinese or African Americans, Robert Weaver firmly opposed such discrimination. He notes that “Of all the instruments which effect this residential segregation, race restrictive covenants are the most dangerous,” and further indicates that this is because, “Such covenants give legal sanction and the appearance of respectability to residential segregation” (Weaver; 1945, 3).

Such dramatic and rapid growth in San Francisco’s African American community prompted the local Y.W.C.A., the Race Relations Division of the American Missionary Association and the Rosenwald Fund to undertake a study that would assess race relations and recommend changes it deemed necessary. In the Fall of 1943, under the leadership of Fisk University sociologist Charles Johnson, some 150 agencies and individuals set out to collect data and in the Spring of 1944 their results were published in *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco*. A report of the Interim Steering Committee of the Johnson Survey published in the Summer of 1944 concluded that each of the six study sections, “registered an emphatic judgment that existing agencies are not adequate to meet the problem, and that a separate community-wide committee is needed to carry through the basic purpose

of the Survey” (1). The report admonishes that because it is in the vanguard of progressive leadership nation-wide,

San Francisco, of all cities in the United States, can least afford to drift along without facing the crisis in race relations. Not only is our immediate problem the most serious in the country, not only are we sowing seeds of disaster, but our particular responsibility for progressive leadership in this matter is unique in America. (2)

It concludes, “Therefore, real racial equality, and the elimination of segregation and discrimination in any form, must be our positive ultimate goal, here in San Francisco above all” (2).

Though there were six sections of the Interim Steering Committee’s report, housing stood out as the most glaring need. Among other things, the Housing section recommended, that “there shall be no housing plans or policies of any kind which tend to establish or maintain segregated projects, areas, districts, or administrative offices”; that 2,500 public war housing units in addition to the existing units in Hunters Point be made available to African American war workers in particular; that there be “fair and legal rent levels in areas occupied by Negroes” and that there be “positive legal and educational steps toward elimination of deed restrictions and covenants involving racial discrimination” (2). In addition, the “Family, School, and Recreation” section noted that “The need for better housing was stressed by all groups and its bearing on the problems of family, school, and recreation is obvious and desperate” (3). Douglas Daniels (1990), whose book *Pioneer Urbanites* was one of the first about San Francisco’s African American community, echos the conclusions of the Johnson Study by noting, “The need for adequate housing was the single most pressing—and most frequently articulated—problem of the migrants” (168).

Dentist Daniel Collins, who had arrived in San Francisco in 1942 to take a post teaching at the University of California’s Dental School, saw clearly what many newcomers were up against. He explains that

Because there weren’t [sic] enough housing for every newcomer to have a new place so they doubled up. A whole family was living in an apartment. And they could work around the clock because the war industry was going 24 hours a day. So you could have what they call hot-seating. People were renting rooms, you could have the room in the mornings.

Collins continues,

Half a day. In fact, you know, we laugh about it now but I knew one guy who was a very small old man named Merle Gadles. He was a wise, wise old-timer. Merle Gadles rented some guy a big chifforobe. The guy stayed in a big chifforobe. That was just a big enough drawer

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for a guy to sleep in. Well that was the circumstances on the ground level. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

The circumstances got even worse when, in July of 1946, a four-alarm fire raged through five buildings in the Western Addition. The fire ignited among newspapers and trash that had collected under the steps of a courtyard lightwell at 1565 Octavia Street. Two hundred tenants, mostly Black and white servicemen and war workers and their families, were forced to flee their homes. One paper reported that half the tenants were African American and that in the end, 77 people were left homeless (*People's World*, 1945, Fillmore Fire).

Collins would have a more personal experience with housing difficulties when he went to find housing for his wife and family. In the late 1940s, once his expectant wife and infant son joined him in San Francisco, Collins attempted to find a larger place that would accommodate them all comfortably. As he tells it,

I had a letter in my hand from Dean Fleming verifying me as a member of the [UCSF School of Dentistry] faculty saying he's clean and he's decent, he's an upright citizen, please help him. And I carried that letter around I guess 20 or 30 places where I saw signs around the university, up around the university, all that whole area. I spent all my lunch hours and on my way home. I'd stop by wherever I saw signs for rent. And as soon as I'd show my face, "No, I can't rent to you. No, people wouldn't like it," or whatever. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

Determined to find a place, Dr. Collins placed an ad in the paper. However, this time he described exactly who was looking for the place to avoid any more "misunderstandings." As Collins notes, "So I put an ad in the newspaper and described it. I named it out in the paper. You know I didn't want to be disappointed again. Negro doctor with wife and baby, two children, needs a place" (Collins, personal interview, 2006). In contrast to his other attempts, the answer to Collins' ad would prove that sometimes there was an element of goodwill among races in San Francisco. In fact, the response to his ad fundamentally changed the way Collins thought about people.

Collins describes what happened when Mrs. Lillian Brown phoned him to come over and discuss renting the bottom flat of her house in the Fillmore district. After talking the circumstances over, Collins notes, "She said come live with me. She's a white woman whom I had never met. She just picked up an ad and decides to see what happens." Collins goes on,

She gave us the downstairs to live in and we stayed with Mrs. Brown for about a year, a year and a half. And then she decided to move, she wanted a smaller quarters. She was getting older. She wanted to move just across the street to a brick apartment building. They were small units,

everything, first floor and whatnot. And she sold us the house for \$5,000. Pay for it however you want to. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

Reflecting back on that episode in his life Dr. Collins suggests that this ended up being an important lesson in life. He notes that “She had no connections. She was not a member of any organization. She was no big liberal or no big ILWU, just an ordinary white citizen. So one makes a big mistake when you prejudge everybody with the same brush. So Mrs. Brown taught me a big lesson” (Collins, personal interview, 2006).

Mrs. Brown’s example of goodwill notwithstanding, by the end of the war even San Francisco’s mayor Roger Lapham was nonplused about the expanding African American community. In a 1944 press conference the mayor asked Tom Fleming, a well-known African American reporter, how long it would be until the African American migrants went home. Fleming’s response: “Mr. Mayor, you know how permanent the Golden Gate is? Well Blacks are just as permanent as the Golden Gate.” Inflaming the mayor further, he continued, “You might expect to see many more coming out here” (Fleming; 1999). Unfortunately, Mayor Lapham was not the only bigoted city official. In November of 1945, a city newspaper reported that Russel Westover, assistant director of the San Francisco Housing Administration, let Herbert Nugent, a candidate for the Board of Supervisors, know “that Negroes in need of housing should leave town” (*People’s World*; 1945, Nugent Leads).

Irrespective of the wishes of any city officials, San Francisco’s African American population had grown by over 665% during the war years alone and it was easy to see why African Americans would want to move there. Not only were there an abundance of jobs with high wages there were also a plethora of social, entertainment and business outlets that made for an exciting way of life. For example, Maya Angelou describes the Fillmore district during the War years as follows:

On Post Street, where our house was, the hill skidded slowly down to Fillmore, the market heart of our district. In the two short blocks before it reached its destination, the street housed two day-and-night restaurants, two pool halls, four Chinese restaurants, two gambling houses, plus diners, shoeshine shops, beauty salons, barber shops and at least four churches. To fully grasp the never-ending activity in San Francisco’s Negro neighborhood during the war, one need only know that the two blocks described were side streets that were duplicated many times over in the eight-to-ten-square-block area. (Angelou; 1971, 179)

In addition, once the war ended not only did the majority of these newcomers stay in their new-found home, but many more would follow and San Francisco’s African American population would continue to grow, increasing by 11,000 between 1945 and 1950 (Broussard; 1993, 190 & Taylor; 1998, 254).

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The situation was hardly perfect however. Shortly after the war ended, R. J. Reynolds, an assistant District Attorney for the City, submitted a report noting,

One of the things badly needed is better housing accommodations for Negroes in San Francisco. Much of their infractions of the law as disturbers of the peace, disruptions in their family life, and fighting amongst themselves has definite relation to the overcrowded, deteriorated quarters in which they live, and the tendency of real estate firms to rent or sell to them only in certain areas, the most prominent being the Fillmore area. This situation is aggravated by the spread of restrictive covenant agreements within the city against the Negro and other minority groups, not only in California but all over the nation, and the overwhelming tendency of the courts to uphold them. (Reynolds; 1947, *The Negro and Crime in San Francisco*)

City officials also took note of the compounding problems and, in the Spring of 1945, Mayor Lapham and the San Francisco Community Chest became the first city in the nation to seek aid other than financial when they invited 32-year-old Charlotte Moton, a recreation representative for the Office of Community War Services and daughter of Tuskegee President Robert Moton, to study the basic needs of the City's African American population. The study was to be aimed at "the intelligent integration of this city's 40,000 Negro people into the community life." To this end Miss Moton stated, "Any problems that do exist are not to be solved by Negroes alone. Nor are they to be solved by whites alone. The only fundamental answer lies in working together—and we can work together" (*People's World*, 1945, Charlotte Moton). However, in San Francisco, as it was in many postwar West Coast cities, the situation was not so black and white. For example, one seemingly overlooked aspect racial integration was the reintegration of San Francisco's returning Japanese population who came back to the Western Addition and often found African American families living in their homes. As Broussard notes, "When the Japanese returned in 1945, not surprisingly, there was a fair amount of tension between the Japanese and the African Americans" (*The Fillmore*; [www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore](http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore)).

Surely Moton's work uncovered veiled racism that, although as pernicious as that in the South, was more difficult to detect. Moton, who had worked all over the country, noted that working outside the South was often more difficult than working in it because, "The south is honest. They don't like us, they tell us so and they do things about it that are clearly evident" (*People's World*, 1945, Charlotte Moton). Longtime San Francisco resident and Jazz great Vernon Alley corroborated Moton's claim saying, "The racism wasn't as up-front as in the South, but it was here" (*SF Chronicle*; 1998, *Jazz Helped Break*). Further, Ralph Friedman described an example of what Moton was up against when he recalled an incident that occurred

on a bus in San Francisco. Friedman, a white man, tells how, as the bus pulled away from the curb, he steadied a young African American girl on his lap until her mother could get situated. He notes, "While this was happening someone behind me gave my leg a poke. I turned to see a woman of about sixty letting herself down in the next seat. As she did, she gave me an ugly look and hissed, "Nigger-lover!" She said it so quietly no one but I had heard it" (*The Voice*, 1949, It Happened).

There were also encouraging signs of racial harmony in the city. In what was likely an over-statement of optimism but certainly a step in a positive direction for African American residents, a 1945 issue of *The People's World* reported that the San Francisco Board of Education's childcare program, under the direction of Marian Turner, "had achieved the almost complete removal of racial discrimination." The article reveals that "Even quite benighted people are usually not too shocked to see Negro, Chinese and white toddlers playing happily together, but to behold teachers of these races supervising the youngsters TOGETHER usually sets them back on their heels. 'Why you can't DO that,' they scream, 'Think of Racial Tensions!'" The article also notes that the extended day-care centers operated successfully with integrated staffs where both Blacks and whites were in supervisory positions over the other (*People's World*, 1945, The Answer).

Furthermore, there were pro-active attempts to create and sustain racial amity. The Marine Cooks and Stewards Union paper, *The Voice*, reported on a mass meeting at San Francisco's Civic Auditorium featuring, among others, Paul Robeson. The event, endorsed by the CIO and sponsored by the Council for Civic Unity (CCU), was intended to "cement good will amongst races." The article continues, "Walter Houston and a number of other Hollywood celebrities will appear with Robeson in a program stressing the necessity for continued harmony between all races and groups now and in peacetime" (*The Voice*; 1945, Mass Meeting).

While Ralph Friedman's bus incident was an example of individual bigotry, San Francisco also grappled with institutional racism. This was clearly evidenced in the uneasy relationship between San Francisco's African American community and the police force. To begin, San Francisco's police department did not hire African American officers. Bassist Vernon Alley, who was a high school track and football star, recounts that he was unable to get a job with the SFPD during the 1940s because he was African American (*SF Chronicle*; 2004, Vernon Alley). Next, prior to World War II there was relatively little conflict between the police and the African American community; however, reports of police brutality became increasingly common as the first postwar decade drew to a close.

One specific example of such police brutality involved Willie Guiden. Guiden, who had arranged to pay his weekly rent mid-week, returned to his Yukon Hotel room on Third Street to find that the landlord had padlocked the door. After a brief conversation about the unpaid rent, the landlord called the police on Guiden. The officers escorted him out of the hotel and told him,



“Remember, if you try to go back in there you’ll get the hell beaten out of you.” Guiden replied, “I was only thinking. You don’t mind a guy thinking, do you?” According to the *People’s World*, after that comment the police clubbed him in the back of the head, beat him with blackjacks and knocked out some of his teeth. They then handcuffed Guiden, drew their guns and stated, “We ought to blow his brains out.” A plainclothes policeman who happened by convinced the officers to take Guiden to the hospital where he received stitches and was then transported to jail. Guiden told reporters that “They kept pushing me around,” asking, “Where that nigger? What have you been doing, nigger? Stand up straight, nigger.” At his trial, the officers admitted that Guiden was not drunk nor had he hit them but that he had resisted arrest. Proving that institutional racism did not stop at the rank and file of the police force the judge presiding over Guiden’s case found him guilty and, after issuing him a six-month suspended sentence, quipped, “I don’t know what to think about you guys. I ought to have a jail just to put you in and keep you” (*People’s World*, 1945, *This Happened*).

Unfortunately, the above incident may have been only one occurrence in a pattern of police harassment directed at African American men. In some instances evidence suggests union workers were at particular risk of police harassment. For example, in an August 18, 1949 article entitled “Union Demands End to Frisco Police Attack on Negroes” it was reported that five different African American Marine Cooks and Stewards (MCS) members were picked up on vagrancy charges while in front of or near the MCS union hall on August 2, 1949. Though one of the men was let go, four were booked. The article notes that “When the case came to trial the next day, Officer Cottrell left the courtroom when he learned that MCS Attorney Harold Sawyer was representing the members. Sawyer declared to the court that the Police Department was deliberately persecuting Negroes, and that this was the reason for the arrest” (*The Voice*, 1949, *Union Demands*). Despite Judge O’Day’s denial of police harassment, a MCS member’s letter to the Police Commission would state,

The intimidation of Negroes by members of the Police Department is a scandalous prostitution of the legitimate functions of the police. In the cases of the four men referred to above, there was not the slightest evidence of vagrancy. As soon as the arresting officers learned that the four men would be defended, and by lawyers who could not be intimidated, they did not dare even to attempt to justify the arrests. (*The Voice*, 1949, *Union Demands*)

Strongly worded letters and a good legal defense team would not always be enough however. Just two weeks later MCS member Johnnie Lampkin was arrested while eating dinner at the American Cafe. An article describes the scene: “They arrested him, for no reason as far as he or anyone in the restaurant could see, but when they learned he was an MCS member they let him go. ‘Oh, MCS,’ one of the cops said. ‘We’ve been having a little

trouble with that outfit' (*The Voice*, 1949, Attack on Negro). The article notes further,

The owners and customers of the American Cafe signed a letter protesting the police attack on Brother Lampkin. 'He comes regularly into our restaurant to eat,' the letter said. 'We know him to be always sober, very dignified and respectable at all times.' 'We resent very much police officers molesting, bothering and giving any of our customers or any persons who're conducting themselves in a dignified manner in this restaurant a bad time, such as was given Mr. Lampkin'. (*The Voice*, 1949, Attack on Negro)

The letter goes on to indicate that the reason Lampkin was singled out may have been because he was an African American seaman.

Although he never had problems with the police himself, veteran reporter Tom Fleming also testified to the pervasive brutality that the African American community suffered at the hands of the San Francisco Police Department. He states,

Well, I knew that the police department, that they could beat you up on the streets and do whatever they wanted to do and get away with it. But I never did have any problems myself. Maybe because a lot of 'em knew me because I was a newspaper man. That could have had a lot to do with it too. And they talked to me differently to the other Blacks because they knew they couldn't get away with a lot of nonsense with me 'cause I didn't take no bullshit. 'Cause I'd go tell the goddamn Chief 'bout what they were trying to do and they knew I could do that. (Fleming, personal interview, 2005)

Notoriety, prestige and social standing were not always enough to get African Americans out of difficult situations and certainly not enough to garner a dignified and respectful encounter. In what is one of the most well known instances of police harassment during this era, NAACP president and well-known civil rights leader Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett was pulled over by a police officer one evening in 1947. As Tom Fleming recalls it:

He was driving out California Street. I guess he had a patient way out there, you know. And this cop pulled him over and said he'd been following him for so many blocks and he'd gone through the stop signs. So Goodlett said, "Well, why didn't you stop me when I did that the first time?" And they got into something on this so he said, "Well let me see your driver's license Carlton." So Goodlett said, "Listen, Mr. Officer. I don't know your name but my name is Dr. Goodlett to you and everybody else." He [the officer] said, "Get outta the car." Goodlett said, "I ain't movin'." He [the officer] grabbed him and pulled him outta the

goddamn car and said, “You under arrest.” (Fleming, personal interview, 2005)

The next morning citizens in support of Goodlett packed the courtroom and when the arresting officer failed to appear the charges were dropped (Fleming; 1999, [www.freepress.org](http://www.freepress.org)). As Fleming recalls, “Goodlett walked out and the cops avoided him from then on. They didn’t want any part of him at all” (Fleming, personal interview, 2005).



*Figure 1.1* Dr. Carlton B. Goodlett, 1963. Goodlett held both an M.D. and Ph.D., owned San Francisco’s most influential African American newspaper—the *Sun-Reporter*—and was a member of the World Peace Council. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

However, the police were not the only ones to perpetrate crimes against African American San Franciscans. In a special report to Edmund G. Brown, San Francisco's District Attorney, R. J. Reynolds indicated that a combination of wartime lay-offs and lower-class migrants contributed to the increased crime rate. Reynolds notes, "It appears that at the peak of San Francisco's war-time production Negro elements with pronounced criminal backgrounds were brought in to help do the job, and the projection of their criminal activities into this area is still apparent" (Reynolds; 1947, *The Negro and Crime in San Francisco*). Placing the burden squarely on Southern newcomers, he continued, "In checking over the arrests, it is readily seen that most of the Negroes arrested are not natives of San Francisco or of California. The most common background is upbringing in the State of Texas, followed by Louisiana and Oklahoma" (Reynolds; 1947, *The Negro and Crime in San Francisco*).

It seems intuitive that given the sheer number of African American migrants coming to San Francisco for wartime employment that any uptick in crime would disproportionately involve these newcomers, especially once the employment boom itself began to bust. Making this point himself, Reynolds indicates,

So prominent among the crimes that the Negro has frequency in are those which enrich him with financial gain. I talked with Judge Daniel Shoemaker one day and he was of the opinion that much of this crime is definitely a reaction to much economic frustration along legitimate avenues of employment. Without this sense of economic frustration influencing his [the Negro] decisions, he would be much less inclined toward criminal activity for financial gain. (Reynolds; 1947, *The Negro and Crime in San Francisco*)

The end of World War II meant the end of the job-boom for many African American San Franciscans. Newcomers, returning veterans and recent hires were all in jeopardy as the shipyards laid-off workers and factories shed jobs. Recalling the postwar bust, one long time resident of Hunters Point, an area of San Francisco that was comprised almost exclusively of war workers at this time, noted that

There have been many changes since I came to San Francisco in 1944; it was in the height of the war at the time and the people really didn't think about what actually was going to happen to them later on. A lot of people thought they were going back where they came from or would be settling here. And then at the end of the war in '46, came a terrible thing. People were being let out of their jobs in masses—and when I said masses, I mean like working at the shipyards, they would say today so many hundred would be laid off. So it left people without work again—particularly Negro people in the Hunters Point area. (Carmicael; 1968, 45)

A state employment official put it even more bluntly saying, "What happened when the war was over should have been expected. Given a chance to

choose between workmen of equal skills, employers began to discriminate again” (*San Francisco News*; 1956, . . . To Be Black). Furthermore, Broussard (1993) notes that “Nearly half of the 100 leading San Francisco industries did not employ a single black worker in 1944,” and that “Ninety percent of black workers were employed by 10% of all industries” (150). Quick to recognize the precipitous decline in jobs for African Americans, in 1946 the San Francisco Urban League released a pamphlet entitled “So You’re Looking For a Job?.” It was geared toward helping people find employment and offered tips for job seekers. In part, it states, “Now that the war is over jobs are not as plentiful. War industries have closed down or are operating with greatly reduced forces. Veterans have come back to claim their old jobs or to look around for new ones. The competition is keen and the chances are that it will become keener” (*So You’re Looking*, 1946). Among the organizations listed in this pamphlet that had signed on to help with job searches were: the local offices of the U.S. Employment Service, the San Francisco branches of the NAACP and Urban League, the Booker T. Washington Community Center and the Council for Civic Unity.

However, even with help from such venerable institutions, the prospects for many African Americans looking for work were often grim. Gerald Johnson noticed this immediately when, upon being discharged in San Francisco from the navy, he found few Black faces working in what was the hub of the African American community, the Fillmore district. He observed, “And when I got back I had a chance to look around and I walked up Fillmore Street and I said, ‘How come there ain’t no Blacks workin’ in none of those stores?’ They had a Longs Drug Store and Petaluma Poultry, meat markets, clothing stores, and nothing” (Johnson, 2005, personal interview). When finding a job working for someone else proved nearly impossible there were people who decided that going into business for themselves might be more secure or at least more satisfying. One such person was a returning Army veteran named Julian Richardson. However, he found that even small business owners faced an up-hill battle when he tried to open a print shop. He notes, “A black person in 1946 could not rent a space between Sutter and Fulton on Fillmore. Only two black people were even employed in that area” (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, *The Legacy*).

Although bright spots for African American job hunters were less common, some shown through the postwar bust. Such was the case with Mattie Jackson. Like many others, she and her husband, John P. Jackson, left Texas for San Francisco in 1942 because Mr. Jackson had secured a job at the Hunters Point Shipyard. Once situated, Mrs. Jackson began looking for work and, upon seeing a “cashier wanted” sign at a Hunters Point cafeteria, applied for the job. Mrs. Jackson and a white woman were both given a try out and much to her surprise and delight she was offered the position. Recalling this time Mrs. Jackson notes, “In Texas, I never would have applied, and if I had, I wouldn’t have gotten the job. This fair kind of treatment is one of the reasons I’m sold on San Francisco” (*SF Chronicle*; 2009, Mattie Jackson). Her good fortune would continue after the war as

well. By the late 1940s, when many African American women were scouring the City for work, Mrs. Jackson had taken a job at a local textile company where she would eventually move on to serve as a union shop steward and manager of Pacific Northwest District Council of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU). When she went on to become international vice president on the General Executive Board of the ILGWU she would be the first African American women to hold an executive office for that union (*SF Chronicle*; 2009, Mattie Jackson).

When it came to union work for postwar African American San Franciscans, Mrs. Jackson's case proved to be more the exception than the rule however. For example, seventy percent of African Americans who migrated to the Bay Area worked in the shipyards during World War II and of those shipyard workers 70% were represented by the Boilermakers union (NAACP WCRF; carton 5). However, in 1937 the Boilermakers authorized the establishment of all-Black auxiliaries, organizations that African American were forced to join if they were to secure employment but in which they had no power, not even a vote, in union business (NAACP WCRF; carton 5). The 1945 California Supreme Court decision in *James vs. Marinship* ended the segregated auxiliary arrangement in California and made it illegal to discriminate against African American workers (Broussard; 1993, 164–65). Citing Executive Order 9346 which encouraged full participation in the war effort and outlawed discrimination in the employment of any person in the war industries on the basis of race, creed, color or national origin, the court ruled that African Americans “must be admitted to membership under the same terms and conditions applicable to non-Negroes unless the union and the employer refrain from enforcing the closed shop agreement against them” (Broussard; 1993, 164). France (1962) indicates that this was a major turning point for African American labor in California as companies and unions all over the Bay Area relaxed race restrictions on employment (131). Such was the case with the Boilermakers, who, as a 1948 study shows, had integrated their lodges after the *Marinship* decision (NAACP WCRF; carton 5). The irony was that, just months after the *Marinship* ruling, the war came to a close and, as Broussard (1993) notes, “As fate would have it, black shipyard workers never realized the full potential of the California Supreme Court's decision” (165).

In many cases however, even when African Americans were able to crack open a union Laurence Maes (1948) points out that

A direct result of the predominance of craft union organization has been a stratification of occupations available to Negroes. Even though the Negro penetrates a new firm or industry, he may find many occupations therein closed to him as a result of union job control. An equally far-reaching effect of the high degree of unionization has been the exclusion of Negroes from certain ‘traditional’ occupations such as hotel bellmen, waiters, elevator operators, and to some extent, janitorial work. Early unionization of such occupations by conservative craft unions has had an adverse effect on Negro penetration. (19)

## 22 *The Postwar Struggle for Civil Rights*

Maes also indicates that not only was it difficult for African Americans to find and maintain jobs, but they suffered from unemployment more so than did their white counterparts as well. He writes,

Not only have Negroes experienced a disproportionate amount of unemployment since the war, but the effect of this unemployment is more severe. Unemployment of white workers during this period of relatively high demand for labor has been characterized by a rapid turnover and relatively short period of unemployment for each individual. Negroes, on the other hand, have been unemployed for longer periods and have frequently exhausted their unemployment benefits as evidenced by increasing non-white loads being carried by local relief agencies. (Maes; 1948, 24)

There was, however, a spirit of activism in San Francisco's African American community when it came time to demand equal employment opportunities, especially among the newcomers. Gerald Johnson, who had grown up questioning racism in New Orleans as a teen, was surely not going to stand for it in San Francisco as an adult. Noticing the paucity of African Americans working in shops on Fillmore Street, Johnson and some friends of his decided that picketing those stores was the best way to force them to hire African Americans. Only, as was sometimes the case back home in Louisiana, Johnson had to act as the catalyst to get the ball rolling. He recalls his first picket to encourage a Fillmore district meat market to hire African American employees noting,

So we got the signs all made and then we decided to form the Civic Progressive Union. And so we were going to hit the bricks at 7 o'clock to picket. So I'm there at 7 o'clock looking to see who else is there. Nobody. Ain't anybody. They weren't there. So I just picked a sign up and started marching in front of this Petaluma Poultry. And then they came out and they all excited. And I said, "Hey, you don't have any Black people working here. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Although the owners of the shop called the police on Mr. Johnson, he was allowed to continue picketing. Johnson's singular picket expanded throughout the day and, as he notes,

But by the time they came we had shut that place down. Cause nobody went in it. And then later in the day a few went in it and they wished they hadn't because we knocked all the food out they came out with. I guess it was two days and they hired a Black to start working there. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Tasting success, Johnson and his compatriots went after the Uptown and American theaters, but this time they would have the support of a more diverse and larger group. He explains,

So when we picket the American theater, up until then we had not had any whites on the picket line. But we went to the American theater, the first day we picket the picket line was two or three blocks long full of whites. While I later found out that they were, part of 'em from the union, part of 'em from the Communist Party and so on. So we had one heck of a picket line. So we decided to expand it to the American theater and one other, I forget what it was. Three we picket at the same time. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Johnson was nearly two decades before his time. Such commitment and energy put into direct action for civil rights would not occur regularly in San Francisco until the 1960s.



*Figure 1.2* Uptown Theater at Sutter and Steiner Streets, 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



Gerald Johnson's involvement in the Communist Party (CP-USA) after World War II surely had something to do with, as Drake and Cayton (1970) put it, the Party's appeal to African Americans. They note, "The Reds had a plan. They won the admiration of Negroes by default. They were the only white people who seemed to really care what happened to the Negro" (735–736). For Johnson, the matter was about enabling African Americans to gain access to employment opportunities that were previously closed to them. He describes his participation in the CP-USA saying,

As a matter of fact, after the first picket line at the Uptown Theater I met an individual from the Communist Party. And we talked for quite a while and he asked me to join and I joined the Communist Party. And I was very active in the Party for I think about ten years. I was active in the unions organizing, in the labor union in trying to get Black business agents, in the carpenter's union trying to get Black business agents and expanding Black participation operating as a member of the Communist Party. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

However, the Communist Party's help was not always welcomed. Broussard (1993) indicates that the efforts of the John Brown Club to picket theaters that refused to hire African Americans in San Francisco in 1946 marked the beginning of the struggle between the SF NAACP and the CP-USA, a struggle that would extend into the 1950s (227). The minutes of a December 1946 meeting of the NAACP Board of Directors indicates that the local NAACP branch voted to assist the John Brown Club with the theater picket in an effort to force the theater's management to hire African Americans. However, they also cautioned that

This incident has been played up by the daily press, and in each case the name of the Association is given in connection with the Communist Party apparently in an effort to place the Association and the Communist Party in the same category before the public. The membership at large in San Francisco is apparently awakening to this situation and seems to show more concern now than has previously been the case. It possibly will take steps to limit much of this influence. (NAACP WCRF; carton 24)

By 1947, the relationship between the SF-NAACP and the CP-USA had not improved. In a section of the minutes of the meeting of the Board of Directors from June of that year entitled "San Francisco Branch Situation," Mrs. Anthony Hart, an NAACP Executive Board member, and Dr. Buell Gallagher, member of the Board of Directors, complained that the San Francisco branch of the NAACP was "in support of the Communist Party line." Mrs. Hart noted specifically that branch President Dr. Carlton Goodlett permitted copies of the Communist newspaper *The People's World* to

be distributed at a San Francisco NAACP meeting. In response, the Assistant Secretary noted the National Office did not approve the distribution of *The People's World* or any other political literature of any party within branch meetings and it was then resolved that any political literature was forbidden at branch meetings (NAACP WCRF; carton 24).

However, not all SF-NAACP members were hostile to the Communist Party. Harry Williams, a member of both the NAACP and the CP-USA, warned that anti-communism would lead to “the destruction of more and more civil liberties and to an increase in police brutality and lynching” (*People's World*; 1951, NAACP Warned of Witchhunt). This warning came when the SF-NAACP postponed its regularly scheduled elections because Williams, the CP-USA's chairman in the Fillmore district, was a member of the nomination committee. Noting that the constitution of the NAACP did not prohibit Communists from either membership or holding office, Williams stated, “The Negro people and their organizations cannot afford the luxury of red-baiting, since anti-communism is a smoke screen used by Dixiecrats and their friends behind which to practice discrimination and segregation” (*People's World*; 1951, NAACP Warned of Witchhunt). After indicating that the CP-USA was not responsible for racist policies in housing, education or voting rights, Williams proposed a program of positive action and concluded that the Communist Party, “never has and does not now seek to take over or control any organization by open or secret means.” The relationship between the NAACP and the CP-USA would remain contentious for years to come.

## 2 Challenges of the 1950s

### Discrimination, Employment and Crime

San Francisco entered the 1950s a changed city, larger and more diverse than it ever had been. Where once less than one percent of the population was African American, by 1950 there were 43,502 African Americans, 5.6% of the total population. This 800% increase in just one decade was by far the largest percentage increase in any major West Coast city. Oakland was next with a 460% increase and Portland followed with a 400% increase (Taylor; 1998, 254). With such a large and rapid increase in San Francisco's African American population, it was nearly inevitable that there would be a corresponding increase in racial discrimination. The situation was so bad in fact that the Council for Civic Unity (CCU) claimed publicly that race relations in San Francisco, a city well-known for its race-liberal ways, were no better than anywhere else in the country (Broussard; 1993, 218). This sentiment was echoed by a UC Berkeley Extension representative who, in a letter to the local branch of the NAACP, wrote, "Because of the growing concern with the problem of race relations in California, and more particularly in the Bay Area, University of California Extension would like to clarify some of the issues involved by offering this summer, both in Berkeley and in San Francisco, a short evening course, Race and Ethnic Relations X102" (NAACP WCRF; carton 12).

Further describing the circumstances was an article that appeared in a 1956 edition of the *San Francisco News*. Under the caption ". . . To Be Black and Live in S.F.," it painted a grim picture of living conditions for African American San Franciscans noting,

Geographically, it is to live primarily in one of three neighborhoods known roughly as Fillmore, Hunters Point and South of Market. Economically, it is something to be without a job until there is full employment among the remainder of the community and to earn less at that when one is available. Socially, it is to be excluded from government, except for token appointments; from countless voluntary associations that make up a democracy; and from the kind of housing, medical care and education Americans expect. (*San Francisco News*; 1956, . . . To Be Black)

Not only was there a general sense that conditions for African American San Franciscans were tough, there were also specific instances of overt racism

that made it clear the City still had a ways to go to live up to its reputation as an open-minded liberal metropolis. In one example of unbridled bigotry, Loren Repulski, a divorced cab driver who lost a custody battle to his ex-wife, demanded that she “desist from association with persons of non-Caucasian ancestry in front of the child,” because he felt that such association was detrimental to the character of his four-year-old daughter. A local newspaper notes, “Repulski objects to Betty’s colored friends, especially a nurse whom Mrs. Repulski has known for some time” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Race Hate Figures). In yet another example, some years later a journalist working for the *Sun-Reporter* indicated that a man called the paper’s office and told the associate editor, Edith Austin, “You ni—ers have gone too far. If you don’t stop writing those stories about racial integration, you’ll find not only a burning cross, but The Sun-Reporter building burning down when you come to work tomorrow” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Cross Burnings). Apparently the thought of Black and white people even associating with one another was too much for some close-minded residents to take.

Unfortunately, a few racist incidents went further than mere words, proving that some people were willing to put their threats into action. First, just three weeks after Mrs. Orelia Duncan and her adult son moved into their newly purchased home at 1383 Rhode Island Street, Mrs. Duncan found a one-foot tall kerosene-soaked cross burning on her front porch. A newspaper indicated that it took police two and a half hours to arrive at Mrs. Duncan’s house and when they finally came they advised her to forget about the incident because it was only a “kiddish prank” (*People’s World*; 1951, Neighbors Back Negro Widow). Even though the event was horrifying, the neighbors’ response was encouraging. The same article reported that five of Mrs. Duncan’s white neighbors visited about a dozen homes in the immediate area and polled more than 25 residents on whether they thought she and her son had a right to live there. All but one agreed she did and, despite the opinion of one bigot who thought African Americans should be “kept in place,” the neighbors’ goodwill mission assuaged Mrs. Duncan’s immediate concerns as she noted, “I’m no longer afraid, I really feel good now” (*People’s World*; 1951, Neighbors Back Negro Widow).

Mrs. Duncan may have felt less assured when a little more than one year later bystanders reported a burning cross bearing the letters “KKK” near the intersection of Geary and Steiner—a location that was directly in the heart of the Western Addition. Although many people witnessed the blazing cross, no one could manage an explanation of just how it got there (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Cross Burned at Geary). Next, in what is the best known incident of cross burnings in the city’s postwar history, the *Sun-Reporter* notes that in June of 1958, as if it were a recreational pastime, two high school boys claiming that they were restless and began tinkering with wood, wire and tools were arrested for burning a cross on Assistant District Attorney Cecil Poole’s lawn. Robert Bilafer and Edmund Hass, both members of prominent San Francisco families, said they burned the cross at Poole’s house because they knew a Black family lived at the residence but denied knowing that

Assistant District Attorney Poole in particular lived there. Stating, "I simply can't pass this off as a teenage prank," Poole was satisfied to let the juvenile court handle the incident (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Cross Burnings).

However, not all cases of racism in San Francisco were the result of individual bigotry. Institutional racism was also well established in professional organizations, unions and private industry throughout the City. For example, when Frances Glover, managing editor of the *Sun-Reporter*, applied for membership to the San Francisco Business and Professional Women's Club, her application was rejected. Even though Glover's qualifications were impeccable—she had both undergraduate and graduate degrees, served as a member of the Board of Directors of the YWCA and was a member of the Board of Trustees of Fellowship Church—her race kept her from being accepted by the Professional Women's Club. The *Sun-Reporter* noted that "Supporters of the proposal to bar Negroes from membership argued that the San Francisco club should not set a precedent which might cause conflict with other BPWCs throughout the nation," thereby making it seem as if denying Glover's application was merely a matter of procedural necessity to stay in line with their national standards (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Sun-Reporter Editor Barred). Seeing the situation for what it truly was, Alice Kavanagh, president of the BPWC, resigned stating, "I have been a member of the organization for four years and have not once seen any indication of interest in working out the employment problems of members of minority races. This incident bears out that lack of interest" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Sun-Reporter Editor Barred). Informing the BPWC about what concerned African American women while simultaneously pointing out the club's myopic position Glover concluded, "It probably comes as a surprise to many that a group of intelligent women would take this attitude. Negro women are vitally interested in movements which would insure better working conditions, and wider opportunities for our sex" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Sun-Reporter Editor Barred).

On the other hand, some institutions made breakthroughs during the 1950s as both San Francisco State College and San Francisco City College would, for the first time, elect African Americans as student body presidents. At San Francisco State Bert Phillips, a 21 year-old star athlete and student leader who aspired to a career with the California Adult Authority, triumphed by 120 votes in a run-off election in 1953. Aware of the significance of his victory, Phillips stated, "It's truly a great honor for anybody, and for a Negro it's an even greater honor" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Students of San Francisco State). Five years later the City's community college followed San Francisco State's lead when 19 year-old Freddie Hicks was elected the first African American president of the Associated Students (*Sun-Reporter*, 1958, Negro Elected Student Body President).

A further positive development was that in 1953 the Bay Area Service League celebrated its tenth anniversary. Initially comprised of eleven charter members all of whom were African American women, Sue Bailey Thurman noted, "Its founder, Helen Stratten, will tell you that in 1943, a group of wives, lonely

for the life of active community service which they had left behind in the east, and joined by certain native daughters, came together to form a civic organization through which they could function locally as a social service unit” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1950, The Bay Area Service League). The program from their tenth anniversary gala declares that the sudden influx of African Americans to San Francisco during World War II created social problems with which the eleven founding members of the Service League thought they could help. By assisting already established agencies, “This group of women represented community leaders from San Francisco and the East Bay whose training, previous experiences and key employment provided the ‘know-how’ to approach the problems at hand” (SF-AAHCS; 1953, Bay Area Service League 10th Anniversary Program). Although the League initially emphasized service to the USO and to children, it became larger and more ambitious over the years and divided into interest groups, each organizing its own projects. In addition, it formed a junior auxiliary to teach teenaged girls etiquette and to provide cultural opportunities otherwise unavailable to them (SF-AAHCS; 1953, Bay Area Service League 10th Anniversary Program). Through the generous and diligent work of these women, many under-privileged families received direct financial assistance, holiday gifts and scholarships to schools and camps.

Although there were some positive advances for African American San Franciscans during the 1950s, the prospect of being considered equally for employment was not one of them. Broussard (1993) notes that by 1948 the state unemployment rate for African Americans was 30%; for Black women the figure was six times as great as the statewide level (210). Furthermore, jobs for African Americans were consolidated among only a hand-full of employers. As Broussard (1993) indicates, “The leading industries in San Francisco employed only a small percentage of the total Black workforce. For example, 90% of all minority workers in San Francisco had been employed by only 10% of the 100 leading firms,” and 40 of these firms employed no African Americans at all (210). At the opening of the 1950s then, the employment picture was a virtual paradox. On the one hand, African Americans had gained employment skills and opportunities during the war that qualified them for a broader range a jobs than ever before; however, finding employers willing to hire them was no easy task. Such was the situation on the ground when, in 1951, San Francisco’s most established African American reporter, Tom Fleming, editorialized that “Job discrimination based on color is, in my opinion, more vicious in the city of San Francisco than it is in most parts of the South. It is more subtle here, for they never come right out say this job cannot be held by blacks. They give them the polite run-around” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1951, My Report).

Even the Board of Supervisors acknowledged that San Francisco had a problem with employment discrimination when they debated but failed to pass a Fair Employment Practices ordinance by a vote of 6–5 (*Sun-Reporter*; 1951, Supervisors Kill FEPC). Although the mandatory antidiscrimination law failed, the Supervisors did adopt a voluntary plan. However, many civil

rights leaders opposed the plan including Urban League director Seaton Manning who offered the following assessment of it: "The voluntary plan does not call for much in the way of commitment by anyone" (Broussard; 1993, 213). As a result, Manning, along with other prominent civil rights activists, formed The San Francisco Citizens Committee for Equal Employment Opportunity, an interracial organization dedicated to defeating the voluntary plan. In the Committee's "Summary of Findings and Conclusions" it noted that "The voluntary plan has failed substantially to broaden job opportunities for minorities in San Francisco," and that discrimination "continues as widespread as before the adoption of the voluntary plan, though some of it is more subtle and devious" (Broussard; 1993, 213).

One of the most progressive unions with respect to hiring African Americans in the Bay Area, the Marine Cooks & Stewards Union (MCS), also declared the voluntary plan to be a failure. In fact, by 1951 more than half of the paid officials of MCS were from minority groups (*The Voice*; 1951, Negro Leadership). Having attended several meetings, MCS member Charles Sassoon declared, "Just as Truman's civil rights program has been nothing but empty words and promises so has the board of supervisors' voluntary FEP plan been a complete failure" (*The Voice*; 1951, For FEP in Frisco). After six months under the voluntary plan, MCS member Ted Rolfs also gave the plan a failing grade. Countering the proclamation of Almon Roth, spokesman for an employer's group who claimed that "the employers groups were more than fair to the Negro people and that 'oppressive laws' were not necessary to bring equality about," Rolfs noted, "that there was terrible discrimination in the city of San Francisco, that practically every San Francisco firm, bank, oil company, etc., refused to hire Negroes and other members of minority groups" (*The Voice*; 1951, Supervisors in S.F. Hear).

The discrimination did not stop at large companies. A series of 1952 *Sun-Reporter* articles indicated that a "Port Security Program" functioned to screen out African American union workers from work at Army and Navy docks thus barring them from work while simultaneously weakening the two most progressive waterfront unions, the MCS and the ILWU. In most cases, the screened persons were active African American union members such as Len Greer, a founding member of the Longshoremen's Union, Local 10, who estimated that he lost up to 50% of his potential work each week because of the screening process. According to Greer, the screening process purposefully punished African Americans for participating in unions and fighting for their employment rights. He noted, "This has turned out to be another form of discrimination and I think that certain backward right-wing officials of the union have definitely been behind the screening program. The Negroes in the union usually vote with the progressive side and have been strong supporters of Harry Bridges" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Unions With Least Bias Hit). The newspaper reported that the African American members of the MCS union and of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU), the only two unions with contracts on the West Coast who had Negro members, were

the hardest hit, pointing out that between 60% and 70% of the screened men were African American (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Unions With Least Bias Hit).

One union whose membership was not harassed was the all-white Sailors' Union of the Pacific (SUP) under the direction of Harry Lundeberg. During the time African Americans were being screened from jobs on the waterfront, the SUP was attempting to take over the MCS union. The *Sun-Reporter* noted that "Lundeberg is hoping to take over if and when enough Negroes and whites who stand up for unity and integration are driven off the front. Men on the front say obviously the screening is to the advantage of Lundeberg and Curran" [Joe Curran from the National Maritime Union also had designs on taking over the MCS membership.] (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Fear Haunts Many Negro). The same article also reported that "All seamen will tell you that a Negro dare not enter the hall of the SUP alone in the daytime and the SUP has a long and disgraceful history of discrimination" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Fear Haunts Many Negro).

Gerald Johnson, who moved to San Francisco after the war in 1946, experienced the racism of the SUP first hand when, attempting to ship out from New Orleans, he went to the Custom House to sign up for a ship. As Johnson tells it,

I go to the Custom House, walk up the steps and they have the union people conducting they business in the Custom House. So all of a sudden I notice these guys looking at me with disdain and hate. So they say, 'What do you want?' I say, 'Well, I wanna ship out. I wanna sign up to get a ship out.' 'Nigger, don't you know you are not gonna be shipping out in no union!' And they sort of made a stand you know. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Once Johnson made it out to San Francisco he shipped out with the MCS union, noting, "It was a very progressive union . . . real radical, just up my alley" (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005).

The last article in the *Sun-Reporter* series on the Port Security Program illustrates how it worked to neutralize African Americans who were activists against discrimination. Twenty-seven year-old Ray Crawford related that "I was screened because I'm a guy who is not willing to accept the position offered the negro in this country. I'm not willing to be second to anyone or allow my kids to grow up to be subservient because of my inability to more [sic] forward" (*Sun-Reporter*, 1952, Fear Haunts Many Negro). Further, John Flower, who led a picket against the screening process when President Truman visited San Francisco, uncovered a multifaceted problem saying,

The question of my being screened is a twofold kind of thing. First was the question of my work in the union of carrying out a program for the brothers, fighting against the discrimination of the companies,



fighting for the enforcement of the contract. The other is the fact of my participation in the Stockholm Peace campaign, where I collected 1400 signatures to outlaw the atom bomb. I'm of the opinion that the increasing attacks against the Negro people as well as against the two particular maritime unions on the West coast, the ILWU and the MC&S and the so called investigation of subversive activity on the waterfront which is supposed to be coming up in a few days, is only to cover up the corruption on the part of the administration boys in Washington and San Francisco. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Fear Haunts Many Negro)

Flower added, "It's because of this kind of action on the part of the government that you force people into a position that they might do anything. To deny people jobs is to deny life itself. That is the real seriousness of this program." [See *Sun-Reporter* articles "Unions With Least Bias Hit Hardest By Screening" and "Fear Haunts Many Negro Waterfront Workers" for a detailed description of the Port Security Program and the politics of the West Coast waterfront unions.]

In spite of such daunting circumstances, people kept chipping away at discriminatory edifices, wearing down institutions and creating opportunities for themselves and others. Julian Richardson, who would go on to found Marcus Books, one of the only Black-owned bookstores in San Francisco, found that one way to combat such racism was to form a committee that made sure African American businesses would survive. By the 1950s, the Fillmore's African American merchants formed the Committee for Community Solidarity to help buoy Black businesses in the area. Richardson notes, "Every month, we picked one business and everyone agreed to spend, say, ten dollars in that particular store. I remember once I had to buy some olives and went to the grocery store of the month, and the owner was already sold out of nearly everything. He was one happy guy" (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, The Legacy of the Fillmore).

In addition to its local Black-business purchasing campaign, the Committee for Community Solidarity published "The Success Directory" which noted, "In seeking listing for this edition of The Success Directory we recorded businesses that had Negroes participating in the net profits; organizations that had *elected* Negroes to executive positions, and Negro salesmen who operated on a commission basis regardless of the firm" (The Success Directory; 1959, italics original). In its statement of policy, the Committee was clear about the need for publishing the Directory stating,

Our aim is to picture certain sides of the Negro community heretofore obscured and neglected by all other existing organizations which purportedly operated for the betterment of the cause of Negro Americans. We hope to show the size of the community's economic efforts, encourage better service and "bigger thinking," and most of

all, help the Negro community become aware of the potency of its own buying power. We intend to prove that this purchasing power can advance our cause as rapidly and as certainly as have our court fights for civil rights and the wise use of our votes. With a free choice of how and where to spend our money, we are not hampered as in trying to attain our civil rights through the courts. (The Success Directory; 1959)

It is reasonable to assume that the Directory helped to increase sales among African American owned businesses. As Richardson recalls, “We had about twelve hundred black businesses here in San Francisco in 1959—almost all in the Fillmore—about a hundred churches, two hundred social clubs, doctors, lawyers, you name it” (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, The Legacy of the Fillmore). Among other business and organizations the 1959 Directory lists 130 social clubs, 128 churches, 13 food stores and 10 civic clubs (The Success Directory; 1959). However, the authors of the Directory were clear that not enough was being done. The Directory included a diagram that showed only three cents of each dollar spent by African American San Franciscans went to support professionals and businessmen in the community. It concludes,

Of the more than \$60 million earned by Negroes in San Francisco in 1957, less than \$2 million were spent with Negro businesses, professionals or donated to Negro churches. One major factor causing this small return to the community is that food and clothing were not offered for sale by Negroes on any appreciable scale. Another cause is that many Negroes are disinclined to trade with their own. *A few take pride in the fact that they do not buy from Negroes.* (The Success Directory; 1959, italics original)

Although it is difficult to determine just how much positive impact the Success Directory had on Black-owned businesses in the City, it seems abundantly clear that without the organization and action by people like Richardson and members of the Committee for Community Solidarity, African Americans would not have been as successful as they were in the Fillmore.

Daniel Collins provides one further example of what it took to be successful in the Fillmore. Collins arrived in San Francisco in 1942 not for war work but to take a faculty post at the University of California’s Dental School. After just three years in the City, Collins not only opened his own practice in the Fillmore district but also took real estate classes so that he could learn enough about the real estate business to buy his own property. Collins notes that while his income from dentistry put his kids through college, his real estate investments were instrumental in affording him a comfortable retirement. Collins was one of the more successful African American residents of the City. Among his professional accomplishments

were an enormously successful private dental practice, a teaching post at one of the premier dental schools in the nation and an appointment to the California State Board of Education. Collins also founded the San Francisco branch of the Urban League where he worked tirelessly to help others find employment (Collins, personal interview, 2006).



*Figure 2.1* Dr. Daniel A. Collins, 1963. Collins was a dentist who owned a private practice in the Western Addition. He also founded the San Francisco chapter of the Urban League and was a member of the California State Board of Education. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Collins explains how he merged his dental work with his service work by suggesting that some of his more connected patients hire individuals he knew would do a good job. For example, the CEO of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company was once a patient of his and as Collins relates:

Eddie Alley ran the garage for Metropolitan, the car garage. And the man who was CEO of Metropolitan was a patient of mine. And I said, "You got one of the best men in town working right in your basement down there." He was parking cars. He finally became manager of the parking there for Metropolitan. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

In fact, Mr. Alley was Metropolitan Life Insurance Company's first African American employee in the San Francisco branch. Though starting as an elevator operator and told he had no chance for promotion because of his race, Alley became the office's first African American supervisor and remained with the company for 38 years (*SF Chronicle*; 2005, Eddie Alley).

Further explaining the overlap between his work with the Urban League and his profession as a dentist, Collins states,

There was a time when the President of First Interstate Bank, which is now CitiCorp, when the President of the bank was a patient of mine, when the man who was the director of loans was a patient of mine, the man who was the vice-president for hiring was a patient of mine. I could just get jobs for people by just calling on the telephone. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

Unfortunately, Collins' impact was likely limited as evidenced in a survey of 31 branches of a major bank. Undertaken by the SF Citizens Committee for Equal Employment Opportunity, the survey found that in 1951 the bank employed only one African American woman in a staff of over five hundred (Broussard; 1993, 214). The woeful track record of banks not hiring African American employees was a focal point of a *Sun-Reporter* article as well. In 1951 the paper ran an editorial praising Bank of America for hiring two African American women as clerks in a Fillmore district branch and called for others to follow suit. The editorial notes that "The SUN-REPORTER thinks the 'time is ripe' for all local banks in the densely populated colored district of Fillmore, to follow the example of the Bank of America by hiring Negro bank clerks." The article goes on to call out specific banks, indicating that:

Other banks in the colored district which should fall in line are the San Francisco Bank, the Anglo California Bank of San Francisco, and the American Trust Co., which has two branch banks on Fillmore St. And we may as well include the branch of the Bank of America at Fillmore and Sacramento Sts. Bank of America would do well to employ more Negro Clerks.

Three colored bank clerks are not, in our opinion, sufficient representation and reward for patronage in a community with a Negro population of roughly 52,000.

The editorial ends on an assertive note when it concludes,

Bank of America is making a tangible contribution to the economic life of the community by circulating something back into the community.

Other banks should follow the lead of Bank of America. And if they do not, their Negro patrons should WITHDRAW their accounts and take their business to Bank of America where they are not discriminated against in employment. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1951, More Negro Bank Clerks!)

By mid-decade it was obvious that the plight of African American San Franciscans seeking gainful employment was, at best, precarious. At the end of 1956 Edgar Osgood, co-chairman of the San Francisco Committee for Equal Job Opportunity, noted in a memo to John Ferdon, president of the Board of Supervisors,

In any case it is regrettably a fact that there is still serious inequality of employment opportunity in San Francisco and that the pace of progress in overcoming such discrimination is intolerably slow. Despite certain very commendable instances in which firms have begun to follow merit employment practices, the overall problem faced by nonwhite applicants and workers has changed very little in the five and a half years since the Board of Supervisors last examined it in some detail. Employment discrimination is still the predominant pattern in San Francisco. (NAACP WCRF; carton 11)

The employment outlook for African Americans had become so bleak that the Council for Civic Unity took on the job of detailing discrimination, exposing the severity of the problem so that a plan of action to combat such racism might be developed. With data collected from 100 large and medium sized private employers, 30 union officials and members, 28 private employment agencies and 21 State Employment Department staff members in San Francisco between 1954 and 1956, the 1958 *Civil Rights Inventory* was the most comprehensive study on African American concerns since the 1944 Johnson survey *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco*. When it came time for the *Civil Rights Inventory* to assess the job outlook it was no surprise to the African American community that it concluded, "employment opportunity in private industry in San Francisco is still widely restricted according to race." The report went on to note that African Americans, more so than other ethnic groups, were adversely affected by race restrictions (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 304). What may have been more of a shock, especially to San Francisco liberals, was that the report indicated

problems might be even worse than they seemed when it remarked, “*With reference especially to the interviews of 100 San Francisco employers—the main portion of this chapter—it is undoubtedly true that these findings tend to be conservative or understated as to the actual extent and character of restrictive employment practices*” [emphasis added] (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 145).

According to historian Albert Broussard (1993), part of the problem was that “Many employers had little respect for the intellect and capability of black workers and operated on the common premise that blacks were capable of performing only the most rudimentary tasks” (214). For example, one service industry executive held the opinion that “The minority workers are not intelligent enough to hold higher jobs such as managerial” (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 107). Such was the prevailing mind-set despite the fact that, according to ten San Francisco employers who practiced non-discrimination, production levels for their African American employees were equal to those of any other employees (*San Francisco News*; 1956, S.F. Union and Job Bias). It must have been at least in part because of this type of racial discrimination that one personnel official stated, “Negroes are wasting their time looking for office work” (Broussard; 1993, 217).

Indeed discrimination clouded clear-headed judgment even when job skills were not the issue. The *Civil Rights Inventory* would point out that “We have seen that nonwhites have not yet been hired generally even in those local job categories which demand few or no special qualifications, or for which companies conduct their own training; lack of skills is clearly not the obstacle in such cases” (309). The *Inventory* may have been alluding to Mayor George Christopher’s own company, Christopher Dairies, which employed not a single African American driver even though many had applied (*San Francisco News*; 1956, S.F. Union and Job Bias). In the end, the *Civil Rights Inventory* concluded, “It is notable that almost none of the employers who would not consider minority applicants indicated that they believed these applicants lacked the performance qualifications for the jobs in question; individual skills and competence were not an issue” (315).

Continuing, Broussard (1993) indicates that private employment agencies and job placement services were reluctant to place even qualified African American job seekers (214). In a CCU synopsis of the *Civil Rights Inventory*, further evidence to this effect was presented in a report entitled “Employment Practices in Private Industry in San Francisco Affecting Minority Group Applicants and Employees” given as testimony before the County, State and National Affairs Committee of the Board of Supervisors on January 30, 1957. The report found that “placement people in private agencies just take for granted a restrictive policy unless there is a specification to the contrary,” and that about half of the private employment agencies, “estimated that the great majority of employers with whom they were in contact had such restrictions [with regard to race]. Respondents said specifications such as excluding African Americans from the potential

employment pool were not always direct or in writing, but usually were placed by telephone” (NAACP WCRF; carton 11). More direct was one State official’s response to NAACP West Coast Regional Director Franklin Williams regarding job placement for African American teachers. When Williams inquired about the legality of referring prospective teachers only to school districts that were known to hire African Americans she replied,

To send to a prospective employer a candidate whom the employer stated he will not hire, would, we believe, be doing a disservice to the candidate by causing him needless embarrassment and expense, and at the same time risking the future effectiveness of the placement service by alienating the patronage of the governing boards. (Broussard; 1993, 218)

The CCU synopsis also indicated that 91% of the employers interviewed, “either did not claim a definite merit employment policy or revealed little or no method of its implementation on a consistent, company-wide basis” (NAACP WCRF; carton 11). Surely this was one factor in CCU Director Ed Howden’s claim that with respect to minority hiring there was a “widespread absence of affirmative action and meaningful policy” (Broussard; 1993, 218). Howden surmised, “We would feel that the conclusion is well-justified on the basis of this much material that there is considerable absence of action, an absence of follow-through, of actual, effective operating policy with regard to minority-group workers” (NAACP WCRF; carton 11). However, it is doubtful that even merit based employment programs would have had an immediate impact as *The Civil Rights Inventory* noted, “No Negro employees at all were reported—not even in service and unskilled jobs—in from two-thirds to three-quarters of the firms which indicated that they had a merit hiring policy or practice” (149).

Much like the imagined problems concerning the skill levels or qualifications of potential African American employees, one additional employment obstacle was the preconceived notion that the general public would be frightened away or otherwise discouraged from patronizing businesses that employed African Americans in positions that required significant public contact. In the words of the *Civil Rights Inventory*:

One pattern which emerged was that of widespread exclusion of nonwhites from positions involving public contact. Although some well known San Francisco companies had employed nonwhites in retail sales and other publicly visible capacities for several years with apparent customer acceptance, little evidence was found in the course of our interviews to suggest that this experience had led to a general relaxation of racial restrictions in public-contact jobs. These restrictions continued to weigh heavily in many types and levels of occupation from unskilled and semiskilled to technical and professional, including jobs such as service-station attendant, cab driver, waiter, hotel and bank “front” personnel,

grocery clerk, wholesale delivery-salesman, home-service technician, clerical worker in public view, and retail sales person. (150)

Presumably this may have been the case with the Yellow Cab Company, a business that had maximum public contact. In August of 1952 the San Francisco branch of the Negro Labor Council (NLC) undertook a campaign to secure driver jobs for African Americans with the Yellow Cab Company. John Flowers, executive secretary of the San Francisco NLC, urged members of the MCS union, of which he was a member, to call Yellow Cab and ask why, if they needed drivers, they would not hire qualified African Americans. Although Yellow Cab hired African American drivers in cities such as New York, Chicago and Los Angeles, in San Francisco African Americans were hired only as car washers (*The Voice*; 1952, Drive for Negroes as Drivers). Unfortunately, the NLC's push to have Yellow Cab hire African American drivers appeared unsuccessful and in 1955 the company's local president, W. Lansing Rothchild, admitted that the company still instituted an employment ban on African Americans in the City (*Sun-Reporter*; 1955, S.F. Yellow Cab).

There were, however, some breakthroughs. During the 1950s Gerald Johnson had a job requiring extensive public contact and was often faced with blatant bigotry when performing it. However, through dogged persistence and good timing, he beat back at least one business owner's long-standing discrimination. Johnson worked as an automobile bumper salesman for a San Francisco plating company and his job was to maintain the accounts of the all-white businesses on his route. However, not all the business owners on that route were accepting of an African American salesman. One Palo Alto man in particular was determined to avoid buying anything from an African American salesman. As Johnson tells it:

I would stop in at least once a week and it would annoy the hell out of him. He would see me coming and he would run to the back of the shop. And then I saw him standing up arguing with what looked like one of his customers. Well it was. The customer needed a '54 front bumper and he was supposed to have that ready. And this guy was irate. And as I pulled up the guy looked on my truck and I had a 1954 bumper sitting there all alone. The guy said, "There's a bumper right there. What da ya mean?" So the owner of the shop said, "Hey, uh, could you sell me that bumper?" So I said, "Wait a minute. I have to call my office and see if I can change." Well that was an extra bumper. Anyway I played around with it 'till I said, "Ok, ok." And I called Jim who was my boss and I said, "Hey, I think I got this guy." Anyway, I sold him the bumper and from then on I got most of his business. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

Johnson's case would prove that economic necessity could trump racial prejudice in a trend that would extend into the 1960s sit-ins, shop-ins and other civil rights demonstrations.



As the decade progressed, crime in the African American community received more press attention. In all likelihood, the increasing problem with crime was due to a combination of grim employment opportunities, overcrowded housing conditions and too few neighborhood entertainment or recreation options. As the situation worsened, the local African American newspaper, the *Sun-Reporter*, ran a series on crime in the Fillmore district. A 1951 editorial noted that “For too long the Fillmore area has been a cesspool of crime. During the past four years The SUN-REPORTER has observed the clandestine, and at times open, operation of criminals within our midst” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1951, Crime in Fillmore). Some of the main problems the paper identified were prostitution, the Chinese lottery, gambling, book-making, and the narcotics traffic. The *Sun-Reporter* blamed lax police enforcement for such problems in what the paper described as “the Negro ghetto.” Further explaining the overlapping issues with crime in the Fillmore, Barnhill (1965) notes that

In 1951 the Fillmore District, complicated by city-wide limitations on land space and housing facilities for Negroes, high rents, congestion, bad housing, and vice prevailed. At this time Negroes migrating into the area had not formed any extensive consensus for urban living. Families with children lived next to houses of prostitution, where loud-voiced drunks kept these places busy on a twenty-four hour basis. The area was neglected by civic leadership, and policemen on duty apparently were lax in enforcing the law. (74)

In the early 1950s, a *Sun-Reporter* editorial notes that, “The ‘pimping’ and ‘prostitution’ situation has become so serious that the wives and daughters of decent citizens are afraid to travel the street at night without a male escort. Several houses of prostitution have enjoyed years of unmolested operation and have become known as ‘sage brothels’” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1951, Crime in Fillmore). This would sound all too familiar to Daniel Collins, who explains that in 1952, after a decade of living in the Fillmore district, he felt the area had become too seedy and dangerous for his family and moved them to the predominately white enclave of Mill Valley just north of the Golden Gate. He states,

We had lived in the City for ten years and the Fillmore had begun to disintegrate. My wife went down with her good buddy, took the kids down for Halloween. And my wife bumped into Birdie Rector. She was a business woman. She was a college graduate from Texas. She ran two or three whorehouses around town, Black. She saw my wife on the street one day and she asked my wife “Honey, who you workin’ for?”

Indicating that prostitution was not the only crime he had come in contact with, Collins relates,

The first Mrs. Brown I lived with had a boy named Billy. Billy was just in maybe sixth or seventh grade. I remember helping him with his algebra. But he had a good buddy whose family name was Littlejaw. He dropped dead on Fillmore Street from a drug overdose. And this woman invited my wife to join her whorehouse. Fillmore Street had begun to disintegrate. All the glory of the years everybody was working and busy is begin to become seedy. And I said, this is not the place I want to raise my family. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

Unfortunately, Billy's friend was not the only child to succumb to crime. In December of 1949, Isiah Williams, a 15 year-old boy, fell victim to racially motivated violence when a group of African American teens were having a swim party at Crocker Amazon Park in the southern section of the city. A newspaper reported that Williams drowned when two white boys opened fire on 11 African American boys, preventing them from rescuing Williams, who had sank beneath the water. Said one boy, "We could have saved him if the shooting hadn't started." The boys claimed that they had never quarreled with any residents in the neighborhood and couldn't think of anyone who would want to hurt them (*People's World*; 1950, Shots Foiled Rescue).

Indeed the situation seemed bad, especially looking at page one of the June 23, 1951 *Sun-Reporter*. On it were three bylines exclaiming: "Open Field for Bookie Operations in the Fillmore," "One Dead, Three Hurt in Gambling Club Brawl" and "Two Bandits get \$5 in Cab Holdup." It was however, the gambling that really stuck in the craw of the *Sun-Reporter's* owner, Carlton Goodlett. As Tom Fleming notes, "Well Goodlett got an idea in his head. He says gambling was going on out here. He looked at it different because it didn't bother me by gambling being out here at all. But he thought the gamblers should do a little bit more than they were doing for the Black community as a whole" (Fleming, personal interview, 2005). Although Fleming, editor of the paper at the time, did not mind the existence of a few successful gambling houses in the Fillmore district, Broussard (1993) notes that the *Sun-Reporter's* readership supported the paper's crackdown on crime (233).

Goodlett and the *Sun-Reporter* staff continued to expose gambling in African American neighborhoods, printing front-page articles that exposed the places and people who contributed to the problem. For example, in a 1952 article Jessie James reported that gambling in the Fillmore district was spreading, taking form behind social club fronts and legitimate businesses. The article claims, "The Pageant Club on Post Street is reputed to have the best card games in Northern California. The Janitors' Protective Association has the biggest crap game in town. The American Legion Club, on O'Farrell Street, still houses dice and card games allegedly run by Oakland's fabulous 'Raincoat' Jones" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Find "Chicken Feed" Boys). Also named in the article were Mr. Stewart of Livermore, CA; Nat Brooks, president of the

Fidelity Social Club; the Pacific Social Club and the Texas Social Club. James states that “In a few days it was possible to visit no less than twenty gambling clubs in the Negro community in San Francisco” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Find “Chicken Feed” Boys). Although the general readership may have approved of it penchant for exposing vice, not everyone was happy with the paper’s crusade against gambling. On May 2, 1954, vandals broke into the *Sun-Reporter*’s building at 1579 Post Street and set six fires in the composing room. Luckily, the fires were discovered and extinguished soon after they were set. The paper believed the motive was reprisal for the articles battling vice in the Fillmore (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Arsonists Make Vain Attempt).

Just one week after his first article appeared, James again reported on gambling, this time in both the Hunters Point and Fillmore districts. James writes that “Chinese operators have ‘invaded and conquered’ the Hunters Point area in terms of controlling the gambling spots” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Chinese Rule Hunters Point). Describing the location in detail, he notes,

In the rear of 1221 Egbert St. in the Hunters Point Area, is located one of the most lucrative gambling ‘spots’ in the area. In a room 16 x 16 ft. we found a full-blown set-up consisting of one black-jack game, one stud poker game and one house-banked crap game. The operators of this establishment are four Chinese males, who at the time we visited were serving an early evening crowd of 36 Negro males and females. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Chinese Rule Hunters Point)

James further notes that there were two additional large Chinese-controlled gaming operations in the area.

In the same article, James announces the opening of the Three Leaf Clover Club at 1841 Post Street in the Fillmore district. Noting that “This gambling club is probably the best equipped ‘suckers paradise’ catering to Negroes in California,” James goes on to show how “Mr. Sunshine,” director of the Three Leaf Clover, and other gambling club directors also own successful legitimate business. He states, “One gaming spot we visited last week was operated by a Negro who has considerable income from enterprises which include a hotel, bar, retail liquor outlet, and other interests” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Chinese Rule Hunters Point). The article also notes that the Three Leaf Clover would be able to net about half a million dollars over the course of a year and that gaming in African American neighborhoods seemed as if it were part of an organized crime ring.

There may have been a reasonable explanation for why gambling was able to exist and expand so easily in the Fillmore district. James makes a connection between the expansion of gambling and the complicity of the police department when he indicates,

The most amazing thing about this whole look-in on the gaming operations is the fact that the policemen, operators and players mingle

freely in these 'joints.' Many times the police are called upon to maintain 'order and quiet' so the games can proceed. In some of the spots you might mistake the policemen for the proprietors. On any rainy day, if you want a policeman quick, you can be sure to find one lounging in one of the social clubs. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Find "Chicken Feed" Boys)

It seems that the *Sun-Reporter's* beginning-of-the-decade efforts made some kind of positive impact in the community, even if it was short lived. A 1954 news report lamented, "It was real nice while it lasted," sighed Mrs. Z. as we chatted about the gambling situation in the Fillmore. Mrs. Z. was referring to the peace and prosperity which prevailed in her home during the time the local police slapped the lid on gambling around here and held it tight" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Gambling Given Green Light). The paper indicated that after months of concentrated effort to stop illegal gambling police vigilance had been relaxed and that word had gone around the neighborhood that gamblers were free to operate again. Mrs. Z., exasperated at the detrimental consequence gambling in the Fillmore had on her husband, stated further that "We bought a television set when Harry quit gambling cause he was home evenings for a change and it was like getting to know him all over again. But now I'm wondering if we will be able to keep the set. Sometimes the breaks go bad for him for long streaks" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Gambling Given Green Light).

By the end of the decade the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the city's major daily, would run another series of reports on crime in the African American community. Explaining its position, though incorrectly indicating that the problem had been overlooked by news outlets, the paper notes that "In publishing last week's series of articles on Negroes and crime in San Francisco, *The Chronicle* performed what it felt was a responsibility to the public. The existence of a disproportionate rate of Negro crime, arising from the ghetto-discriminatory pattern of Negro life here, was one that had long been passed over without mention" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, The Crime That a Ghetto). Further explanation about the series claimed that the articles, "proceed from the basic fact that the Negro is on the bottom of the pile, that he is not part of the society which surrounds him; that his life, his frustrations, tensions and insecurities are confined within a cultural and geographical ghetto" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, The Crime That a Ghetto). Although pointing out the obvious may have been good enough for the *Chronicle's* editors, more demanding readers may have wondered how exactly did the Fillmore end up in this predicament and what kinds of solutions might be available, topics the paper did not take up.

In addition, the *San Francisco Chronicle's* series on crime sometimes practiced short-sighted victim-blame journalism to explain how and why the Fillmore grew into a ghetto. One piece states that ghettoization was the result of the concentration of unskilled and poorly educated African

American newcomers who came to work in the war industries (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, How and Why Fillmore). Historian Albert Broussard refutes this claim, citing Charles Johnson's 1944 study *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco*. Broussard (1993) contends that most newcomers were from the South, in their early 20s, moved as family units and, in contrast to the *Chronicle's* claim, "In addition to being young and ambitious, black migrants were almost as well educated as San Francisco's established black residents" (138–39). In fact, the Johnson survey concluded that the "grade achievement of the San Francisco Negro migrant population, as revealed in our sample, reflects a relatively high degree of formal education" (Broussard; 1993, 140). Although the *Chronicle* correctly indicates that in postwar San Francisco African Americans were the last hired and first fired and subsequently were forced to rely on jobs "digging ditches, shining shoes and opening doors for white people," it did not adequately identify the causes of these dynamics. Instead of pointing out racially discriminatory practices in hiring, housing and education as the culprits behind unemployment and ghettoization, the *Chronicle* went on to state that unskilled uneducated unemployed African Americans gravitated to the Fillmore to seek the security of communal misery, "And thus too many a pioneer got a tenement room and a common-law wife and a bottle and settled down to pass his defeat on to his children—the generation now growing up in the Fillmore" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, How and Why Fillmore). Both factually incorrect and condescending in tone, the *Chronicle's* writers must have been completely astonished when, just five years later, the African American community it described as thoroughly defeated would demand and win many victories against the real enemy, white supremacy and those who practiced it.

*The San Francisco Chronicle* also proved it could have a well-intentioned, if slightly paternalistic side. Although the byline of one 1959 article seemed as if it might be headed in a probing and critical direction claiming "Negroes and Crime—The Key is Discrimination," the article failed to address the role of racism in San Francisco and, instead, blamed crime on middle-class African Americans for abandoning their less fortunate brethren. In an interview with Hamilton Boswell, pastor of Jones Methodist Church in the Fillmore, the paper notes that successful African Americans move out of the Fillmore district and quotes Jones saying, "But the tragedy is that these leaders loose touch with their people. They get so busy defending equality in conferences with white officials that they don't have time to come back to the Fillmore to help these kids who are going to be tomorrow's juvenile delinquents" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, Negroes and Crime—The Key). Although it is most likely true that, as the article notes, "Many of those natural leaders—those who would form youth organizations or improvement clubs in any other neighborhood—have moved out," the onus for crime and the deteriorating condition of the Fillmore could have just as easily been caused by absentee landlords who failed to keep up their rental properties, companies that practiced employment discrimination

that prevented area residents from obtaining jobs, racist real estate agents that prevented residents from buying homes and lax law enforcement in the area. Unfortunately, no matter who was to blame or what share of the responsibility any group or individual took for cleaning up the Fillmore, there were always some people whose myopic assessment would ensure resentment and hostility continued between the races as proved by one woman who stated, "I've always been in favor of equality for Negroes. But it seems to me they should clean up their crime problem to prove they are fit for it" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, Negroes and Crime—The Key).

An additional problem was that police antipathy and brutality directed against African American San Franciscans was prevalent during the 1950s. For example, one reporter notes that "Many policemen, including some of the most intelligent on the force, have adopted a paternalistic attitude. 'Negroes,' says one veteran police inspector, 'are children. You have to treat them like children and you can't let them get the upper hand'" (*SF Chronicle*; 1959, Negroes and Crime—The Police). While the tact of such a statement is suspect, it was most likely a common attitude held by many of the officers who patrolled the Fillmore district, the neighborhood with the largest African American population in the city.

More often than not, when confrontations with the police occurred, racist language was not the only problem with which African American San Franciscans had to contend. One instance in 1954 saw two officers from the Park Station, a station that would have ongoing problems with African American citizens, assault Mr. Eliston as they were investigating a dispute among neighbors. It was reported that Mr. Eliston verbally disagreed with the police officers who arrived at the scene and in response one of the officers called Mr. Eliston a N\_\_\_\_\_, chased him up the stairs to his apartment and beat him with a blackjack. When Mrs. Eliston tried to intervene, the Sergeant who was with the officer pushed her against the refrigerator and handled her roughly. The paper reported their injuries as such: "Mr. Eliston suffered cerebral concussions, backstrain and contusions of the head, chest and abdomen. Mrs. Eliston sustained contusions of the head, chest, arms and face" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Man and Wife Reported Roughed Up).

Never a voice to avoid a difficult or controversial topic, the *Sun-Reporter* ran a series of articles in 1958 detailing the African American community's problem with the SFPD in general and some specific instances of police brutality. In an opening statement to the first article in the series, reporter Marvin Anthony states,

We have cases in our files to prove that Negroes have been beaten by police officers, merely because they were dressed well; beaten because they were able to master the king's English; beaten because Caucasians found them good company; beaten because they talked back to foul-mouth officers who found it enjoyable to call them vile names.

These, and many more cases, we intend to bring to our readers. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco)

Claiming that the NAACP had received numerous complaints from African American victims of physical and verbal abuse suffered at the hands of the San Francisco Police Department throughout the years, Anthony relates the following as a “typical case” of police brutality in the City. He notes that in 1954 Harrison Williams, an employee of the UC Medical Center, was stopped by an officer [badge 1596] and questioned about his knowledge of the use of fireworks in the area. Although Williams denied knowing anything, the officer demanded Williams be frisked in the street. When Williams asked to be taken to the station for booking and a legal search, the officer hit Williams several times with his fist and took him, along with William Steele, to the Park Station. There, the men were called “dirty stinking N\_\_\_\_\_s” and Williams was subjected to further beating. Although the article does not mention the final outcome of the incident, it concludes, “Williams was taken to Park Emergency Hospital where he was treated for numerous bruises, a hemorrhage of the eye, and a fractured jaw” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco).

Anthony’s follow-up article revealed that in May of 1956, as the Briggs family of 937 Scott Street entertained a few friends in their home, officer R. Herrman [badge 1288] knocked at their door, asked what was going on and then brushed past the couple into their house. After other officers arrived, the hosts and guests were arrested and then called names and told “they should all be sent back to Mississippi and Alabama where they belonged” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco, b). Subsequently, all were taken to the Park Station where officer Herrman hit Thelma Robinson and her brother with his fists and nightstick. The two siblings were taken to Park Emergency Hospital and treated for numerous cuts and bruises and were later taken to the City prison where they were charged with numerous violations (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco, b).

The third article in the series relates that in September of 1957 Charles Murry, a City College student, was pulled over for speeding in the Western Addition neighborhood by four officers. After Murry questioned how fast the ticket indicated he was going officer Vincent Traina, who had not written the ticket, struck him with his club and was then joined by the other two officers who had not written the ticket. Cecil Finley, a witness to the incident who owned a funeral home near the intersection, told the police he thought they had beat the young man too much after officer Traina broke his club hitting Murry. Murry was treated at an Emergency Hospital for his injuries and later booked on charges of battery, resisting arrest and swearing (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco, c).

It would be three weeks before Anthony would report on police brutality again, but given the severity of the problem it was inevitable that another article would appear. In this instance Mr. and Mrs. Haywood Jackson had

been visiting Sam Martinez at his home at 338 Fifth Street. Because he had no phone in his house, Martinez accompanied the Jacksons to a phone booth to call a cab when they left. As they talked while waiting for the cab two officers in a patrol car pulled up and started asking Mr. Jackson questions. When the questioning turned into an argument, one of the officers hit Jackson in the mouth, knocking out one of his teeth. The officers then put Jackson in the patrol car and continue hitting him. After being booked in Southern Station, one of the officers told Jackson that if he “forgot the matter” no charges would be filed against him. Although the paper reports that Jackson was called “vicious names” when he refused to drop the matter, it does not indicate what the final outcome was (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Police Brutality in San Francisco, d).



### 3 Housing in the 1950s

Housing for African Americans, both private and public, continued to come only at a premium throughout the 1950s. Although the 26-block area of the Western Addition was originally designed to hold 50 people per acre, by the mid-1950s one newspaper reported that each acre housed 200 or more people (*San Francisco News*; 1956, Negro Housing Woe). The article also noted that most of the buildings in the Western Addition were designed for three families but that at least 40% housed six or more families who had to share both kitchen and bathroom facilities. The article goes on to state that “Recent surveys have shown how this process had culminated in blight with its consequences, of ill health, accidents, fires, delinquency, excessive municipal costs and deficient property revenues” (*San Francisco News*; 1956, Negro Housing Woe).

One indication of just how bad the housing problem had become was evidenced in results of a housing survey conducted by the San Francisco Housing Authority (SFHA). It indicated that 2,000 families were soon to be displaced from their temporary housing and needed permanent low-rent housing, 1,365 additional applications for low-rent housing were on file and the Redevelopment Agency estimated the need for 1,400 units to house families displaced by its projects (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Need for Nearly 5,000). In all, nearly 5,000 families and individuals were in need of affordable housing, something that was not only in short supply but, at least for African American San Franciscans, racially rationed.

Though the tide was about to turn, discrimination in San Francisco’s public housing was the norm rather than the exception in the early 1950s. For example, in a unanimous vote, the Housing Authority adopted a resolution in 1942 that stated, “In the selection of tenants for the projects of this Authority, this Authority shall act with references to the established usages, customs and traditions of the community” (Broussard; 1993, 222). The SF Board of Supervisors reaffirmed this policy in 1950. This meant that if African Americans were to live in any public housing project, African American families must already reside in that project. Public housing projects that were not already integrated would remain racially segregated. Or, in the Agency’s own words, they would not “enforce the



*Figure 3.1* This is one room of a two-room ‘apartment’ on Geary Street where a family of six lived, 1952. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

commingling of races.” To that end, not only was the 136-unit Westside Courts project, finished in 1943, the only one of the five public projects to house African American tenants, it was occupied exclusively by African Americans, mainly because it was located in the Fillmore district and fit the SFHA’s mandate of neighborhood pattern segregated housing (France; 1962, 61).

There was some high level opposition to this discriminatory practice. In January of 1950, Dr. Herbert Henderson, the only African American member of the urban redevelopment agency, resigned in protest noting, "If I had been an Uncle Tom or a handkerchief head I could have remained in this position. But I am in violent opposition to discrimination." He continues, "discrimination by the housing authority has been revealed, but Mayor Robinson hasn't made a single statement on the question of segregation. By his silence he gives consent to these policies. I do not want to be associated with such a position" (*People's World*; 1950, Sole Negro Quits). Just three months later the City would lose a second African American public housing official. In April, Mayor Elmer Robinson removed Dr. William McKinley Thomas as a commissioner of the San Francisco Housing Authority, a move likely prompted by Dr. Thomas' outspoken criticism of the Mayor's position on housing policy. Voicing his opposition to the Mayor, Thomas noted, "He has done nothing since he took office which would not lead people to believe that he is anything other than a true and tried disciple of segregation" (*People's World*; 1950, Robinson Sack 2nd Negro). Unfortunately, resignations and opposition alone were not enough to change such discriminatory policies in San Francisco's public housing.

In 1951 a further challenge to the Housing Authority came from chairman of the board of supervisors and future mayor George Christopher. Christopher attempted to find housing for an African American family of seven who lived in a studio apartment at 574 Third Street in the Bayview neighborhood. Although the Fontenots had originally applied with the Housing Authority for a larger apartment in 1947, by 1951 Mrs. Fontenot was notified that the family was still on the waiting list but could not qualify for two or three room units because the units were too small to house such a large family according to health rules restricting the number of persons to a bedroom (*People's World*; 1951, Christopher Asks Action). In a letter to Housing Authority executive director John Beard, Christopher admitted that renting the Fontenots an apartment may be a violation of the resident law but insisted that "While that may be the case, two or three rooms would be much better than keeping them in one room" (*People's World*; 1951, Christopher Asks Action). The Fontenot's cause was also taken up by Local 6, a union to which Mrs. Fontenot belonged. The union's welfare committee voted to send letters requesting that the Housing Authority, the Health Department and the Board of Supervisors assist the family with finding a better housing situation (*People's World*; 1951, Christopher Asks Action).

The most pivotal case with regard to San Francisco's public housing was the 1952 *Banks v. the San Francisco Housing Authority* case that would officially bring an end to the Housing Authority's policy of segregation. Special assistant to the Federal Housing Administrator, Frank Horne,

indicated that San Francisco and Oakland were “possibly the only two Pacific Coast cities which continue segregation in their housing projects (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Segregation in Public Apartments). Horne noted that the “neighborhood pattern” of segregation applied to both existing projects and ones under construction and that “only the projects still on the drawing boards are to be operated on an unsegregated basis.” However, in what seems to be an outright contradiction, prior to 1952 SFHA director John Beard denied that the agency discriminated in its selection and placement of nonwhite tenants (Broussard; 1993, 224). Beard would assert that rather than being racially restrictive, the “neighborhood pattern” policies only gave preference to families already residing in the area to conform with social, economic and religious characteristics of the area (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Segregation in Public Apartments).

The petitioners in the Banks case, Mattie Banks and James Charley, Jr. and their NAACP lawyers Loren Miller and Terry Francois saw the case a bit differently than did John Beard. To them, Banks and Charley were denied entrance to North Beach Place solely because of their race. Further, in sworn testimony it would seem that even John Beard acknowledged this fact. When Francois, then an up-and-coming attorney in San Francisco, asked Beard whether a potential resident who met the preferential housing criteria—a disabled Negro veteran who had been displaced from his home—would be accepted to live in the exclusively white Holly Court project, the SFHA executive director answered that under the agency’s instructions for admittance such an applicant would not be admitted because he was non-white. Pressing the issue, Francois states, “At least, Mr. Beard, on September 15, 1952, Mr. Charley was not being considered for admission to North Beach, is that correct?” Beard replies, “That is correct.” Francois continues, “It wasn’t based upon credit rating or anything else, except that he was non-white, is that correct?” To which Beard replies, “That is correct” (NAACP WCRF, nd, carton 103).

Broussard (1993) indicates that the Banks case took a decidedly torrid direction when the SFHA asserted that Mattie Banks and James Charley, Jr. were denied not because of race but because of their reprehensible moral character (224). At the time of the trial, Banks’ husband was living overseas as an active duty fireman with the US Navy and Mattie Banks and her two daughters were living in a one-bedroom apartment sharing a kitchen and bathroom with other adults (NAACP WCRF, nd, carton 103). Charley, a 27-year-old hospital orderly, was accused of being a “burglar on probation” and of committing polygamy while Banks, the wife of a World War II veteran, was charged of understating her income and of frivolous spending because she had recently purchased a television (Broussard; 1993, 224 & NAACP WCRF, nd, carton 103).

Such attempts at character assassination in the Banks case proved ineffective and, on October 1, 1952, San Francisco Superior Court Judge Melvyn Cronin ruled that “neighborhood pattern” constituted, “unlawful discrimination in violation of the 14th Amendment to the Constitution of the United States, and the laws and general public policy of the State of California and the City and County of San Francisco” (NAACP WCRF, 1952, carton 103). In that same decision, Judge Cronin further admonished that *Banks v. the San Francisco Housing Authority* should serve in, “enunciating a sounder, fairer, more enlightened, and advanced principle to guide us in the matter of public housing, in granting to the Negro what he is entitled to as a citizen—genuine equality of treatment under the law.” While this verdict encouraged the African American community, it enraged some white residents. For example, an anonymous postcard dated October 18, 1952 was sent to Judge Cronin. The note on it labeled him a “traitor to our white race” and stated that “You shall be killed to give other traitors to learn their lesson [sic]” (*SF Chronicle*; 1952, Note Threatens Judge).

The Banks decision was clearly a moral victory for African American San Franciscans; however, the fruits of this victory were slow to arrive. Just one week after Judge Cronin’s ruling, SFHA chairman E. N. Ayer testified that the racial “neighborhood pattern” was the rule and that it was adopted to localize Negroes to occupancy in the West Side Courts project. He further indicated that “so long as the rule is in force Negroes will not be admitted to North Beach or any other existing project of the permanent, low rent type” (*SF Examiner*; 1952, One Suing for Housing). Additionally, in a hearing before Superior Court Judge Melvyn Cronin, John Beard testified that, in violation of the Federal Public Housing Act which gives veterans preference over non-veterans in public housing, “Applications of Negro veterans for apartments in North Beach Place were passed over in favor of white nonveterans” (*SF Chronicle*; 1952, Hearing on Jim Crow). Furthermore, during the hearing Beard revealed that the Housing Authority’s violations to the Public Housing Act were not limited to occasional instances, but rather, it assigned 52 non-veterans to North Beach Place while applications from African American veterans were on file.

The Housing Authority remained resolute in their position and in an October 1952 hearing, 16 African American applicants charged that they were denied consideration at a public housing project because of race. Again chairman Ayer stated in a matter-of-fact way that African American applicants were restricted to the West Side Courts, no matter which project they applied to live in or how qualified they might be (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Ayer Admits Housing Bias). Although NAACP lawyer Loren Miller made the case that skin color should not be a determinant for renting when he pointed out that 15 white families in North

Beach Place had previously been sued for non-payment of rent, neither Ayer nor SFHA director John Beard seemed to care. Beard testified that “though complete credit investigations were made of all Negro applicants for North Beach Place no similar inquiries were made of the 86 white tenants who have been admitted,” and that all 16 African Americans failed to qualify (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Ayer Admits Housing Bias). Such blatant bigotry may have been on James Stratten’s mind when he called for Ayer and Beard to be tossed out. In November of 1952, Stratten, the executive secretary of the Booker T. Washington Community Center and member of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, charged the two housing officials with “distinct and extreme bias against minority groups” and asked that they be removed from their offices (*Sun-Reporter*, 1952, Stratten Asks Ousting).

In November 1952 it seemed the Banks case had finally been laid to rest. The “Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law” by the California Superior Court unequivocally stated, “respondents have arbitrarily refused to admit petitioners to any permanent low rent housing developments under the ownership and control of respondent, Housing Authority, or to certify them for admission to any of said developments, except Westside Courts, solely because of their race and color and for no other reason,” and, “That respondents have arbitrarily refused to recognize and consider, solely on the grounds of race, the preferences of Negro veterans and families of veterans, said preferences having been given said veterans and families of veterans by the Housing Act of 1949; that said respondents have recognized and given preferences to veterans and families of veterans of Non-Negro applicants in the selection of tenants.” It was therefore found, “That petitioners, Mattie Banks and James Charley, Jr. are in every manner qualified for admission to any and all of the seven above-named permanent low rent housing developments” (NAACP WCRF, 1952, carton 103).

Surely it was as surprising to Banks and Charley as it was to Francois when the Housing Authority again denied their applications at the beginning of 1953, this time for what seemed to be a personal vendetta against people who wanted nothing more than fair treatment and a place to live. When Francois discovered this he wrote an angry letter to the SFHA stating, “Frankly, I was amazed at the suggestion since this precise point was determined adversely to you by the Superior Court in the matter of Banks vs. Housing Authority, and Judge Cronin specifically found in Paragraph 7 of his Findings of Fact that these applicants were in every manner qualified for admission to any and all permanent housing developments.” He continued, “I am further advised by my clients that your determination of ineligibility was expressly based upon the fact that they instituted suit against the Authority. If my information is correct, this suggestion is startling, to say the least” (NAACP WCRF; 1953, carton 103).

By September of 1953, the State District Court of Appeals under Justice Fred Wood upheld the superior court's 1952 ruling. Countering the Housing Authority's argument that African Americans as a group were afforded equal housing opportunities, Judge Woods noted that the rights of individuals were being abridged when they were denied admission to specific projects and that "neighborhood pattern, "is an arbitrary method of exclusion, a guarantee of inequality or treatment of eligible persons" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1953, Court Voids Jim Crow). And finally, when, on May 23, 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to entertain an appeal of the previous decisions, Banks, Charley and San Francisco's African American community could at last compete with whites on a level playing field for all available public housing (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Segregation Ended in S.F.).

Although the issue of integrating public housing in San Francisco was at least theoretically laid to rest by the mid-1950s, the private housing predicament was still problematic. For instance, a workshop on home ownership values and finance conducted at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco revealed that "Although Negroes in the Bay Area qualify in every way as home purchasers, they are kept from buying by Bay Area banks, home builders and others in the real estate situation" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Home Builders and Banks). Albert McKee, a representative of Fidelis Real Estate Company, explained that banks and tract developers made the requirements for home finance especially difficult for African Americans and stated, "All we want is opportunity . . . the same opportunity to buy as the white American" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1954, Home Builders and Banks).

In 1952 Dr. Daniel Collins would discover just how tough the housing market was when he went house hunting. Collins was fed-up with the grit and crime over-taking the Fillmore district and, in his words, "I wanted to go to a place where my kids had a chance for Little League and Boy Scouts and whatnot. So we went shopping for a house" (Collins, personal interview, 2006). Dr. Collins was in a fairly unique position among African American San Franciscans. Economically well off and self employed, he was able to afford a home if he could find someone willing to sell to an African American family. Collins saw an ad for a house in Mill Valley, an enclave just north of San Francisco over the Golden Gate Bridge. As good as the house seemed on paper, Collins had reason to be skeptical. As he notes, "of course she [his wife] and I had been rejected several times and we knew damn well we were gonna be rejected in Mill Valley" (Collins, personal interview, 2006).

One Sunday Rodney Payne, a family friend and colleague of Collins, convinced them to take a look at the house. When they arrived in Mill Valley, both doctors went to meet Mrs. Fault, the woman selling the house. Collins describes what happened next: "She came out and went to him, 'Oh, Dr. Collins, come on down, let me show you the house.'

And he said, he had a very hard Scotch accent, ‘Oh no, I’m not Dr. Collins. This is Dr. Collins. I’m Dr. Payne.’ And she said, ‘Oh, I can’t sell you this house.’ Just like that” (Collins, personal interview, 2006). In spite of such a statement, Dr. Collins’ wife fell in love with the house and, under such circumstances, Payne did the only thing he could; he offered to buy the house from Mrs. Fault tacitly acknowledging that he would turn around and sell it to Collins. Edward France indicates that such third party intervention was not entirely uncommon. He explains that “In some cases, homes were bought directly from an owner who desired to make the best deal possible and was not especially concerned with what his friends or neighbors might think. Others resorted to the subterfuge of buying through a third party who was white. After the transaction was completed, this third party would resell to the Negro” (France; 1962, 78–79).

Mrs. Fault and her husband must have sensed this was a possibility because, as Collins relates,

Mrs. Fault, the woman from whom we bought the house, called us early one morning and said, ‘Dr. Collins, my husband and I were walking up from the theater, it’s about a mile up the hill. We’ve checked you out and we don’t see why we can’t sell you this house directly. We’re just glad to do it.’ So I said, ‘That’s fine.’ So I brought her a check for \$3,000 over there on Thursday and bought the house. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

Not everyone in Mill Valley had a change of heart however. Not long after this purchase Collins notes,

The shit had hit the fan. The real estate operators, the people had heard that a Black family had bought this house on Seminary, which was the prime property on the middle ridge. Two and seven-tenths acres. So I got a call from a man named Gene Heidie. I should never forget his name. Gene Heidie called me. He said, ‘Doctor, my name is Gene Heidie. This is not from me. I’m glad you bought the house; it’s all right with me. But my associates, the other people in the real estate business, authorized me to offer to buy your house back from you at a profit.’ So I didn’t get mad. I said, ‘That’s fine. You give me twice what I paid for it and I promise you that I’ll sign a document that me and my wife, nor my children as long as they’re under my control, will set foot in Mill Valley.’ That’s how much I would’ve made, \$20,000 of cold cash free. They wouldn’t bite. They didn’t bite on that so we moved to Mill Valley in 1952. (Collins, personal interview, 2006)

The Collins family still owns and occupies that house.



Dr. Collins' problem was no isolated incident. Late in 1952, a well-known pastor for one of the largest African American churches in San Francisco would encounter racial prejudice in the housing market as well. Reverend Frederick Haynes, pastor of the Third Baptist Church, looked at a house for sale in San Francisco's predominately white Sunset district. Shortly thereafter, Agnes Contorines, the seller, received an unsigned note in the mail that warned, "For your own good, don't sell to colored" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1952, Pastor Looks at House). In contrast to many sellers who caved in under such pressure, Mrs. Contorines was undeterred by such blatant racial hate and reported that she was selling the house to anyone who cared to buy it.

Discrimination in the housing market was so commonplace and such a problem in San Francisco that part two of the Council for Civil Unity's 1958 *Civil Rights Inventory* was entitled "San Francisco's Housing Market—Open or Closed?" After interviewing 64 white real estate brokers the CCU revealed:

The opinions, attitudes, and practices of these brokers confirm that:

1. Minority families, especially Negroes, face many problems in dealing with realtors—problems that do not arise for their white counterparts;
2. Most brokers will not sell to a nonwhite unless other members of the same race already live in the neighborhood;
3. Many devices and evasions are used to keep all-white neighborhood intact;
4. Brokers who restrict sales to minorities believe that
  - White residents do not want nonwhites in their neighborhoods
  - Selling to nonwhites endangers a broker's business reputation and profits;
  - Nonwhite residents depreciate property values
 (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 14)

Brokers held tight to this latter belief—that nonwhite residents depreciated property values—even though Dr. Luigi Laurenti's research into statistics on home sales in San Francisco proved it to be untrue. Laurenti selected nine comparable all-white areas in the same price bracket as a basis for comparison and revealed that "entry of non-white families into a white neighborhood usually didn't harm prices at all. In fact, when these neighborhoods were compared with similar all-white areas, they showed higher or equal prices in four out of five comparisons" (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 12).

Echoing the problem facing many African American professionals like Dr. Daniel Collins—professionals with enough money to afford a home

but difficulty finding a desirable home to buy, the *Civil Rights Inventory* showed that not even one broker was willing to sell to an African American who wanted to buy in an all-white neighborhood in San Francisco. This led the CCU to declare that “Being the first to sell to a Negro in an all-white area is apparently the strongest taboo in the real estate business” (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 15). Renting would be no easier and in some cases would prove even more difficult. Though the *Inventory* noted rentals were a small part of a broker’s business it went on to state that

70% of those commenting felt that nonwhites trying to rent come up against the same prejudice as those trying to buy. In fact, some brokers believe renting is even more difficult for Negroes because they are regarded as poor tenants. Some owners will sell to minority people but will not rent to them for fear of losing white tenants” (*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 14–15)

In the case of buying or renting to any minorities, a pamphlet published by one property owners’ association made its position crystal clear. Defining tract restrictions, article 7 of the pamphlet notes, “No person other than one of the white Caucasian race shall rent, lease, use or occupy any building on said property except as servant employed by an owner or tenant” (*San Francisco News*; 1956, A Mourning Figure).

The most publicized case of racial discrimination in the City’s real estate industry occurred when Willie Mays, a professional baseball player, attempted to buy a house in a predominately white neighborhood. In 1957, the New York Giants relocated to San Francisco thus becoming the San Francisco Giants. When Mays, the team’s 27 year-old superstar, was searching for a place to live he would find out just how intolerant San Francisco could be when it came to African Americans searching for a home. What made this case unique was that, unlike most African Americans searching for homes in San Francisco, Mays was a well-paid professional athlete, renowned for making clutch plays. If anyone could escape the racial bias against African Americans in the housing market, it would surely be the “Say Hey Kid.”

Mays found a home for sale in Sherwood Heights, a predominately white neighborhood perched atop one of the City’s many hills and adjoining the exclusive St. Francis Woods district. Walter Gnesdiloff, who built and owned the three-bedroom home at 175 Miraloma Drive, initially agreed to sell it to Mays but backed out of the deal at the last minute. Gnesdiloff, a contractor, worried that if he sold to Mays his business would suffer. He noted, “I’m just a union working man and I’d never get another job if I sold this house to that baseball player. I feel sorry for him, and if the neighbors say it would be okay, I’d do it” (NAACP WCRF; carton 103, folder 43).

France (1962) notes that “In the few days preceding the closing of the transaction the owner received a great number of calls from neighbors and from others purporting to be representatives of various improvement clubs. The calls in large measure were of an adverse nature, that is, they expressed opposition to Mays’ moving into the area” (81). One such neighbor was Martin Gaewhiler who apparently expressed the majority opinion of the area’s white residents when he announced, “Certainly I objected. I happen to have quite a few pieces of property in that area and I stand to lose a lot if colored people move in.” He went on, “I certainly wouldn’t like to have a colored family near me” (NAACP WCRF; carton 103, folder 43).

Such an expression of outright racism was a blow to the city’s image of tolerance and some city officials most likely knew that something had to be done to repair the damage. To that end, San Francisco’s mayor George Christopher responded by sending Mays this note:

Words cannot express my deep feeling of regret at this most unfortunate occurrence.

Mrs. Christopher and I extend to you our warmest invitation to be our guests in our home until you find suitable housing.

I sincerely trust that you will not feel that this incident portrays the sentiment of San Francisco. You may be assured that the vast majority of our citizens want to welcome you here.

(NAACP WCRF; carton 103, folder 43)

It seems that Mr. Gnesdiloff realized he was sending the wrong message as well when he phoned Mays the next day and said, “Mr. Mays, I want to tell you my decision personally. I am very happy to have you buy my home. The majority of the people of San Francisco want it that way, and I want it too” (*SF Chronicle*; 1957, Willie Mays Buys S.F. Home).

Although Mays ended up buying the house for \$37,500, the *Sun-Reporter* notes that it was first offered to several other buyers by Village Realty Company for \$32,500 (*Sun-Reporter*; 1957, Willie Mays Robbed). Superstar or not, the premium for being an African American buying a home in a predominately white well-off neighborhood in San Francisco seems to have been nearly 13%. Regarding the incident, Mays seemed a bit ambivalent when he noted, “I’d sure like to live in San Francisco. But I didn’t want to make an issue about it. I’ve never been through this kind of stuff before, and I’m not even mad about it now.” Mays’ wife was less conciliatory when she pointed out an obvious contradiction that many race-liberal San Franciscans would likely rather not face when she stated, “Down in Alabama where we come from you know your place, and that’s something at least. But up here it’s all a

lot of camouflage. They grin in your face and then deceive you” (*SF Chronicle*; 1957, Willie Mays Is Denied).

Years later, NAACP President Terry Francois claimed that George Christopher, then running for Lieutenant Governor, had only offered his home to Mays because of the bad publicity the event garnered. Francois, who served as Mays’ attorney during the incident, noted, “Before this became a matter of public knowledge I called it to the Mayor’s attention and requested that he use the prestige of his office to seek a change in the builder’s position” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, NAACP Head . . . Terry Francois). He continued,

I pointed out that San Francisco, having urged the Giants to come West, would surely be embarrassed if the team’s star center fielder was unable to find accommodations. Christopher absolutely refused to intervene, telling me that it was his understanding that an owner had a legal right to dispose of his property as he saw fit. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, NAACP Head . . . Terry Francois)

Francois asserted that it was only after City Hall was deluged with phone calls, some from as far away as Canada, that the Mayor extended his own home to Willie Mays. In the end, Mays did not take Mayor Christopher up on the offer.

Though he may have over-paid for his home, at least Mays had the means to buy a house in the first place. For those who were less well off, Jefferson Beaver was surely something of a god-send. Beaver, an African American himself, started the Trans-Bay Savings and Loan Association in 1949 in order to lend money to African Americans who were refused financing by larger banks. Founded with funds from both whites and Blacks, by 1956 Trans-Bay had enabled more than 1,500 people, mostly African American, to secure mortgages (*San Francisco News*; 1956, A Mourning Figure). Said Beaver, “We know that the Negro cannot operate in a free market. There are restrictions: by neighborhoods, property owners, real estate corporations, companies and some financial institutions.” He continued, “We think a man’s a man; but most banks are operating and are influenced by their experience of 20 years ago, when Negroes were the first to go broke. To us, a loan is an individual rather than a race matter” (*San Francisco News*; 1956, A Mourning Figure). As president of Trans-Bay, Beaver and his staff must have been very good at assessing an individual’s loan worthiness because the savings and loan had only two repossessions in its first seven years of operation.

Given the overwhelming problems African Americans experienced securing housing in San Francisco, it is worth noting at length the points from the “Summary and Conclusions” of the *Civil Rights Inventory’s* housing section. They are:



Figure 3.2 Pickets march before offices of the Standard Building Co., 2222 19th Avenue in protest against alleged racial discrimination, 1961. The row grew out of charges that a salesman refused to show African American buyers a model home at 301 Christopher Drive in Forest Knolls. Marchers from left are Nyla Marchese, Terry Francois, Cathy Averill, John Pelette and Charles Turner. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

1. *There is strong resistance in the housing industry to selling, renting, building for, or loaning money to the first nonwhite in an all-white district.*
2. *The opinion that nonwhite neighbors cause house prices to drop is widely held by property owners, brokers, builders, and lenders. But . . . This opinion is not borne out in actual experience. House prices have increased in many integrated areas.*
3. *Segregation is most often justified as an economic necessity by realtors, builders, and finance institutions.*
4. *Associations of tract homeowners, usually set up by the builders, exert both subtle and direct pressures to maintain all-white districts.*
5. *Housing discrimination runs in a circle.*
6. *The power centers in housing—brokers, builders, and lenders—help maintain and perpetuate segregation.*
7. *Public agencies have long acquiesced to segregation in housing built with the assistance of public funds.*
8. *New laws to prevent discrimination in publicly-assisted housing and by real estate brokers should do much to diminish discrimination.*
9. *Employment attitudes and practices are more liberal than those concerning housing.*

(*Civil Rights Inventory*; 1958, 37–39) [Italics original]

## 4 Protest and Struggle, 1960–1964

The 1960s would be the most turbulent decade yet for postwar African American San Franciscans. It would be a time of dramatic change, one in which the city experienced the uncompromising demand for equal rights and self-determination by a group who had both grown in size and organization. In 1950 the total population of the city was 775,357 of which 5.6% was African American (Taylor; 1998, 254). By 1960 the total population of San Francisco had declined marginally to 740,316 but the African American population increased by nearly 31,000 to 74,383, a robust 10% of the total population (Taylor; 1998, 286). At the same time, the phenomenon of “white flight” took hold and, as one newspaper reported, “Between 1950 and 1960, 90,000 whites vacated San Francisco for the commute communities,” small suburban cities that were almost all white (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 1). Although there were both positive and negative developments for African American San Franciscans during the decade, one report published in the late 1960s made the sobering, if overly pessimistic assessment that

The years 1940 to 1960 were the key ones in the history of the Negro in San Francisco. They marked the disintegration of a small, stable, relatively well employed and housed minority into a large group of frustrated, bitter people. People whose homes are crumbling, whose jobs are the first to be eliminated by a cost-conscious employer (if they indeed have jobs) and whose children will see no better [sic]. (San Francisco, *A City in Crisis*, 1968)

In 1960 more than one third of San Francisco’s African Americans lived in the Western Addition and made up 46% of the neighborhood’s population. However, living conditions were difficult for many of the area’s residents. As one report noted, “In 1960 the 62,269 residents of 14 census tracts in the Western Addition generally had more unemployment, lower family incomes and fewer years of school than did all of San Francisco’s population in that year” (*A Profile of the Western Addition*, 1960; 1). More specifically, the report indicated that 12% of the Western Addition’s men

and 10% of the women in the labor force were unemployed compared with 7% and 5% city wide respectively. Furthermore, most of the neighborhood's population over 25 years old had not finished high school. However, in spite of difficult life circumstances, the larger African American population meant increased political representation and a greater ability to advocate for equality. Enabled by the community's growing population as much as its desire for racial equality, African American San Franciscans often moved beyond the tactics of debate and compromise characteristic of the previous decade to direct action and confrontation.

If winning further civil rights victories during the 1960s was inevitable it also followed that some of the City's African American leaders would become higher profile figures. One example of the increased attention given to local African American leaders came in Jerry Adams' five-page article that appeared in the "Pictorial Living" section of one of the city's major daily newspapers. The article profiled U.S. Attorney for Northern California Cecil Poole, Judge John Bussey, Dentist Daniel Collins, *Sun-Reporter* owner Dr. Carlton Goodlett, Twentieth Century Club President Myrtle Shortt, Trans-Bay Federal Savings and Loan Executive Vice-President



Figure 4.1 C.O.R.E. shop-in at Lucky grocery store located at 1201 Gough Street, 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.



Jefferson Beaver, Reverend Frederick Haynes of Third Baptist Church, Booker T. Washington Community Center Director James Stratten and NAACP President Terry Francois (*SF Examiner*; 1961, San Francisco's Negro Leaders). It also briefly recognized other influential African Americans such as professor Marie Fielder, professor Robert Thornton, former Director of the San Francisco Urban League Seaton Manning, Dr. Arthur Coleman, ILWU Regional Director William Chester, jazz bassist Vernon Alley and real estate broker T. Wilkins Washington. Adams prefaced the profiles by noting, "If you were to sketch the typical prominent San Francisco Negro, he would be under 50 years old, and a native of the South. He probably arrived in San Francisco after 1940. He is, with some exceptions, a strong race man, i.e., he generously devotes time and money on behalf of Negro causes" (*SF Examiner*; 1961, San Francisco's Negro Leaders).

Though most of the leaders profiled by the *San Francisco Examiner* were men, the *Sun-Reporter* also recognized some pivotal women in leading positions. In fact, the paper welcomed eight prominent women's clubs and four leading African American women who had recently moved to San Francisco. Effie Lee Morris came to the city from New York after accepting the position of Coordinator of Children's Services for the Public Library system. Her principal duty was to supervise children's reading programs in the Main library and in its 26 branches. Doris Thomas, who earned a B.S. from Hampton Institute and a law degree from Howard University, came to San Francisco to take the position of Community Organization Specialist with the Urban League working with citizen's groups in community development projects. Lucille Jones received a Ph.D. from the University of Oklahoma and moved to San Francisco with her husband to work as a Speech Pathologist at the Veterans Administration Hospital. The last woman the newspaper highlighted was Aileen Hernandez. Before coming to the City to take the position of Assistant Chief of the California State Fair Employment Practice Commission, Ms. Hernandez taught adult education at UCLA, was a newspaper columnist and was the Education and Public Relations Director for the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union, Pacific Coast Region (*Sun-Reporter*; 1963, *Sun-Reporter to Welcome*).

The growing leadership class among African American San Franciscans was not without its problems however. This was especially true in the local branch of the NAACP. As the civil rights struggle progressed and activism grew more common, schisms appeared between activists and moderate groups. The first hint that something was amiss came in the December election for officers. Here, Terry Francois' defeat of incumbent President Grandvel Jackson was declared temporarily invalid by national Executive Secretary Roy Wilkins (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, *Fraud Suspected in S.F. NAACP*). At issue, claimed branch member Sammy Higgins, was that State Democratic Assemblyman and NAACP member Philip Burton

secured new memberships and thus more votes for Francois from the Federated Young Democrats. The problem was that when Higgins tried to counteract the votes for Francois by signing up new NAACP members from the Young Republicans Club who were in favor of Jackson, branch secretary Onita Hicks failed to register the new memberships brought by Higgins. When asked about the applications, Hicks claimed that she had neither spoken to Higgins about any new applications nor had she received or rejected any. In a magnanimous gesture, Jackson, who was aligned with the S.F. Labor Council and was the more conservative of the two candidates, urged the national office to let the election results stand, "So that Terry can get on with his job," even though that meant the labor conference he had organized would fall through (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, *Fraud Suspected in S.F. NAACP*).

Though Francois emerged as the branch President in 1960, the problems between moderate and radical factions within the NAACP would resurface in 1964 after some of San Francisco's most aggressive civil rights protests. However, even before that, inter-organization struggles emerged capturing headlines in the City's daily papers. First, in the Spring of 1963 Wilfred Ussery organized a coalition of local civil rights groups including the NAACP, CORE, the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination and SNCC in order to confront the local power structure with specific demands on the part of the African American community (Crowe; 2000, 125 & Wellman; 1966, 23). Calling themselves the United Freedom Movement (UFM), its leaders claimed, "We wanted only groups who have direct action as an M.O. (modus operandi) and who don't have too much feedback to the white community. These groups have a real role to play, but it's in the implementation stage not the initiation stage" (Wellman; 1966, 24). In essence, the UFM wanted an exclusively African American leadership to inform decisions and actions for San Francisco's African American community in areas related to political participation, education, employment, housing and police-community relations (Wellman; 1966, 23). Right from the onset however, the UFM encountered an obstacle that impeded its goals. As Wellman (1966) notes,

UFM leaders are isolated from institutionalized power since they are mainly students, intellectuals, and professionals, and in these positions they have almost nothing to do with the political structure of the city. They have done little to mobilize the black community behind their programs so that they might constitute a political force with which to be reckoned. (33)

Months later the more moderate Church-Labor Conference (CLC), a coalition of church leaders and unionists who disapproved of direct action protests, was formed. Of this group Wellman (1966) notes,

CLC was organized in the Spring of 1963 to confront whites with the fact that Black San Franciscans are not just individuals but “a united Negro community that is out to negotiate with them in a dignified relationship as equals—and in an effort to abolish some of the injustices and inequities and shameful mistreatment of their people. (10)

Because churches had more of a direct connection to the African American community than did the leadership of the UFM, the CLC was more in touch with the everyday problems confronting the community. Or, as Wellman (1966) indicates,

The contact that the groups in the UFM had with this [Negro] community were relatively non-existent. At best, they could speak “in the name of the Negro,” but it would have been extremely difficult for them to speak “for the Negro.” This might be compared with the CLC which appeared to have a firm foundation in the Negro community and had mustered literally thousands of Negroes for rallies, marches, and political action. (30–31)

Furthermore, organized labor was a significant part of the CLC in that, “The union leaders played an active role in formulating the political stance taken by the Conference because they were politically more sophisticated than the clergy, and they had access to political leaders” (Wellman; 1966, 15).

Although the two groups agreed on the issues involved with civil rights, their approaches were quite distinct and they were bound to clash. An example of the coming discord was apparent when the Reverend Hamilton Boswell, pastor of the Jones Methodist Church and chairman of the CLC, said that in order to move toward its goals in housing, employment and education it was necessary to have unity within the African American community and that the UFM, with its emphasis on confronting the “white power structure,” represented only a small segment of the community’s voice. Even more provocative was his stance that the UFM was a group of “economically insecure, politically inept Negroes,” and that it would be absurd for them to take on a structure of any sort without a carefully devised program (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, A New Approach). In spite of such outspoken criticism, some of the foremost leaders in the African American community attempted to quell or even deny the antagonisms. Carlton Goodlett, himself a member of the UFM, insisted, “There is no vociferous disagreement. Things will be worked out so the ministers will be in our movement,” (*SF Examiner*; 1963, A Split Among SF Racial Groups & *SF Chronicle*; 1963, Negroes Surprise an S.F. Audience). Daniel Collins held a similar opinion and, in the same article he noted, “Those who think there are any serious rifts in the Negro community are sadly mistaken.”

In the end the two groups formed an uneasy truce in order to work together for the good of the African American community. This is evident when Wellman (1966) writes,

Leaders of the two alliances were unable to unify and relate to one another in a disciplined and concerted fashion on a broad principle binding them together. To be bound together organizationally and in principle was interpreted as being “captured” or losing autonomy. Relations resulted from necessity and not from a desire to work together. (38)

This kind of cooperation, however it emerged, would be especially important when, in 1964, San Francisco would see some of the largest direct action civil rights protests on the West Coast.

As the decade progressed and African American organizations became more activist and political, social and economic advances would be won through hard-fought battles against ingrained racism, a racism that local residents did not often recognize or even acknowledge. Perhaps as a way to assuage their own guilt or to make the City appear more virtuous, residents and reporters alike frequently compared San Francisco with other cities in order to point out the ills of the other. For example, in the first article of a 10-part series, *The San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* attempted to burnish the City’s image proclaiming that “For the schooled and sophisticated Negro, San Francisco has opened some of the doors of discrimination and given opportunities unequalled in many other parts of the U.S.” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 1). In a similar vein, the article subtly blamed many of the problems African Americans experienced on conditions endemic to the African American community such as the high crime rate, an educational lag of at least two years, chronic unemployment due to lack of skills, family disintegration, dependence on public welfare assistance, a developing Black Muslim movement and an attitude of hopelessness on the part of adolescents. The article concludes,

The migrant comes with exorbitant dreams of a new life, a fresh start—dreams as fragile and easily shattered as a child’s Christmas wish; once broken, a vacuum to be filled with resentment. Further, the migrant brings with him cross-country the inflammable inheritance of generations of discrimination, deprivation and despair. (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 1)

The *News-Call Bulletin* article did give some African Americans a chance to voice their sentiments about living in the City and when asked, their opinions rang clear. A 19-year-old youth, described by the paper as a “Negro boy,” vented, “The City’s a dog. I’d like to do something

constructive, but I don't get a chance. My future in San Francisco? Man, I don't see any." Other people noted that "San Francisco is unfriendly," and that "The city is cold and heartless." And, perhaps summing up exactly why many of the problems in the African American community had persisted throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, one man offered, "The white man tolerates the Negro so long as he isn't here in large numbers. San Francisco's a strange place. You're called mister and can eat in the fanciest restaurants, but you can't find a job" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 1). Dr. Daniel Collins, who practiced dentistry in the Fillmore district proffered a gentler though still critical assessment when he stated, "San Francisco is the kindest city in which I've lived. It has offered the most opportunities. But it still has a long way to go before the Negro can truly say he's got an equal chance for jobs and homes" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 2). In her annual report summary for 1960, Tarea Hall Pittman, Acting Regional Secretary for the NAACP, corroborated Collins' assessment when she noted, "Housing continues to be the greatest problem facing Negroes in the West with the second largest problem being provision of jobs for this growing labor force" (NAACP WCRF; carton 25).

In addition to the challenges that came with facing outright bigotry, African American San Franciscans faced an additional problem when confronting institutional racism. For example, Irving Babow (1963), a researcher who studied restrictive practices in public accommodations in San Francisco, would note that although most places of public accommodations were available without restriction,

In a relatively small percentage of restaurants and hotels, however, and in a few commercial recreation centers such as bowling alleys and billiard parlors, in some neighborhood taverns and bars, in many personal service establishments such as barber shops and beauty parlors, and at many travel agencies and travel resorts, Negroes continue to encounter restrictive practices. (8)

Further explaining this phenomenon, he states,

An important factor in the perpetuation of discriminatory patters is the failure of a substantial proportion of places of public accommodation to establish and communicate to their personnel an explicit, stated policy of nondiscriminatory service and to specify the legal requirements which the management expects its employees to follow. (Babow; 1963, 7)

Babow (1963) would conclude that "How to turn a person away or how to segregate him tactfully and subtly so that there is no legal evidence of

unequal treatment are distortions of interpersonal competency developed to a high degree by some practitioners” (8).

As in the 1950s, individuals seemed willing to openly express both strong and varying opinions about racial discrimination in the 1960s. In a letter supportive of the NAACP, Anne Battley wrote, “My funds are very limited but occasionally I may be able and want to contribute a dollar or two. While my contribution is small it will lend my moral support and show that another white person is sympathetic and interested in justice and equal rights for our Negro citizens” (NAACP WCRF; carton 12). However, Joseph Davis was less encouraging. In the all-to-common habit of lumping the singularly worst acts perpetrated by African American individuals as behavior endemic to the whole race, Davis states that as he was attempting to collect a debt he was owed by Ben Smith, an African American man, he was jumped and therefore concludes, “This undeserved and wanton attack on my person, this brutal treatment, forces me to withdraw from any active participation in any Negro activities” (NAACP WCRF; carton 12). Continuing along these same lines, in defending San Francisco’s Fire Chief, Thomas Edwards rants,

As a matter of fact, you people do have one real claim—you have been responsible for the bulk of crimes perpetrated in this city—a city protected by Chief Lindecker. Can you honestly state you have done anything else toward the betterment of our community. If you demand equality and equal rights, why don’t you do like the rest of us had to do. Earn them. (NAACP WCRF; carton 12)

Whether they committed “the bulk of crimes” in the City, it appears true that African Americans accounted for a far larger proportion of arrests than their share of the San Francisco’s total population. Although comprising just 10% of the population in 1960, African Americans accounted for 35% of the arrests, a statistic that one official of the local NAACP declared was proof of racial bias by San Francisco police (*SF Chronicle*; 1960, Negro Crime Statistics). Police Chief Thomas Cahill countered that the statistic reflected good police work combating a rising African American crime rate. While it may have been true that the SFPD was vigilant in their efforts to combat crimes perpetrated by African Americans, one cannot help but wonder if the police worked as hard to combat the racially motivated hate crimes committed against the City’s Black residents. Some such crimes occurred when African Americans were able to break the color barrier and move into what was once an exclusively white neighborhood. For instance, just two weeks after Richard Dixon, a postal employee, moved his family to the Sunset district at 4430 Kirkham Street, racists spray-painted “Nigger Go Home” on his garage door along side another epithet, “KKK” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, Bigotry Lifts Its Ugly). According to police, other

hate crimes had seemingly no explanation. For example, less than a year after Dixon's encounter with racial intolerance a six-foot cross was burned on the lawn of a home that an African American family had just purchased in the Ingleside district. Police in this case said they could not understand what motivated the cross burning since the neighborhood was already integrated (*Sun-Reporter*; 1963, Cross Burned in Ingleside).

*The San Francisco News-Call Bulletin* would prove an additional source of information on crime in San Francisco's African American community. The paper noted that "In almost every category of bloody and brutal crime, Negroes commit a disproportionate percentage: murder, 47 pct. of the city's total; rape, 37 pct.; aggravated assault, 50 pct.; robbery, 48 pct." (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 7). Stressing the severity of the problem in the Fillmore district, the paper related that the police, defying any degree of tact or racial sensitivity, called the patrol route in the area "The Jungle Beat" and that "Violence is a nightly habit in the Fillmore District." The article concluded that much of the violence was instigated by young people who had little hope of securing gainful employment that would have kept them off the streets and out of trouble.

In contrast, Dr. Daniel Collins noted that "When there was high employment for Negroes in WW II, there was nowhere near the crime" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 7). Collins further recalled the Fillmore of the late 1940s saying,

Well, the Fillmore at the time was a delightful place to be. The reason I would say that is, everybody had jobs. Nobody had the need to mug anybody. You could walk down Fillmore Street with dollar bills hanging out your pocket, nobody would bother ya 'cause everybody had a job. (Collins, 2006, personal interview)

There was not, however, unanimity among African American organizations or individuals when it came to assessing problems in the community. At least one organization agreed that some negative elements had permeated the community and sought to change them. Attorney Don Warden and a group of African Americans organized a group they called the Afro-American Association through which they executed a program of self-help by directly confronting problems in the African American community. Speaking frankly, Warden said,

Let's be honest. We do get low grades and seek athletic rather than academic skills in far too many instances. Our crime rate is high; we do have too many people on welfare rolls, drink too much, buy too many Cadillacs, discriminate against each other, and don't own a productive thing. We're beggars, and no one respects a beggar. (*Frontier*; 1963, SF-AAHCS archive)

To counter such problems the Association taught African history and culture to inculcate, “a feeling of pride and purpose to replace the inferiority instilled by a white culture which he is taught to chase, but not allowed to join, a culture which has degraded him and taught him to be ashamed of his blackness” (*Frontier*; 1963, SF-AAHCS archive). Warden further described the situation noting, “The white man broke the link with the past dragging us from our homeland into slavery, and we had no choice but to drink in his culture; but we were rejected and our inferiority reinforced.” Although The Association was only operating three after-school classes at the time of the article, its long-term goal was to operate all-Black private elementary schools.

Further group-appraisal came from James Stratten, executive director of the Booker T. Washington Community Center, a center that was, in many ways, just as socially conservative as its namesake. As if quoting from one of Washington’s turn of the century speeches, Stratten offered this assessment: “The Negro no longer is going to be able to blame the white man for his failure. The Negro situation will be even more grave than it is today if he can’t qualify and find jobs. Now it is up to us. Blaming the whites may be an escape now, but it won’t be tomorrow” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 3). In the same vein, one San Francisco probation officer was known to tell her wards, “If we want to be accepted, we’d better first make ourselves acceptable.” There were, however, variations on that opinion. One 7th grade girl evidenced that teenagers were also aware of the problems when she noted, “I guess we Negroes are a stereotype. There’s a common picture we can’t read or write and are carefree and, I guess, sort of irresponsible.” However, she also seemed to understand that such negative opinions needed to be countered when she concluded, “We’ve got to change that picture” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 3).

There was also good cause for optimism among African American San Franciscans at the outset of the 1960s. Political strength and community organization were components of increasing value and utility, tools to use in securing equal rights. Or, as Dr. Carlton Goodlett put it,

We want to take part in making this a greater city than it already is. We’re getting fed up at being told to be patient and forbearing. Mostly, we’re in the rear guard fighting for rights others have. We want to join the forefront in planning for the future—ours and the city’s. (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 10)

To this, Dr. Daniel Collins, one of the more staid voices of African American leadership in the City, would add, “Of course, as the Negro approaches first-class citizenship, he must accept responsibility as well as privileges” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 10).



One method of advancing to the vanguard was to take advantage of the community's better organizational skills and larger numbers to enact direct action protests. While such protests would really take off in 1964, the first glimmer of such action's potential took place under the leadership of James Herndon and Benjamin Christwell. Herndon, co-founder of the San Francisco Negro Historical and Cultural Society, was concerned with finding both permanent employment and the dignity and security that went along with secure jobs for African American San Franciscans. To that end, Herndon's San Francisco Negro American Labor Council and Christwell's Bay View Citizens' Committee picketed Juntine Wong's Super Save store on Third Street in the Bayview district until he promised to employ two African Americans (*Sun Reporter*; 1962, Picket Line Formed). Christwell explained the focus of this picket and other actions that the job campaign undertook by noting, "Elementary justice demands that Negroes be hired in businesses where they bank and spend their money. Our committee will continue to advise Negroes not to spend their money where they can't work" (*Sun Reporter*; 1962, Picket Line Formed). In a show of their strength and determination, they returned weeks later to picket Wong's store a second time because he had hired only one African American employee instead of the agreed upon two. A local paper noted that the organizations took such a hard line because, "local stores in the Bayview district owe their existence to the large number of Negro customers and that it would be just and fair to spend some of the money made in the area in the hiring of Negroes" (*Sun Reporter*; 1962, Economic Boycott Forces).

However, as positive and action-oriented as community leaders and groups could be, it is clear that the picture was not quite so rosy as James Stratton made it out to be in his claim that "The rules of society are being altered in our favor. No longer will we be able to use, as a legitimate complaint, the cry we were barred from a job or a house because of race" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 8). For example, a report on the economic status of African Americans in the Bay Area by the California State Employment Service based on the 1960 census found that "The low percentage of Negro workers in some industries in some occupations suggests restrictions on job opportunities not wholly explainable on the basis of lack of skill or educational attainment of the Negro labor force" (The Economic Status of Negroes; 1963, SF-AAHCS archive). The report indicated that the largest numbers of African Americans were employed in transportation equipment manufacturing (primarily shipbuilding), construction, transportation, government related service industries, private households and food processing but almost completely absent from positions in white collar jobs.

Furthermore, in what would be a barometer of social well-being in the African American community, the report identifies problems with youth employment, stating,

The most striking feature of the labor force participation among the nonwhite population (more than 2 out of 3 of whom are Negroes), is the generally lower participation of persons in the younger age groups and the relatively higher participation of persons in the older age brackets. The lower participation rate of nonwhite workers in the younger age groups is undoubtedly a reflection of the greater difficulty these young people have in securing employment, since many of the industries that usually employ younger workers, employ very few nonwhite workers. (The Economic Status of Negroes; 1963, SF-AAHCS archive)

If the existing employment conditions were bad, the forecast was worse. The State Employment Service summed up the prospects for Bay Area African Americans noting,

The effects of technological change in the years ahead will fall most heavily on Negro workers who, with below average education and training, will be the least prepared to compete in tomorrow's job market. Technological change in the Bay Area will reduce job openings for the less well educated and, at the same time, raise the educational requirements for job entry. The concentration of Negro workers in a limited number of industries and occupations makes them more vulnerable to structural unemployment, and consequently fails to provide the Negro community with an economic "cushion" to support it in periods of recession. A most notable factor in this respect is the lack of employment opportunities for Negroes in managerial jobs, sales and clerical jobs, and professional jobs, which are, generally speaking, less subject to unemployment. (The Economic Status of Negroes; 1963, SF-AAHCS archive)

The State Employment Service report would prove prophetic. Just months after it was published the San Francisco Labor Council warned that the City was fast becoming a financial and business center with little employment hope left for blue collar workers, a segment of the job market that employed many more African Americans than did the white collar sector. Leaving little to the imagination about to whom it was referring, its bulletin titled "Negro Unemployment" stated, "In less than a decade the San Francisco Labor Council has seen half of our production jobs leave San Francisco. We've seen two hundred warehouses close each year. These were places where workers with limited skills or training could be dispatched for jobs" (George Johns Collection; 1963, box 52). Put another way, San Francisco's Human Relations coordinator and former U.S. Secretary of Labor James Mitchell noted, "One of the practical difficulties which business firms face, especially in the employment of Negroes, is precisely this:

finding those with the skills for which there are openings” (*SF Examiner*; 1964, Equal Rights Report on S.F.).

One arena where African Americans were clearly qualified for jobs, even at top-level positions, was in the San Francisco Post Office. As David Johnson recalled of his own tenure at the San Francisco Post Office during the 1950s, “In the Post Office you will find [Black] people with Ph.D.s, who are accountants, who had skills that they could have found employment outside had the employment market and industry been much more open” (D. Johnson, personal interview, 2005). However, even though many African Americans found gainful employment with the San Francisco Post Office, few were promoted to such top-level positions as their skills or seniority might dictate. Angered by such de facto racism, James Stephens, a Postal Clerk in San Francisco, demanded a full investigation of the San Francisco Post Office and its promotion practices (*Sun-Reporter*; 1963, Bias Charged At S.F. Post Office). The *Sun-Reporter* indicated that

Mr. Stephens argued that promotions are not given by Mr. John F. Fixa in accordance with Postal Rules and Regulations, and that a pattern of discrimination exists throughout the San Francisco Post Office Department that eliminates Negroes and other members of minority groups from top level positions. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1963, Bias Charged At S.F. Post Office)

In what may have been a tacit admission of guilt at an Equal Employment Opportunity Hearing, the Post Office’s representative offered little argument in Fixa’s defense nor did he sum up the Post Office’s position with respect to the charge. And, although it did not solve the problems with promotions, five years later under Postmaster Lim Lee, the Post Office instituted an aggressive postal trainee program, the first of its kind in the nation, aimed at “finding employment for the hard core unemployed in the ghettos of the city” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Postal Jobs for Ghetto).

One high profile employment breakthrough was getting Mayor George Christopher’s business, Christopher Dairy Farms, to hire an African American driver. Although it took over a decade of agitation and many NAACP promptings to win this battle, in March of 1961 the Mayor’s business hired native San Franciscan William Garrick as a milk route truck driver (*Sun-Reporter*; 1961, Mayor Firm Employs First). But the victory was not without controversy. NAACP president Terry Francois accused the Mayor of engaging in years of stalling and then hiring Garrick only under the immense pressure of facing a direct action campaign. Although African American leaders demanded that Christopher Dairy Farms employ an African American driver throughout the 1950s, it was not until the NAACP gave the Mayor one week to comply with their demand that he finally

capitulated noting, “I have been trying for years to hire a Negro driver, but Teamster Local 226 wouldn’t let Negroes into the union” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, NAACP Head . . . Terry Francois). However, it was unclear just how sincere his assertion was because, as the *Sun-Reporter* noted, the statement prompted teamster business agent Stephen Gilligam to call Mayor Christopher a “blankety blank liar.”

An incident that was perhaps just as telling of Christopher’s integrity when it came to dealing with matters of racial equality came at a State Senate hearing in 1963. At this six-man subcommittee hearing set up to investigate “the nature and extent of racial discrimination,” in California, Senator Eugene McAteer accused the two term Republican mayor of not moving quickly or effectively enough to end discrimination in the hiring and promotion of minority City employees. Noting that he had referred discrimination complaints to the mayor’s office and that nothing was done with them, McAteer stated, “it’s not always easy for a Democratic State Senator to get things done through a Republican Mayor” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Negro Job Issue). President of the local Urban League, Jefferson Beaver also indicated that “it is more than a harmless oversight that Negroes serve on very few of the City commissions which make employment and other policies.” Beaver suggested that African Americans be appointed to commissions as part of a special effort to “upgrade Negro workers and destroy the racial ghetto” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Negro Job Issue).

By the 1960s, racism in San Francisco’s employment market had exhausted the patience of progressives in the Bay Area, pushing many to act out against it. Although San Francisco had a history of protest movements and civil rights activities, the 1960s ushered in a new component previously unseen, the large-scale involvement of young people, many of whom were college students. The first large demonstration of the decade came in October of 1963 and was directed against Mel’s Drive In, a popular restaurant owned by Mel Weiss and San Francisco City Supervisor Harold Dobbs who was, at the time of the pickets, running for mayor. Although the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination was nominally in charge of the demonstration, Jo Freeman, then a student at UC Berkeley and participant in the protest, noted, “It was in fact organized by members of the DuBois Clubs, a youth group loosely, but not officially, associated with the Communist Party” (Freeman; 1997, *From Freedom Now!*).

On November 2, 1963—just one week before the mayoral election—demonstrators picketed Dobbs’ home at 1601 Monterey Boulevard near the exclusive St. Francis Woods neighborhood. Though John Shelley, Dobbs’ political opponent and eventual victor in the mayoral race, denied any involvement, Dobbs was nonetheless suspicious of the demonstration and stated, “It is clearly part of a contrived political maneuver aimed at making race relations an ugly issue in the mayoralty campaign

(*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Charges Traded). Addressing both the mayoral race and the picket, Dobbs went on to note,

I will not be pushed around. I will not be subjected to contrived political pressures in business or in City government. I believe that government must be based on the principle of equal rights for everyone—but not special rights or privileges for any one, or any group. The same principle applies to my business. (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Charges Traded)

Although Shelley may not have had anything to do with the demonstration, he was clearly in favor of it and likely knew that it would serve to bolster his own standing when he noted, “The Constitutional right of any citizen to peaceful, legal protest is undeniable. It is more important than the possible damage such a demonstration might have on my own campaign or on Mr. Dobbs’ campaign” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Charges Traded).

The day after the demonstration at Dobb’s home, protesters again picketed Mel’s Drive-In on Geary Boulevard for the second straight day. Describing the first night’s demonstration where 64 protesters were arrested, *The San Francisco Chronicle* reported that “Forty-eight singing, chanting pickets, protesting alleged racial discrimination, were arrested in a wild sit-in demonstration” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Mass S.F. Sit-in Arrests). The newspaper labeled the protest “a wild melee,” and indicated that the majority of the protesters were college students and young housewives who occupied empty booths and stools without ordering food, sang freedom songs, pounded on tables and scuffled with police as they were forced into paddy wagons. Recalling the Mel’s Drive-In demonstration as a breakthrough in direct action civil rights protests, Jo Freeman notes, “That night, and again on Sunday, the demonstrators held the first mass sit-in of the Bay Area civil rights movement” (Freeman; 1997, *From Freedom Now!*).

However, the protesters were sympathetic to the political nature of demonstrating against a mayoral candidate so close to the election and agreed to call off the campaign until after the vote was completed. But, following his election loss, activists resumed their demonstrations against Mel’s Drive-In. Sounding hopeful, Arthur Sheridan, chairman of the Direct Action Committee sponsoring the protests noted, “Now that the election is over perhaps the real issue can come out. And that is simply Negroes in jobs” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Pickets Resume Drive-In Siege). Sheridan’s hopes were realized when, just days after the pickets resumed, Mel’s settled the dispute by announcing to a group of about 200 demonstrators that all 13 restaurants in the Mel’s chain would abide by a new employment agreement. In that agreement worked out by James Mitchell, the Mayor’s human rights coordinator, and Mel’s

officials, the restaurant chain agreed to hire and train African Americans for jobs as waitresses, carhops, cashiers, bartenders and fountain attendants, jobs with a high level of public contact and from which they had previously been excluded (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Mel's Settles Civil Rights).

Tasting the success of mass demonstrations at Mel's Drive-In, civil rights activists would move on to another front, one that would go down as one of the biggest demonstrations ever held in San Francisco. In March 1964, thousands of civil rights activists from a broad range of organizations led by the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination united to protest against the discriminatory hiring practices of the Sheraton-Palace Hotel. Established in 1875, the Palace Hotel was one of the most elegant buildings in the city and had once been an important source of employment for African American San Franciscans. However, as early as 1915, when the Panama-Pacific International Exposition was held in San Francisco, African Americans who once found work in the hotel's baggage department or restaurant began being replaced by white work crews (Broussard; 1993, 39). Times had changed though and by the 1960s activists were certain they could crack the job market in the hotel industry using direct action protests. As Freeman notes, "The NAACP had been contemplating legal action against the hotel industry for some time because so many local Negroes had complained to the NAACP of discrimination. But after the successful Mel's action, demonstrations seemed a quicker route to jobs (Freeman; 1997, From Freedom Now!).

Although one of the most noteworthy facts about the Palace Hotel campaign was the large number of young people involved, also new to this demonstration was that it was led by a woman, 18-year-old Tracy Sims. Sims had graduated from Berkeley High School in 1963 and enrolled at San Francisco State College but dropped out after completing just one semester to focus on civil rights work full time (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, At 18, a Civil Rights Veteran). She demonstrated her leadership ability as chairwoman for the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination and as secretary of the DuBois Club of San Francisco. Having been arrested five times in seven months for demonstrating, twice during the Mel's Drive In campaign, Sims explained her commitment and dedication to the civil rights movement saying, "I inherited this fight as part of my Negro birthright" (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, At 18, a Civil Rights Veteran). Also unique to the Palace Hotel demonstrations was that, as Jo Freeman notes, "It was one of the few times in the history of the civil rights movement in which blacks and whites did walk hand-in-hand" (Freeman; 1997, From Freedom Now!). In fact, not only did Blacks and whites work cooperatively but, in what would become routine in large civil rights demonstrations in San Francisco, white demonstrators outnumbered Blacks.



*Figure 4.2* Tracy Sims, secretary of the San Francisco W.E.B. DuBois Club and leader of the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination, 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

One particularly large and raucous demonstration was held on March 1, 1964. During the protest 123 people were arrested, some of them high profile African American leaders including NAACP president Thomas N. Burbridge, comedian Dick Gregory, attorney Terry Francois and CORE chairman William Bradley (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Negro Leaders Held). The previous night some 70 people demonstrated both inside and

outside the hotel but Judge Francis McCarty issued a court order forbidding the protesters from entering the hotel. The following night, Judge McCarty further amended the order to allow only nine picketers. When the demonstrators decided to go forward with the picket, “Some 30 uniformed policemen then started arresting the demonstrators, who sat down, locked arms and continued singing freedom songs” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Negro Leaders Held). During this first batch of arrests 81 people were taken to jail but most returned the same day to continue the picket. After ignoring Captain Arthur Williams’ command to disperse or face serious consequences for being arrested a second time, 42 more people were taken to jail around 2 o’clock in the morning. Further, 18-year old Tracy Sims was facing a \$50,000 damage suit filed by the Palace Hotel (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Negro Leaders Held).

Demonstrations at and negotiations with the Sheraton-Palace Hotel took place over some weeks and were characterized by drawn out discussions about how to improve the minority hiring practices of the Hotel Employers Association of San Francisco. In one instance, Morgan Smith, manager of the Palace hotel, accused Tracy Sims and the Ad Hoc Committee of being “irresponsible participants in the civil rights movement,” and of being led by Marxists with whom he would not negotiate (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Negro Civil Rights Groups). In response to Smith’s attempt to characterize the protesters as irresponsible, Dr. Burbridge stated that the United Freedom Movement had sent out a call to all members of the NAACP, CORE and The Baptist Ministers Union, all well respected civil rights organizations, to join the Ad Hoc Committee pickets. William Bradley added that “We are sick of management calling pickets irresponsible. If irresponsible means against prejudicial hiring then we are all irresponsible.” Further, Bradley addressed the Marxist issue noting,

When people report to the picket line we don’t ask them what their politics are. Red-baiting is an old device used to discredit civil rights groups. As long as people are involved in the struggle against Jim Crow they are welcome to the freedom movement. (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964. (Negro Civil Rights Groups)

Perhaps the single most contentious demonstration took place on March 6, 1964 when approximately 1,500 people showed up to picket at the Palace Hotel and more than 200 were arrested. Tension peaked when two men antagonized the protesters with racially charged icons and epithets. Clyde Irwin marched in front of the entrance of the hotel brandishing a swastika while Darell Bishop chanted, “The South shall rise again,” while handing out Confederate flags to like minded racist on-lookers (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, Attack on Bearer of Nazi). Perhaps sensing that if the protest turned more raucous it could result in negative





*Figure 4.3* Dr. Thomas Burbridge (right) and attorney Terry Francois (left), 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

consequences, two prominent African American civil rights attorneys, Willie Brown and Terry Francois, reversed course and advised protesters against actions that would force arrests. Francois explained his change of heart stating,

I'm not at all certain I can continue to work with them under these circumstances. I'm not only a lawyer, but a father and a citizen of San

Francisco, and I didn't spend all these years trying to better relations with police to have them destroyed unnecessarily" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Rights Leader Blasts Tactics).

A third lawyer, U.S. Attorney Cecil Poole, also disagreed with the protesters' actions noting,

I hope whoever is advising them will tell them this conduct isn't contributing to their cause. I'm surprised at their disorderly behavior. I just cannot approve of even successful tactics that have the effect of violating the law. This kind of conduct brings into disrepute the entire movement, including its objectives. (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, Rebellion Splits Negro Leaders)

If Friday's demonstration was the most contentious, the next day's protest would be characterized by the largest mass arrest in San Francisco's history. The show of power on both sides seemed to have some impact however because following the arrest of 167 activists, 159 of whom were white, Mayor John Shelley brokered a two-year minority hiring pact with the San Francisco Hotel Employers Association representing 33 major hotels (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, Shelley Wins Agreement). Jo Freeman, who was present at this final hotel demonstration, noted that the settlement was helped along because, "leaders in the ILWU had phoned Mayor Shelley, who had enjoyed major union support for his recent election, and urged him to resolve the conflict. Several children of the ILWU leadership were in the Sheraton demonstrations and many Negroes were among its members" (Freeman; 2004, 99). In the end, the Hotel Employers Association agreed: 1) to bring the total minority employment levels to anywhere from 15 to 20%; 2) to inform civil rights groups should serious impediments to minority hiring develop; and 3) to provide periodic statistical analysis on the number of minority employees in all jobs. The Sheraton-Palace Hotel also agreed to drop any civil damage suits against demonstrators (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Hotel Pact Relies).

In spite of the victory, civil rights leaders and organizations were still split on whether or not direct action should be used to advance gains in employment. For example, although Terea Hall Pittman, regional secretary for the NAACP, denied her organization supported the Palace Hotel demonstrators, the San Francisco branch of the NAACP released a statement unanimously approved by its board of directors saying it "recognized the beneficial results flowing from the successful efforts of the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination . . . and consider this to be an outstanding achievement of equal rights in our community" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, NAACP Split Over Palace). On the other side, James Mitchell, San Francisco's first human relations coordinator, was among



*Figure 4.4* Protest at the Sheraton-Palace Hotel resulting in 123 arrests, 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

the list of detractors. Despite the fact that most of the Palace-Hotel protesters were themselves white, he stated,

This kind of direct action permits people who might otherwise be sympathetic to or mildly interested in the cause of the Negro to say in effect, 'If this is the way they're going to act, count me out.' While it may be true that those who say this seize upon the demonstrations as an excuse for no action, nevertheless, we are faced with a real and practical problem of alienating a portion of the white community who might otherwise be helpful.

Mitchell then added, “It may be that the Negro leadership in this country needs to distinguish between constructive and damaging action” (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1964, Mitchell Adds Voice).

One group not typically sympathetic to the methods of direct action was San Francisco’s African American clergymen. However, Reverend G. L. Bedford, president of the 40,000 member Baptist Ministers Union, chimed in cautiously but favorably when he noted, “Before there are further demonstrations, Mayor Shelley should be given time to implement this program. The supervisors should have 30 days to approve a statutory Human Relations Commission, and if they then don’t I’ll take to the pulpit and urge my people to hit the streets” (*Sun-Reporter*, 1964, Uncle Tom, Segregation).

Criticism from older more established leaders may have been well meaning but not enough to deter the more youthful activists. In fact, just a week later hundreds of demonstrators were back at it, this time focusing their aim at the discriminatory hiring practices at the Cadillac dealership along San Francisco’s “Auto Row.” However, this time an older and more established voice led the protests, that of NAACP president Dr. Thomas N. Burbridge. On Saturday March 14, 1964 more than 200 demonstrators chanted and sang while protesting the discriminatory hiring practices of the Cadillac dealership where, they claimed, only seven of the 258 workers at the agency were African American. Like the Palace Hotel before it, the Cadillac Agency protesters were mostly white and of the 107 people arrested just 23, including Dr. Burbridge, were African American. The paucity of African American participation, especially among the better-off classes, was clearly a sore spot with veteran *Sun-Reporter* newsman Tom Fleming, who recalled,

The Black intellectuals were playing bridge games during that thing. It was mostly white kids out there on that damn picket line in Auto Row and places. And I was furious about that. I said, “You damn bastards. You playing bridge on Sunday afternoon instead of being out there on that goddamn picket line.” Oh, that made me mad as hell. (Fleming, personal interview, 2005)

He concluded, “I don’t understand how them people think like that, who don’t participate in such activities. I don’t understand how they think at all” (Fleming, personal interview, 2005).

Following the protest, General Motors issued a statement in which it claimed to have in place an on-going “non-discriminatory employment policy” and further noted that “The demonstrators who have appeared at Cadillac have these [Federal and State] channels open to them. No good purpose could be served by private discussion of allegations and unfounded charges made by unlawful demonstrators,” (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, New Mass Arrests). With regard to the Cadillac dealership such a statement seemed suspect considering that, according to the NAACP’s 1964 Annual Report, “Of a total 258

employees, 9 were black and all were waxers, janitors and lubrication men; none were mechanics, salesmen or executives” (NAACP WCRF; carton 25).

However, as dismal as their hiring record was, Mayor Shelley managed to convince civil rights leaders to cease protests for two weeks while the disputed issues were worked out by mediation. The moratorium was part of what Shelley called a program “to establish a better climate in San Francisco for the furtherance of improved employment opportunities for minority citizens” (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, Two-Week Freeze). But, when the NAACP asked the Automobile Dealers Association to agree to a goal of 16–30% employment of minority group persons in future job turnover openings, the auto dealers emphasized that they were already equal opportunity employers and the climate between the two sides chilled considerably (Freeman; 2004, 103–104). It took further picketing and more arrests the following month before the protesters and auto dealers made pledges to the Mayor’s Interim Committee on



Figure 4.5 NAACP sponsored picket at the Cadillac dealership on Van Ness Avenue, 1964. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

Human Relations and thus brought the city's most significant period of civil rights campaigns to an end.

Despite the Automobile Dealers Association rhetoric of conciliation, just two years later the city's Human Rights Commission director, Frank Quinn, reported that the organization was failing to live up to the minority hiring agreement it had made. Noting that the Association "has not taken an affirmative action in recruiting and employment," he went on to indicate that "If the heat isn't on, the water doesn't boil. If there aren't demonstrations, it seems to me that some of these people don't show a concern" (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, Auto Row Reneging). Statistics bore witness to his criticism. In late 1964 African Americans comprised 8.5% of the employees but by early 1966 they were only 7.4%, which prompted Quinn to note, "The figures underline the lack of effort on the part of the Motor Car Dealers Association to recruit and train among minorities, as they agreed to do in the agreement they signed with us and the NAACP two years ago" (*Spokesman*; 1966, S.F. Human Rights Commission). Quinn also indicated that every effort to implement the agreement was initiated by the Human Rights Commission not by the dealers.

Shortly after the Cadillac showroom protests, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported that NAACP president Thomas Burbridge quit his post in protest over philosophical differences between himself and the executive committee. Relating that the organization's official nominating committee had offered one slate of officers while a small group of members offered another, the newspaper noted, "Apparently battling for control of the association are the so-called 'moderates' and a dissident group demanding increasingly militant action" (*SF Chronicle*; 1964, Feud Within the NAACP). This was, however, the second time Burbridge had quit his post. Four months earlier, in June of 1964, he resigned when the NAACP's Board of Directors voted to advise the protesters who had been arrested in the Sheraton-Palace Hotel and Auto Row demonstrations to plead no contest rather than not guilty. Burbridge's stance was that they should plead not guilty and demand jury trials (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Entire NAACP Executive Board Quits). When the general membership voted overwhelmingly not to accept his resignation and further voted to overrule the Board's decision on how to advise the arrested protesters, Burbridge's tenure as NAACP president was temporarily saved.

However, by October it was clear that the differences between Burbridge and the NAACP Board of Directors were irreconcilable and he, along with the entire Executive Board, resigned (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Entire NAACP Executive Board Quits). Although initially quiet about the reasons for his departure, Burbridge later penned a letter published in the *Sun-Reporter* explaining his decision. First, he noted that after many discussions at NAACP board meetings, the organization agreed to file suit to stop the A-2 redevelopment plan that the S.F. Board of Supervisors passed in October 1964. However, he stated that after the suit had been filed, "certain members of the board began to question not only the propriety of this suit, but

whether they ever approved the taking of active steps toward the defeat of the urban renewal plan (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Why I Resigned). Calling this change of heart a “gross insincerity,” Burbridge stated that “It was a clear indication that certain board members intended to reverse the active role the NAACP had taken in the recent past in fighting for Negro rights and decent opportunities to live and work” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Why I Resigned). He concluded,

It was now evident to me that this group, which had been overwhelmingly reversed by the active membership at the June membership meetings, in opposition to the vigorous policies of the NAACP in supporting the Cadillac sit-in demonstrators, was continuing its policies to emasculate the active program taken by the NAACP. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Why I Resigned)

Controversy surrounding the local NAACP branch had not fully dissipated by December, when the vote for the Board of Directors took place. In a victory for the so-called “militant” slate, after resigning his post as branch president just three months prior, Burbridge was elected first vice-president over the more conservative attorney Joseph Williams. The more liberal slate racked up a few more posts as well when Dr. Joseph Wellington secured the spot of second vice-president over Dr. Oscar Daniels and attorney Richard Bancroft was elected president (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Liberal Slate Wins). Prominent attorney and member of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors Terry Francois declined a position on the NAACP’s Board of Directors in what journalist Tom Fleming noted was, “one of the most ungracious moves that he has made in his checkered career.” Francois asserted that although he was disassociating himself with the local branch, he would remain an active member through the national office (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Liberal Slate Wins). Fleming, indicating that the initial problem arose when Francois’ term ended and Burbridge was elected to replace him, noted,

The thinking persists among residents of the Negro community that Francois, at the time he stepped down as president and Burbridge was elected to succeed him, thought Burbridge, a college professor, would be president in name only with Francois himself calling the shots and holding the power in his hands. Spokesmen for this view say that Francois became enraged when he discovered that Burbridge himself was a strong personality. The two men now hold strong dislikes for one another. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Liberal Slate Wins)

Richard Young took a broad look at some of San Francisco’s African American leaders and the organizations to which they belonged in his article examining the state of African American leadership in San Francisco shortly after the turmoil surrounding the 1964 NAACP elections.

Young interviewed eight protest leaders and seven politicians and described both commonalities and points of contention between and among the two groups. First, he concluded,

With the important exception of the NAACP, the Negro politicians interviewed are inactive in local protest groups; they often neglect even to purchase memberships in protest organizations, or are unaware if they have or not. They also display surprisingly little interest in the more radical protest groups such as CORE, Freedom House, the Ad Hoc Committee, and the Black Muslims, even though these organizations have made significant contact with the lower-class Negroes of the Fillmore District (Young, 1969, 97).

One unnamed politician inferred the same sentiment, if less diplomatically, when he said, “the Negro politicians of San Francisco have lost contact with the Negro masses: Willie [Brown] and Terry [Francois] are not sufficiently aware of the needs of the average Negro” (Young; 1969, 96).

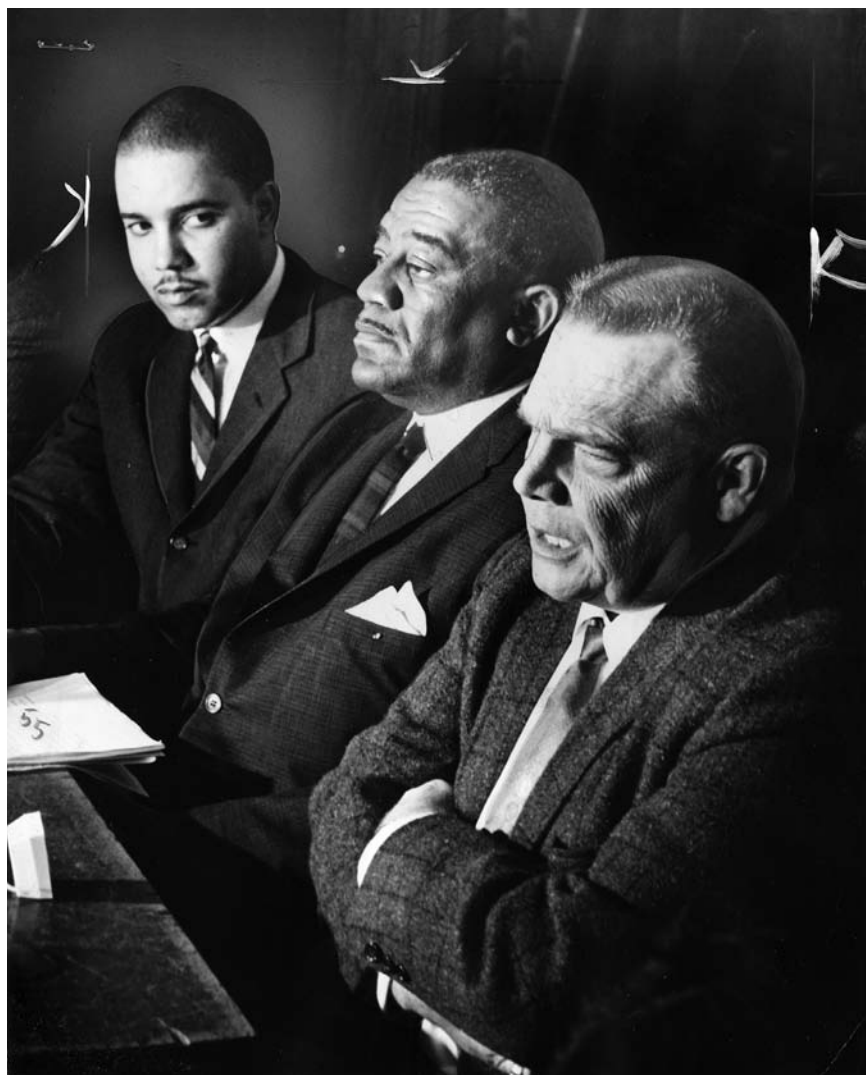
There was further disagreement between the politicians and protest leaders about how to secure gains for the City’s African American community. While most politicians and protest leaders were in favor of direct action mass protest, “Most of the politicians consider the protest leaders to be inefficient and unsophisticated,” and viewed politics as the most effective tool for improving the situation in the African American community (Young; 1969, 98). Reacting to the accusation that politicians were opportunists or “Uncle Toms,” the politicians often noted that politics required compromise to affect lasting change. In a statement that was a bit off the mark one politician quipped, “In politics, you must choose between something or nothing; militants accomplish nothing” (Young; 1969, 99). As one might imagine, the protest leaders disagreed with such an appraisal and as Young (1969) notes “With the exception of the executive director of the Urban League, San Francisco’s Negro protest leaders consider direct action protest to be a far more effective tool for bettering the Negro’s lot than political activity,” (103). Four of the eight protest leaders interviewed went so far as to assert that political activity hurt the community. Disagreements were not confined to schisms between politicians and protest groups alone however. For example, protest leader Pleasant Carson—coordinator of Freedom House and a member of CORE—turned a critical eye on the local NAACP, a protest group he claimed was “too moderate” (Young; 1969, 102). Carson’s stance may have been influenced by his organization’s influence. Young (1969) indicates that “Freedom House has been able to organize hundreds of Negroes on short notice for various protest purposes. In short, Freedom House has an organization in many ways stronger and healthier than that of any Negro politician in San Francisco” (105).



## 5 Rights and Repression, 1965–1969

In many ways, San Francisco's African American community emerged from the Palace Hotel and Auto Row protests more galvanized, assertive and ready to take on racial discrimination whenever and wherever it occurred. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the long-standing problem of police and community relations. For example, Ralph Newman, who owed \$69 for outstanding traffic warrants, voluntarily surrendered at the Hall of Justice whereupon he claimed he was beaten so badly by two police officers that he had to be taken to Mt. Zion hospital for surgery (*Sun-Reporter*; 1965, Negro Beaten in Jail). Increasingly frequent instances of police brutality directed against African Americans such as the one involving Ralph Newman, spurred CORE's call for a nine member independent citizens police review board with the power to recommend the dismissal, transfer and suspension of officers (*Sun-Reporter*; 1965, Bradley Calls for Review). Just one month after its demand, CORE chairman William Bradley was arrested and "roughed up" while picketing in front of the Emporium department store. Bradley noted that "this is the second incident of police brutality directed against officials of San Francisco CORE since the Chapter started putting pressure on Mayor Shelley and other officials to establish an independent citizens police review board. It was reported that Sherman Gerke, Chairman of the Public Relations Committee of the Local CORE Chapter was roughed up and had his glasses broken by police officers on the previous weekend" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1965, Bradley Jailed).

In July of 1966 the city narrowly averted a summer-time riot in the Fillmore district when police rushed 30 patrol cars into the area following the shooting of robbery suspect Frank Jackson by off-duty African American police officer Herman George. The city's African American weekly reported that a crowd of some 200 to 250 bottle throwing young people gathered and taunted officer George while other groups roamed the area shouting anti-white slogans such as "kill whitey" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1966, Near Riot in Fillmore). Making an ominous forecast, Larry Scott, who was arrested for taking part in the incident, noted, "Our brothers in Hunters Point, Daly City, the Bayview and the Fillmore know that was just a warm-up too. You know what happened in Watts and Chicago, man? Well



*Figure 5.1* Bill Bradley, Rev. T. R. Provost and Pug Kilpatric (left to right) announce racial agreement on food stores, 1963. The equal job opportunities agreement was pledged on behalf of 317 San Francisco food stores. The agreement was announced jointly by the West Bay Association of Food Industries, Inc., CORE and the Baptists Ministers Union. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

that's gonna happen here too. We can get guns . . . ” (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, Fillmore’s ‘Warm-Up’). Scott’s friend, Leon Beck, explained that his participation in the incident resulted from an all too common frustration—that of not being able to find employment in the City. Beck noted, “I’m a

high school graduate. I'm willing to work at anything, but I can't find a job because there are no jobs for 'niggers'" (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, Fillmore's 'Warm-Up').

If Beck's goal of attaining employment and his frustration with not being able to find a job was both understandable and concrete, Scott's goal was equally clear but less productive. When asked what he wanted, Scott replied, "Power. That's the only thing whitey understands. Power. And violence. Whitey will see that too. All over his streets (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, Fillmore's 'Warm-Up'). Scott's prediction that violence would come to the streets of San Francisco rang true in the following year. On November 13, 1967, officer Herman George was critically injured when a gunman opened fire on him and his two co-workers at the Hunters Point Housing Authority police station. While his fellow officers survived, George, who had shot and killed a robbery suspect the previous year, died from his injuries on December 16. Homicide Inspector William Armstrong noted that the shooting may have been carried out by the Black Panthers in retaliation for the shooting of Huey Newton two weeks prior in Oakland (*Sun-Reporter*; 1967, Negro Police Officers Threatened).

However, even before officer George's shooting the atmosphere between the African American community and police in San Francisco was racially charged. This is primarily because relations between the two groups were already strained when, on September 27, 1966, a white police officer, Alvin Johnson, stopped two African American teens driving what he suspected was a stolen car in the predominately African American district of Hunters Point. When the teens split up and fled the scene, officer Johnson chased 16-year-old Matthew Johnson across an empty lot and, after the teen reportedly ignored a command to stop, the officer shot and killed the boy. Shortly thereafter an angry crowd of residents gathered and demanded to meet with Mayor John Shelley. However, once Shelley arrived at the Bayview Neighborhood Center, the crowd had grown in size and discontent and the mayor was forced to retreat as bricks and a firebomb were thrown at him and the police. Despite that attack, the mayor made an effort to keep the incident under control by advising the police not to make a show of force and to refrain from using police dogs or tear gas (*Sun-Reporter*; 1966, Violence Hits the Streets).

In what would be a continuing trend over the next decades, during the initial stages of the riot, politically moderate middle class leaders of the African American community—among them Orville Luster, Willie Brown, Terry Francois and Thomas N. Burbridge—were completely ineffective in assuaging the anger of the mostly lower income and younger residents of Hunters Point. The City's white leadership proved no better at placating the area's residents and when the Mayor attempted to address them he was shouted down (*Sun-Reporter*; 1966, Violence Hits the Streets). City officials and a presidential task force blamed the riots on unemployment among African American youth but failed to note that inadequate housing

conditions and too few recreational outlets in the area also played a significant role (Miller; 2006, San Francisco Race Riot of 1966). Attempting to ease a tense situation, three days after the shooting Mayor Shelley went public with a message stating,

Specifically, members of our community who are Negroes are the victims of an almost unendurable frustration. Some are consumed with almost uncontrollable fury because of the fact that they do not have the same economic and social opportunities that are taken for granted by their fellow citizens.

He continued, “Nevertheless, the fact still remains that, here in San Francisco, discrimination against the Negro and other minorities still persists, and it is a cancer in our city’s economic life” (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, The Mayor’s Message).

Over the course of the riot 146 arrests were made and 42 African Americans were injured, ten from gunshot wounds. In contrast to the 1965 Watts riot in Los Angeles, the Hunters Point riot saw little violence or looting and the property damage in the area, primarily directed at white and Chinese businesses, totaled around \$100,000 (Miller; 2006, San Francisco Race Riot of 1966). Also, after investigating the case, a nine-member coroner’s jury, a jury that included only one African American member, that the shooting was an “excusable homicide” (*Spokesman*; 1966, Cop Goes Free).

With the 1966 Hunters Point riot etched clearly in their minds, in 1967 the local branch of the NAACP released its plan for a “cool summer in SF.” The plan astutely noted that finding summertime work for minority youth could be the most urgent need to quell disorder in the city (NAACP WCRF, carton 26). Just how effective the NAACP’s plan was is unclear but, according to a *Spokesman* article the following year, the long-term results were not glowing. For example, in an interview with Sam Jordan, a longtime resident of the Bayview-Hunters Point neighborhood, the article notes that “He [Jordan] observed that the large number of youth were without work or any recreation, and generally becoming discouraged, even to the point of ‘taking hate out on each other’. And under the circumstances of nobody caring for them they are falling into trouble; getting a rough time from everybody; and some even committing senseless vandalism” (*Spokesman*; 1968, Frustration In Community Service).

Two years after Johnson’s shooting in Hunters Point, in a report titled “San Francisco, A City in Crisis,” city Supervisor Terry Francois warned that “Relationships between police and other minorities are going downhill in spite of efforts to improve the situation.” The report further indicated that according to a Lemberg Center study, nearly half of the African American men in San Francisco between the ages of 18 and 65 viewed police brutality as a major cause of community disorder (San Francisco, A City in Crisis, 1968). In an effort to make headway in resolving the issue,

the Reverend Cecil Williams held a Citizens Alert meeting to discuss police brutality at Glide Memorial Church. Among the incidents discussed was one where the police pulled over an African American cab driver for speeding but ended up arresting him for assaulting an officer, resisting arrest and driving illegally. One newspaper reported that in route to the station the police called the driver “Little Black Jungle Boy” and one officer, badge number 1579, said that he was “out to kill a Little Black Jungle Boy” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Citizens Alert Discuss Police). To help prevent cases such as this, Charles Clay, a member of the Hospitality House, noted that he and other members would shadow the police and find out the details of incidents involving police brutality. They would then go directly to the Police Commissioners’ office and talk with Mr. Donna or Mr. Farri instead of filing a complaint with the police department where they felt the complaint would be thrown away after a few days (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Citizens Alert Discuss Police).

Adding to the chorus of discontent, in October of 1968 officials of the local NAACP announced that they were extremely dissatisfied with the SFPD and Chief Thomas Cahill’s performance and demanded an eleven-point reform program. Clifton Jeffers, president of the Ingleside NAACP branch noted,

We think that law enforcement in San Francisco has reached crisis proportions necessitating the immediate implementation of innovative changes. The events of the past several months have created a total lack of confidence in Chief Cahill and his ability to operate the police department effectively in dealing with the grave conditions citizens of San Francisco face. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, NAACP Assails Police)

Jeffers was not alone in his assessment of the SFPD. After ten years in law enforcement, officer Robert Jefferies resigned from the police department claiming that “it was so riddled with white supremacy that black citizens cannot ever hope to be treated as anything but subhumans, and a black police officer has slight chances of ever being anything more than just a patrolman” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, SF Cop Quits).

Officer Jefferies’ inside assessment was reiterated the following year when the recently formed “Officers For Justice (OFJ),” a group of African American officers banded together to fight racism in the SFPD, released a statement to the Police Commission claiming that racism was a pervasive problem within the department. Noting a recent incident where a white officer made derogatory racial remarks to Jesse Byrd, an African American motorcycle officer, OFJ president Sergeant Henry Williams stated, “What we have here is not just the act of one officer against another member of this department, but rather a good example of white leadership.” Williams continued,

Captains, lieutenants and sergeants have refused to stick their necks out. If there is to be harmony in this department there must be some signs from the leadership that the old ways of callous indifference are over, that, in truth, the black officers will not be made to suffer the racial slurs in silence, but rather be accepted as an equal by all. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, SF Police Charged)

Not only was leadership lacking when it came to internal issues in the San Francisco Police Department, but external affairs also hit a nadir when, at the close of the decade, police shot and killed three African American men. First, late in 1968 the police shot and killed George Baskett, a truck driver. The following year an all-white jury found officer Michael O'Brien not guilty of voluntary manslaughter in Baskett's killing. Adding insult to injury, the *Sun-Reporter* indicated that before court was even dismissed, defense attorney Jake Ehrlich, who represented the Police Officers Association, invited people to join him for a celebratory drink at the bar across the street from the Hall of Justice. In the same article Clifton Jeffers, now head of the SF-NAACP, commented that "The result does not do anything to inspire and build confidence in our criminal justice. It clearly indicates the extent to which racial bigotry is in our system of justice" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Black Community Enraged). O'Brien was subsequently fired in May of 1969 for failing to exercise proper judgment the day of the shooting (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Baskett's Killer O'Brien).

Next, in April of 1969, rookie patrolman Gerald Roberts shot and killed 19-year-old Albert Linthcome on Third Street in the Bayview district. Linthcome was a suspect in a grocery store owner's murder and was attempting to escape questioning in the case when he was shot (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, 19-Year-Old Hunters Point Youth Slain). After hearing from 17 people, an eleven-member coroner's jury that included only one African American member unanimously declared the shooting a justifiable homicide (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Coroner Clears Cop). In contrast, outraged citizens held an informal "Black Inquest" as an alternative to the official coroner's inquest and found officer Roberts guilty of murder (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Black Inquest Convicts Cops).

Finally, on November 6, 1969 an off-duty police officer shot and killed Charles Brumfield when he attempted to cash a bad check at a Geary Street branch of the Bank of America. Brumfield, who was unarmed, left the branch after bank officials delayed cashing the check. However, the officer, who was working as a teller at the bank, followed the suspect out of the bank and warned him to stop. When Brumfield failed to stop the off-duty officer shot him in the back of the head. After the shooting James Tremaine, an eyewitness to the event, attempted to file an official complaint. In his letter to police chief Thomas Cahill, Tremaine stated that "The following day I reported my observations to the Homicide Division and then attempted to make an official citizen's complaint, both through your [Chief Cahill's]

office and through the Complaints, Investigation and Welfare Office. No one would accept such a complaint.” He further suggested that the officer who killed Brumfield “should be tried for murder, as should anyone who deliberately kills a man without just cause” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Uproar Over Killing).

Although the Western Addition was the center of the African American community and home to most of the Black owned businesses and entertainment spots, Hunters Point was another district in the city that was home to a significant African American community. More residential in character than the Fillmore, Hunters Point had been virtually ignored by most of the city following the close of the war. Once a multicultural district filled with blue collar working families, without the war industry to fuel economic stability Hunters Point deteriorated. By the late 1960s the once new but temporary housing had become permanent slums, unemployment was out of control, police/community relations were abysmal and poverty abounded. Furthermore, although historian Albert Broussard (1993) indicates that in 1945, Hunters Point was one of the most thoroughly integrated districts in the city, by the 1960s it had become rigidly segregated (175). According to 1960 census figures, African Americans living in the Hunters Point and Bayview neighborhoods comprised 65% of the total population of 21,931, over 12% of the unemployed, earned \$2,000 less per year than the average city resident and had a median education level of 9 years (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, What Is There Left). In addition, although not geographically a large part of the City the Hunters Point and Bayview districts comprised 19% of all the city’s welfare recipients in 1963 (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, What Is There Left b).

As bad as conditions were in Hunters Point, little was done to devise solutions despite the fact that city officials were well aware of the problems that area residents faced. For example, in a letter to the Redevelopment Agency’s Executive Director Justin Herman, the Housing Authority’s Executive Director Eneas Kane details the nexus between employment and housing writing,

Dear Justin:

As Newark and Detroit make so abundantly clear, ghetto frustrations are exploding ever more disastrously, and one of the reasons may be exaggerated expectations on the part of low-income families. The job and housing opportunities they believed were theirs have, on considerable measure, evaporated in the summer heat. Programs for helping them have languished in Congress or been enfeebled by lack of funds.

Are you aware of the necessity of speaking not in hopeful abstractions about the very real and urgent aspirations of low-income families, but rather of speaking in firm and concrete terms about the probabilities of realizing those aspirations?

Huge hopes are now developing in the Hunters Point area over the new housing that redevelopment will make available in the next several years. Eager anticipation easily elaborates any nebulous generalization about the future of the area, and is the heady current in meetings of tenant organizations. There is talk of “the right” of all tenants in the so-called Center Core war housing to move into the redevelopment housing. There is mention of “certificates” and “guarantees” affirming this right.

If, in all this talk, there are possible areas of misunderstanding or of exaggeration or of error, they should be cleared away now and not be allowed to grow and lay hold of the imaginations of the hundreds of families looking ahead so eagerly to redevelopment at Hunters Point. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 24)

Twenty years had made for stark change in Hunters Point. Describing the immediate postwar climate, Broussard (1993) notes, “Hunter’s Point developed into one of the most progressive examples of San Francisco’s wartime housing” (176). However, a newspaper reporter writing in 1963 painted a far different picture stating, “There is a terrible bleakness about the place. Hardly any green grass, few lawns, few trees [sic]. There is only the gray monotony of the barracks-like buildings stacked like a row of crates on the wind-whipped hillside” (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Exclusive: Life In S.F. Ghetto). In his graduate thesis, Carmichael (1968) notes that the dividing line between Hunters Point and Bayview—two areas often examined together in reports and articles—was the Third Street thoroughfare. Describing this main drag he states, “Lining Third Street are grocery, drug, liquor, hardware, and jewelry stores, family-operated stores, cleaners, barbershops, eateries, night spots, churches, banks, and real estate offices.” But, unlike in the Fillmore district, he indicates that “Few of the business concerns of the area are owned or operated by Negroes or residents of the area. There are a number of established Chinese, Jewish, and Italian concerns operating on and off of the main thoroughfare” (42). Furthermore, once in Hunters Point proper, Carmichael (1968) points out that “There are no public telephones, letter baskets, sheltered bus stops, barbershops, night clubs, or eateries” (41).

In a particularly grim assessment of the area at the close of the decade, L. P. Lewis, Director of the Model Neighborhood Agency, assessed several of the area’s problems. Highlighting a crisis in police community relations, Lewis states that

A large majority of the Model Neighborhood’s black population, especially the youth, express a strong dislike toward all police activity. This feeling is reflected in the general attitude that law enforcement is more *of* the black community instead of a service *for* it. Such a negative



community attitude creates a feeling of fear and mistrust on the part of the police. A deadly pattern evolves: as the two remain isolated from one another and have no meaningful way to deal with each other on a personal basis, hostile misconceptions become the rule. (Joseph Alioto Papers; box 10, Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency, emphasis original)

Lewis concludes that, as a result of police harassment and unfounded charges made against area residents, “residents consider police as oppressors and policemen see blacks in general as their enemy.”

Next, under the heading “Housing and Physical Environment,” Lewis writes,

Lack of care in the utilization of separation of these different land uses has made environmental blight one of the major hazards to the financial and physical health of the area’s housing. High property taxes, absentee ownership, and tight money, on the other hand, are making it increasingly difficult to prevent physical deterioration of much of the area’s housing supply. Lack of sufficient amenities such as recreational facilities, adequate commercial facilities, and greenery, further make the area a less than adequate place to live. (Joseph Alioto Papers; box 10, Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency)

Interestingly, two years before Lewis’ assessment of the area Frank Sawyer, a manager at the San Francisco Housing Authority’s Hunters Point war housing site, pledged to clean the area up. In a letter dated April 4, 1967 Sawyer wrote:

*Dear Tenant:*

*A half million dollar face lifting for the “Center Core.” . . .*

*This half million dollars will be used for essential cleanup and fix-up. Priorities include:*

- \* Replacement of worn showers and sinks.*
- \* Painting inside and out.*
- \* Structural repairs.*
- \* Grounds rehabilitation, including improvement of walks, handrails and retaining walls. All meet needs tenants themselves have expressed.*

*Together, they will make the war buildings livable and presentable for the next several years until Redevelopment replaces them with modern, attractive housing. (John Shelley Papers; box 5, folder 4, italics original)*

Apparently the Housing Authority, the agency that owned the Hunters Point war housing, never kept its promise to improve the facilities. In fact, after living in the area for seven months while doing research in the area, urban anthropologist Neil Eddington, Ph.D., levied this harsh criticism: “The elected officials in San Francisco and the so-called ‘concerned philanthropists’ maintain the plantation at Hunters Point,” and further challenged Mortimer Fleishhacker, chairman of the San Francisco Committee on Youth, or Mayor Shelley to walk in the neighborhood after dark or spend the night in the district (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, A Plantation in S.F.). He declared that in the mid-1950s the African American population of the district was 43% but, as a result of Western Addition residents relocating to the area because of the A-1 and A-2 redevelopment projects, Hunters Point had become 96% African American. While studying the area Eddington lived in Hunters Point for seven months and his research revealed substandard housing, few recreation programs, no clothing stores for women, no service stations and not a single doctor’s office. He also indicated that “The reputation of the place is so bad that even the low-caste job market is closed to some Negroes when they give an address in Hunters Point,” and that even African Americans from the Western Addition looked down on the residents of the district. Eddington concluded, “I believe there’s a conscious plan to create a plantation system. People don’t want these Negroes in San Francisco. They don’t want to give them a choice of where to live. (*SF Chronicle*; 1966, A Plantation in S.F.)

Pessimistic and negative reports about the area were repeated like a bad mantra. Researchers including Renee Goldsmith, Benjamin Carmichael and Arthur Hippler indicated that by the 1960s Hunters Point had developed a revolving cycle of poverty that first emerged shortly after the close of World War II and which had solidified by the 1960s. Goldsmith’s (1967) master’s thesis states,

Most of the Hunters Point residents were forced to live a hand to mouth existence by virtue of being entrapped in a history of a lack of education, lack of employment, disappointments and frustrations. Many children growing up in Hunters Point never leave the projects. They marry there and continue to live in the manner of their parents. We thus see a generational dimension to the poverty cycle emerging. (27)

Goldsmith (1967) further describes just how pervasive the tedium and hopelessness that blanketed the area were on the district’s youth when she writes,

In Hunters Point there can be found a large group of people who are suffering from what can be called ‘social monotony.’ This can be partially attributed to a lack of community, recreation facilities, money, space, employment and a host of other variables. Most kids would rather hang

out on the corner with their friends, shooting the bull, drinking beer and jiving than work for a low unattractive salary. (65–66)

It was also obvious that many residents of Bayview and Hunters Point were frustrated that so many people came to view them only as subjects in a social experiment. As one local pointed out, “We’ve been surveyed to death by all these outsiders. After they’re finished with us they go away with their surveys, books and degrees and we stay on livin’ in this place with nothin’ to look forward to” (Goldsmith; 1967, 23).

As bleak as Hunters Point of the 1960s seemed, there were encouraging signs. The Youth Opportunities Center (YOC), set up in 1960 under the direction of Dr. Lewis Watts and Herman Gallegos, provided an outlet to help youth between the ages of 15 and 21 get job training and find employment (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, What Is There Left). Lee Soto, a *Sun-Reporter* journalist who covered the Hunters Point and Bayview districts noted, “Right along with training the young unemployed people in the Hunters Point–Bayview area became employable, expending efforts to juvenile delinquency, the YOC has a goal of helping these young adults become motivated to meet the challenges of today’s world (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Operation Bootstrap Practiced). In addition, an education counselor at the YOC who the *SF Chronicle* identifies only as Mrs. Cole, taught a workshop for youth who were unable to qualify for the job training programs due to insufficient educational attainment. Explaining her success with students who had not done well in school she said, “You see, they weren’t against education. They were just against schools. So I made the atmosphere as unlike school as possible—more of a home atmosphere—and they have done very well.” The article states that by the end of the first six week workshop 18 of her 20 students were in job training or had secured jobs, prompting Mrs. Cole to note, “the youngsters are generally bright. Some of them picked up a year of reading in the six weeks. Most of all what they need is to get rid of the ghetto mentality” (*SF Chronicle*; 1965, Tact Unlimited). It was no wonder then that Tom Harris, director of the Hunters Point Boys’ Club, indicated that the attitudes of the young people in the area were improving, changing from “What the hell’s the use of trying, we’ve got the name of being bad,” to “jobs are opening up . . . we’re getting a chance” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Operation Bootstrap Practiced).

In addition to the YOC and the Boys’ Club, smaller youth-led clubs were formed in order to mentor kids and allow them to encourage each other to strive toward their goals. For example, a group of well-respected Hunters Point men between 22 and 27 calling themselves the Elegant Gents worked, “to encourage the young men there to raise their horizons and upgrade themselves,” while volunteer teaching in areas such as boxing, music and art (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Operation Bootstrap Practiced). In the same vein, the Viscounts was a group of ten young graduates of Mission High School who met weekly to help the youth of Bayview and Hunters Point.

According to Viscounts president Henry Wheray, “We were formed to set a good example for the kids coming up. We chaperon the smaller boys whenever they take a trip to some other place under the Boys Club program; we help at the dances given here; we sponsor dances and the proceeds go to the Boys Club, we help anyway we can” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Young Men Start Service Club). Ben Carmichael, a member of the Hunters Point Boys club, noted that the hardened attitude of the youth in the area was, at least in part, a front when he said, “These young people aren’t as tough as the papers have made them out to be. They have been given a reputation and they feel they should live up to it (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Operation Bootstrap Practiced).

Such self-help organizations were not limited to Hunters Point however. For example, at the end of the decade a club comprised of 25 girls ages 14 to 17 opened in the Western Addition that was similar to the all-male clubs in Hunters Point. Called the Beautiful Black Sisters, some of the club’s objectives were: “to involve young, black sisters in social and educational activities, to aid in helping young people find employment, to aid in bridging the generation gap, and to strive in promoting pride, dignity and a sense of identity as beautiful, black sisters (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Beautiful Black Sisters).

Another area that continued to pose problems for many African American San Franciscans in the later half of the 1960s was employment. According to one study conducted by the National Industrial Conference Board (NICB), among the employment obstacles faced by African Americans were white workers who resisted equal opportunity programs, a shortage of African American workers with the necessary education or skills for open jobs, the disbelief among African Americans that companies really want to hire them, and the added cost of recruiting and training African American employees (*SF Examiner & Chronicle*; 1966, Obstacles to Job Equality). It was certainly true that, as the NICB study concluded, many of San Francisco’s Black residents assumed companies would refrain from hiring them. Or more simply put, as George Crippen, an African American job placement officer at City College plainly stated, “No minority person feels he is not going to be discriminated against” (*SF Chronicle*; 1969, Jobs and Black Students). However, many employers were more comfortable highlighting a problem other than direct employer bias. For example, the vice president of personnel at Bank of America stated, “We are genuinely an equal opportunity employer—but it sure takes a lot of effort to seek out qualified Negroes. This is the problem” (*SF Examiner & Chronicle*; 1966, Obstacles to Job Equality). Similarly, the personnel manager at Foremost Dairies, Inc., headquartered in San Francisco, noted that “Unfortunately, not many qualified Negroes have been turned up,” this despite their collaborative efforts to find prospective employees with the help of the Urban League, ministerial groups, local unions, employee referrals and the State Department of Employment (*SF Examiner & Chronicle*; 1966, Obstacles to Job Equality).

An end of the decade report specifically addressing the African American population of Hunters Point also evidenced that a lack of appropriate skills and training were problematic when it noted,

Very few employment opportunities exist for the many untrained and otherwise inadequately prepared young people in Bayview-Hunters Point. Discrimination and competition prevent them from obtaining the diminishing number of unskilled jobs available in San Francisco (see Employment Section). Until the poverty program began several years ago there were no employment alternatives. The poverty program and other government-sponsored activities have tried to involve these young people both on their staffs and as participants in their training programs.

Unfortunately, however well intentioned, these programs have only been a stopgap and consequently have never really come to grips with the real needs of training and career development. The dead-end nature of most of these jobs created for young people have been more harmful to them than helpful. Instead of learning something which could be applied elsewhere, most of these jobs have built-in immobility. (Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency, Joseph Alioto Papers)

Such a conclusion must have been exasperating for San Francisco City College job placement director Joe Amori. Amori indicated that of the college's 10,000 students, 1,500 were African American but only four of those 1,500 showed up at the 14th Annual Recruitment Day to meet job recruiters. He also indicated that City College offered 42 different two-year courses free of charge but that few African American students took the classes. Frustrated over the lack of African American participation in programs that could potentially help them obtain job skills or find employment, Amori lamented, "All it takes is a two-year investment of time—354 lousy [school] days of study—and they've got it. But they're just not taking the courses . . . they're just not doing it" (*SF Chronicle*; 1969, Jobs and Black Students).

In some instances, working for a particular employer was nearly as much of a problem as being unemployed. One group of employees at the Emporium, an up-scale department store located downtown, complained of "plantation-type racist tactics" on the part of the union and management and called for a boycott of the store. A spokesman for the group, Tom Hawkins, explained, "I've worked for the Emporium for two years and I've never been treated with respect. Even when I was in a managerial position I was harassed." He then noted, "We can't see buying in a store where the black employees and other non-white workers are insulted, degraded and denied a chance for advancement that white employees get" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Racism at The Emporium). Shortly thereafter, Hawkins and fellow

employee Jim Hollins were fired for distributing leaflets on their days off in front of the store that accused the Emporium of racial discrimination and asking shoppers to boycott it. In response, the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO), known for its organized opposition against redevelopment, filed an unfair labor practice charge with the National Labor Relations Board on behalf of Hawkins and Hollins (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, WACO Files Racism Charges).

Further contributing to employment difficulties was that San Francisco was losing blue-collar jobs to smaller neighboring cities, jobs that unskilled and semi-skilled African American workers often held. These suburban enclaves were characterized by racist housing practices that kept African American families from moving to the areas where the jobs had gone. The National Committee Against Racial Discrimination reported that minorities, “increasingly are contained in circumscribed areas of central cities; employment opportunities increasingly are locating in outlying sections and suburban communities where Negroes are denied access to living accommodations.” The Committee further stated that from 1962 to 1965 only about 1,000 blue-collar jobs opened in San Francisco; during the same period 24,000 opened in nearby Bay Area cities (*SF Chronicle*; 1968, Housing Discrimination And S.F. Negro). While commuting to jobs outside the city was possible for some, it was typically not a viable option for most people because many plants were not accessible by public transportation and in cases where they were, it would take too long and cost too much for would-be commuters (*SF Chronicle*; 1968, Housing Discrimination And S.F. Negro).

As blue collar jobs moved out of the City prospects for employment grew increasingly dim. The San Francisco Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns addressed the situation noting,

In San Francisco certain unique problems exist. As has been described, blue collar workers, both skilled and unskilled, are less in demand in a more and more service and finance oriented city. So, vacancies are infrequent for skilled blue collar workers. There are fewer of these—and fewer unskilled jobs—in San Francisco every month. This leaves many minority group skilled workers, historically excluded in this tight union city, out in the cold. (San Francisco, *A City in Crisis*, 1968)

The NAACP was also aware that, even in cases where job vacancies existed in blue collar work, African Americans were still at a disadvantage because of discrimination by the unions. In its 1966 West Coast Region Annual Report, the organization indicated that even though the Board of Supervisors unanimously endorsed equal employment opportunities legislation that stipulated all firms doing business with the city, their contractors, subcontractors, suppliers and unions open their union membership to minorities and observe anti-discrimination practices as proposed by the city’s Human Rights Commission, “the ILWU, Teamsters, SF Labor Council

and the Building Trades Council strongly opposed the measure” (NAACP WCRF, carton 26).

By the end of the 1960s the NAACP was fed up with union racism and called for a “Black Monday” demonstration at the steps of the Federal Building in San Francisco to protest discrimination in the building trades unions. Before a crowd of 200 demonstrators, the NAACP demanded that the federal government take actions against discriminatory unions involved in government-financed construction. Indicating that African American contractors should be hired whenever possible to do the construction in predominately African American communities, Hunters Point NAACP branch president Tom Neal stated that “If we don’t do the work of redeveloping our own neighborhoods, then nobody is going to do it” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Black Monday Protest). About the same time, Rip Ridley and Cecil Williams along with other African American community leaders held a press conference to announce that they had met with the San Francisco Labor Council in an effort to get the unions to hire more minority workers but that the Council had made no effort to find a solution to the problem. Ridley, director of the Western Addition EOC office, indicated that only the Longshoreman’s Union and the Laborers’ Local 261 hired minority workers on a regular and fair basis while the 7,000 member strong Bay Area Teamsters Local had only 46 African American workers (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, Black Leaders Blast).

Gerald Johnson, who ran his own landscaping business from 1963–1969, presents an nuanced picture of the employment market of the 1960s in San Francisco. When asked whether he ever ran up against any overt discrimination he replied,

You know, the kind of business that I was in, I got quite a bit of contracts in landscaping. I didn’t notice any overt racism about it. And of course, you don’t usually in that kind of situation. It may be there, but I did well with it and with the landscaping, I got a lot of contracts. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

However, he also noted that “Yea, most of the crafts and the trades was segregated. So I guess the field that was really open was business,” and concluded that “It probably was the market I got into that made the difference. It was less of any racial barriers” (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005).

Issues surrounding racial discrimination and equal rights persisted late into the decade and, on occasion, the struggle against these problems gave way to path breaking achievements. One example occurred when, in the Fall of 1968, San Francisco State College fired an African American graduate student and English instructor, George Murray. Murray, also the Minister of Education in the San Francisco Black Panther Party, allegedly advised African American students to bring guns to campus to protect themselves from racist white administrators. In a response to Murray’s firing, a group

of students led largely by members of the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front came up with a list of 15 demands and went on strike. The students boycotted classes, held protest rallies and disrupted campus business to the point where the college had to be shut down. Further conflict brought about College President Robert Smith's resignation, the second resignation of the college's president in just six months [John Summerskill had resigned over racial tensions on campus in 1967.] (Whitson; The San Francisco State College Strike Collection).

The strike was supported by a large segment of the city's more liberal population including: the Church for the Fellowship of All People, a group of African American police officers called the Officers for Justice, and the *Sun-Reporter* newspaper. The *Sun-Reporter's* owner, Dr. Carlton Goodlett was himself arrested on the college campus after leading a 3,000 strong student march in support of the BSU and student strike (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Dr. Goodlett Release). Goodlett was not the only one to take an active role in favor of the students. The Officers for Justice made the following statement in support of the striking college students:

That the Officers for Justice—

1. Endorse, support and approve the fifteen demands of the Black Student Union and the Third World Liberation Front of San Francisco State College.
2. Deplore the tactics being used by white policemen against students . . . and the carnival spirit and glee of police and sheriff departments within a 100 miles of San Francisco who now beg to have their policemen permitted to get "riot training" experience on the heads of San Francisco State College students. Officers for Justice ask that the practice of bringing in outside policemen be ended.
3. Condemn the order of the San Francisco Police Department which bans all black policemen from San Francisco State College Campus who are not in uniform.

(*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Black Policemen Speak Out)

After Robert Smith's failed attempt to lead the college to a peaceful resolution, S. I. Hayakawa was named acting President. Hayakawa was intolerant of dissent and was an authoritarian administrator who was perfectly willing to call on police to break up demonstrations no matter how much it inflamed the students, faculty and community. In one meeting with African American community leaders at the *Sun-Reporter* building, Hayakawa noted that the next time the school had to close because of protests it would be closed for a long time and later walked out of the meeting (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Hayakawa Rebuffs Community). When he was interviewed at the local public television station the following week, Hayakawa referred to the Black Student Union and Third World Liberation Front as his "enemies" and accused



two reporters of hostile and incorrect reporting before walking out yet again (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Hayakawa Stages Another Walkout). Writing for the *Sun-Reporter*, Reginald Major, one of the few African American administrators at the college, noted that “Hayakawa not only manipulates the war on campus, he has brought it down to the black community. One must understand that Hayakawa is afraid of black people and had to be reassured several times that a visit to the Sun-Reporter building would not result in his being beaten up.” Major went on to assert that at this meeting Hayakawa told the group of community leaders, attorneys, ministers and public officials that they were irrational, too emotional and incapable of conducting reasonable conversations (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Uncle Sam Hayakawa). In what seems like a customary closing for the president, Hayakawa dashed away from the meeting but not before admonishing, “You must stop the terrorism on campus, must sever all ties with white radical SDS, and must go back to classes. If you do that, I will use my leverage with them (the majority community) in order to help your cause” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, Uncle Sam Hayakawa).

If there was any kind of ambiguity surrounding the strike Scooter Akins attempted to clear up when he stated, “The fight to end racism and the acceptance of the 15 demands involves three principles—relevant education, historical truth and the right to determine our own educational destinies” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, A Message to the Black). After months of turmoil, on March 20, 1969 members of the Third World Liberation Front, the Black Students Union and members of a Select Committee on resolution of the 15 demands signed a joint agreement that ended the strike. Among the settlement agreements was the formation of the first Black Studies Department in the nation, the allocation of 12 positions to this new department, the hiring of an African American administrator to the Financial Aid Office and the admission of hundreds of qualified nonwhite students (Whitson; The San Francisco State College Strike Collection). [See <http://www.library.sfsu.edu/about/collections/strike/essay.html> to view the 15 strike demands, the “Settlement of the Demands of the Black Student Union” and the “Settlement of the Demands of the Third World Liberation Front”]

Even though the strike had resulted in some concrete advances, just months after its conclusion four African American administrators quit, citing an inability to work with President Hayakawa. Reporter Rufus Byars wrote that, “They charged S. I. Hayakawa for being the most effective instrument of bigotry at the college. That he, being unsympathetic to the black plight on campus, was in fact crippling the educational needs of non-white students” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, 4 Black Administrators). Indicating that Hayakawa was delaying the development of the school’s Ethnic Studies Programs and preparing to dismantle the Educational Opportunity Program (EOP), Reginald Major, Elmer Cooper, Ed Reavis and Joseph White noted in a press release that “We are expected to go along with every administrative decision even if that decision adversely affects the educational lives of non-white students.” Their conclusion was this straight-forward statement:

We, as black human beings, cannot allow ourselves to be seduced by the system no matter how pleasurable it promises to be. There is no way we can remain at San Francisco State College and maintain our respect for ourselves and our usefulness to the educational aspirations of non-white people. We refuse to condone racism in education. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, 4 Black Administrators)

The strike at San Francisco State was just one very poignant indicator of racial discrimination in the city and the struggle against such inequality. As the Chairman of the San Francisco State College Academic Senate, Walcott Beatty noted, “The campus is a microcosm of society” (Whitson; The San Francisco State College Strike Collection). In the case of the strike, resolution would take five months and, in the end, those who engaged the struggle achieved some concrete gains. In the larger society by contrast, the struggle for fair housing in San Francisco was an epic battle with little hope of a quick resolution and, during the 1960s, it resulted in very few tangible gains.

## 6 Housing in the 1960s

Even before World War II reached a conclusion, San Francisco city planners and politicians were thinking about urban renewal, a process that would sweep through most of the nation's larger cities during the 1950s and 1960s. Mollenkopf (1983) notes, "To mayors, developers, downtown businessmen, the construction trades, and urban planners, urban renewal became an increasingly popular rallying cry" (77). Also called redevelopment, urban renewal was supposed to refurbish and revitalize areas of a city that had decayed and were turning into urban slums. However, more often than not politicians and planners made sure that "urban renewal would spur downtown development rather than neighborhood rehabilitation" (Mollenkopf; 1983, 137). This was the case with one of the first areas slotted for renewal in the City, the predominately African American community called the Western Addition.

Like most redevelopment agencies, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) labeled target areas "blighted districts" to justify tearing them down. Indeed, "blight" had become a keyword in urban renewal and an agency, simply by labeling an area blighted, could spell its demise. However, in the case of the Western Addition, also called the Fillmore after its major north-south artery, the African American community saw the district as much more than an urban slum. As historian Albert Broussard notes, "There was a tremendous sense of pride in this community where most of the Black businesses, where most of the Black professionals lived and operated. I mean, this was their community" (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

Emboldened by the Housing Act of 1949, housing authorities in large cities such as Boston, New York and San Francisco were encouraged to demolish and rebuild blighted areas using the power of eminent domain and land cost and land clearance subsidies (Hartman; 2002, 8). To accomplish renewal, cities formed redevelopment agencies to furnish central direction and guidelines and provide the financial incentives to guarantee investment by private developers (Hartman; 2002, 15). In this way, San Francisco was no different from other big cities. Corporate interests pushed hard for renewal and, although most concrete action such as demolition and rebuilding would be delayed until the 1960s, the politicians and

businessmen eventually got what they wanted; that is, San Francisco was transformed into the premier administrative, service and financial center of the West Coast (Mollenkopf; 1983, 140).

Although the federal-local urban renewal program was not introduced by Congress until the late 1940s, San Francisco got a jump start on the process when, in 1945, the City Planning Commission produced the report *The Master Plan of San Francisco: The Redevelopment of Blighted Areas*. Anticipating the exodus of skilled workers, the report indicates, "The steady, progressive execution of redevelopment plans in slums and areas of severe blight will enable San Francisco once again to attract and house workers who have left the city for more favorable living elsewhere." It concludes, "The economic and social returns from redevelopment will far exceed its public cost, for the new structures will be clean, safe, healthful, and attractive, and the new neighborhoods will have qualities unknown in the present blighted districts" (*The Master Plan of SF*; 1945, 5).

Indicating the importance of San Francisco in relationship to the Bay Area as a region, fist City Planning study stated, "San Francisco is to the Bay Region what the Island of Manhattan is to the New York Region." The study then emphasized the need for the Western Addition to be cleared out and cleaned up when it noted,

It is close to the financial district . . . and contains slopes on which apartments with fine views can be erected. In view of the characteristically low incomes of colored and foreign-born families, only a relatively small proportion of them may be expected to be in a position to occupy quarters in the new development. (Mollenkopf; 1983, 160)

Clearly, renewal proponents knew that if the city was to maintain its position as a West Coast Manhattan, not only would it need to build up in the financial district, it would need to build out in order to comfortably house the professionals who would be working downtown. Equally clear was that those professionals would not come from the neighborhoods that redevelopment demolished.

It was no coincidence then, when *The Master Plan* identified the Western Addition, the area with the largest concentration of African American residents, as a primary area of interest of urban renewal. The report notes that

The largest single area of blight in San Francisco is the Western Addition, embracing parts of Hayes Valley and the sections known as Japtown. Here are opportunities for the creation of new properties which would give clean, modern housing to hundreds of families. The economic and social values to be achieved through the redevelopment of this section of the City are almost unlimited. (*Master Plan of SF*; 1945, 19)

Further, the report was non-too-subtle about what kinds of people likely did not embody those social values noting, “The blighted districts obviously attract under-privileged families and people seeking low-cost housing” (*Master Plan of SF*; 1945, 8).

The portrait of the Western Addition laid out by *The Master Plan* was in stark contrast to how Willie Brown, the City’s first African American Mayor, would describe the area. Looking back, Brown recalls that

It was a black community from about Bush to Fulton Street on Fillmore. There were many black barbershops. There were barbecue pits all over the place. There were stores that were as interesting and important as the ones in Union Square except they carried goods that primarily blacks would purchase and use.

He continues, “You had places where black people gathered no matter where they resided in San Francisco. That was what Fillmore Street was like in those days” (Fillmore Stories; Willie L. Brown, Jr., [www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/](http://www.pbs.org/kqed/fillmore/)). However, in the eyes of developers, the very existence of this bustling African American community may have been the problem. As Chester Hartman (2002) indicates, “It was becoming apparent that urban renewal could be used to displace the city’s minorities and recapture the centrally located residential areas they had inherited after whites moved out” (17). Gene Suttle, once Deputy Executive Director of the SFRA, made the agency’s motives clear when he recalled how moving out African Americans was a primary goal of renewal. He notes, “I don’t think you’ll find that stated outright, but it was talked about in terms of blight. And who occupied those blighted properties but blacks?” (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, The Legacy of the Fillmore).

To show how serious they were about urban renewal, the City Planning Commission hired Mel Scott, a redevelopment consultant, to report on the necessity of redeveloping the Western Addition. With the title, *Western Addition District: An Exploration of the Possibilities of Replanning and Rebuilding one of San Francisco’s Largest Blighted Districts under the California Community Redevelopment Act of 1945*, the 1947 report left no misunderstanding about what the city had in mind. Scott’s survey took into account about half of the Western Addition, an area housing nearly 50,000 people. It revealed that 44% of the family dwelling units did not have exclusive use of toilet, bathing, and installed cooking facilities and concluded, “The mixture of uses, the crowding together of buildings, the lack of play space for children, and the old-fashioned street pattern with its hazardous intersections doom the area to further decline, so that it is only a matter of time until most of it does become a slum” (Western Addition District Redevelopment Survey; 1947). Scott notes that assessments on property in the Western Addition had dropped an average of 50% in many residential blocks and that the mixed use of commercial, industrial and residential

structures populated by a mixture of races and nationalities gave way to social pathologies and squalid physical conditions (Mollenkopf; 1983, 147). What Scott's report failed to address was that the Western Addition was also home to many African American businesses including: restaurants, cleaners, night clubs, theaters, a roller skating rink and a bowling alley, businesses that would not stand a chance of operating successfully outside the African American community (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

Yet another publication, a professionally assembled booklet on how the Western Addition might look after it was redeveloped, was put out by the City Planning Commission in 1947. Incorporating graphic design and billowy prose, *New City, San Francisco Redeveloped* (1947) proclaimed,

In this new city of space and living green there are no densely built-up blocks. Here no families live in murky cubicles, damp basements, rooms that are hardly more than closets. Public health nurses find no overcrowded households, no children or young people sleeping in the same room with victims of tuberculosis. Gone are the disreputable joint, the so-called smoke shops, the 'hotels,' and pool hall hangouts known to the police. Gone, too, are the alleys in which juvenile gangs plotted mischief that sometimes ended in murder. (5)

And, if the Planning Commission had its way, also gone would be the area's African American community. The report itself notes that the area's population would decline by approximately 13% from 86,000 to 75,000, and states, "There is no crowding and congestion in these redeveloped neighborhoods" (*New City, San Francisco Redeveloped*; 1947, 8). Further evidence that redevelopment's main concern was not relocating residents within the area but removing them from the area comes from SFRA executive Gene Suttle himself. Having served as the Western Addition Area Director and the Deputy Executive Director for community services, Suttle knew better than most what the SFRA was trying to accomplish. In an interview after his retirement from the agency he notes that "Once of the purposes of renewal when it was called slum clearance was not only to get rid of the people and the structures but to make sure those blighting influences didn't come back. And so there was no intent to rebuild for the kind of people who were being displaced (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, *The Legacy of the Fillmore*).

Redevelopment was not just a local issue either. In a public hearing in 1948, State Senator Gerald O'Gara offered his opinion on San Francisco's urban renewal debate stating, "Our study showed also that if this blighted condition is continued uncorrected, it is going to affect, and infect, other portions of the same district, and the whole city" (Public Hearing on Redevelopment; 1948). He continued,

Now, while, as I say, the Western Addition Area is the worst blighted in the City, and has the most need for community redevelopment, it is also

the district in San Francisco that has the greatest potentiality for redevelopment; it has a splendid location; it is a district where once the fine homes of San Francisco were located; it is a place of excellent views, of easy accessibility; it is a place where, if we can arrest the blight and clean out the slums, we can build beautiful, decent, safe homes for our people. (Public Hearing on Redevelopment; 1948)

In his concluding remarks O’Gara even tossed in a trump card, one that he may have felt would win people over to the benefits of redevelopment when he noted, “We feel that this [urban renewal] is one way to fight such things as Communism: to preserve this American way of life” (Public Hearing on Redevelopment; 1948).

Continuing to stack the deck against the Western Addition’s African American community was city Supervisor and realtor Chester MacPhee. In the same public hearing mentioned above he notes,

Now, that is something which you have to take cognizance of; it is something the police department faces every day; something that the district attorney’s office faces in prosecuting these people who come from that particular area. It is an inescapable conclusion, gentlemen, that crime is directly attributable to bad housing conditions, and unless you and the people of San Francisco see fit to take positive action along these lines, you must expect continuous crime and vice to come from this area, and you can ask an insurmountable job of your police department in combating crime in that area. (Public Hearing on Redevelopment; 1948)

But MacPhee’s testimony would prove less than sincere when it was discovered that he was a stockholder and director of the Del-Camp Investment Corporation, a company that had systematically acquired over forty buildings in the Western Addition and was attempting to sell them to the city for exorbitant prices (Mollenkopf; 1983, 153–54). Joining MacPhee in questionable business practices was Arthur J. O’Connor, an appraiser in the Assessor’s office, who had an interest in a 44-unit apartment building in the Fillmore District (*Sun-Reporter*; 1958, Slum Property Dealings). Both MacPhee and O’Connor, who denied any conflict of interest in their dealings, were subject to official investigations and as a result of his real estate speculation MacPhee was forced to resign in 1958 (Mollenkopf; 1983, 154).

Another indication of just how serious San Francisco’s city planners were about urban renewal came when the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (SFRA) was established shortly after Mel Scott’s 1948 report on renewal in the Western Addition. Wirt (1974) notes that the SFRA functioned like most redevelopment agencies across the nation, as a legally separate entity from the city government with a compound of private and public powers

providing a touch of the corporate state to local government. He also states that “It can make and implement its own plans, move people from one section of town to another, arrange massive sums for financing and condemn property” (Wirt; 1974, 297–98).

However, even though the redevelopment stage was set by the 1950s and an official redevelopment plan for the Western Addition was approved in 1956, little had been accomplished in terms of actual demolition or reconstruction by the end of the decade. One reason was because, as Mollenkopf (1983) notes, “In San Francisco, urban renewal activities were initially undertaken by the poorly staffed Department of City Planning, and later by a Redevelopment Agency which conducted its activities through work orders to other departments which saw it as a competitor and, consequently, were often uncooperative” (148). Furthermore, Hartman (2002) indicates that “In the mid-1950s, the corporate powers of the Bay Area had not yet mobilized themselves to plan fully for their future needs and to establish the necessary apparatus to carry out their plans” (14). Finally, Mollenkopf (1983) evidences that

Red tape and scandal also stymied the city’s other project, the Western Addition A-1 renewal area. Though the Board of Supervisors had approved the project before the passage of the 1949 Housing Act, the SFRA had moved slowly in acquiring properties. California’s enabling legislation hampered land-taking by eminent domain, and the SFRA could not get the city attorney’s office to expedite its condemnation suits. (153)

However feeble and unorganized the Redevelopment Agency may have been early on, these inadequacies did not stop it from putting forth its agenda. In a 1952 report sponsored by the Redevelopment Agency and the Department of City Planning, the point was clear when it noted,

The changes which have come to the Western Addition have been a downward spiral, marked by overcrowding of the land, overcrowding of structures, deterioration, and discouragement—resulting in further deterioration. Recent surveys have shown how this process has culminated in blight with its consequences of ill-health, accidents, fires, delinquency, excessive municipal costs and deficient property tax revenues. (The Tentative Plan; 1952)

Attached to that report was a two-page letter to SFRA Director James Lash from Director of Planning Paul Oppermann, who seemed quite excited at the potentials that lay ahead. Oppermann wrote,

Rebuilding the Geary area in the Western Addition will reclaim it as an economically healthy, well functioning, and attractive part of San Francisco’s



cherished environment. It means better use of the land, better standards of living. It means greater opportunities for business and a greater choice of accommodations to meet present-day family needs. It means more convenient routes for transit and private automobiles. It will provide more adequate space for schools, not crowded, and better indoor and outdoor recreation facilities sorely needed in this area. (The Tentative Plan; 1952)

But Oppermann must have had at least a hunch about the kinds of hardships redevelopment would create when he noted,

Improvements of this magnitude cannot be achieved without inconveniencing some, but your carefully worked out proposals for scheduling the program are convincing evidence that, compared with the great benefits to be derived from the improvements by all the citizens of San Francisco including the residents of the Western Addition, hardship will be minimized. (The Tentative Plan; 1952)

If redevelopment projects in the 1970s were characterized by red tape, delay and disorganization, beginning in 1959, urban renewal in San Francisco was on the fast-track. Just three years after its formation in 1956, the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee, a group of San Francisco's most powerful business leaders, sponsored and paid a Philadelphia, PA city planning consultant named Aaron Levine to produce a report on the city's redevelopment program. The report found that San Francisco lagged behind other large cities in redevelopment, lacked leadership and needed more support from the business community. As a result, the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee created the San Francisco Planing and Urban Renewal Association (SPUR), an organization created to generate support for urban renewal from citizens with significant business interests (Hartman; 2002, 9–11). In fact, SPUR was appointed to serve as the SFRA's official citizen's advisory committee and helped build a middle-class, professional constituency in favor of redevelopment (Mollenkopf; 1983, 168). Also, to aid in its own promotion efforts, the Redevelopment Agency produced a small polished booklet that boldly stated, "*San Francisco Redevelopment Agency Now Offers 43 acres of prime land in the Western Addition.*" In it the agency claimed that

The desirability of Western Addition land makes this an unusual investment opportunity. The land offered is in a highly desirable location with an urban setting that provides excellent amenities. There are no other sites of this quality available at this time for development in San Francisco.

One of the most significant events in San Francisco's urban renewal process was the hiring of M. Justin Herman as the SFRA's Executive Director. Perhaps no individual had as much impact on city planning during the heyday of urban renewal as Herman. During his tenure at the SFRA—from

1959–1971—Herman built the Redevelopment Agency into an organization that had 462 employees by 1972 and secured funds totaling \$128 million in federal urban renewal dollars over which it had direct control while being relatively free from local governmental constraints (Hartman; 2002, 16–19). Given Herman’s redevelopment acumen, it is somewhat of a surprise that he was Mayor Christopher’s second choice behind a budding Republican state assemblyman named Casper Weinberger. Weinberger, who eventually went on to become the Secretary of Defense under President Reagan, became ineligible for the position when a city attorney ruled that there was a conflict of interest because his law firm represented several wholesale produce firms being relocated for the SFRA’s Golden Gateway project (Hartman; 2002, 17). Herman served as a federal official with the San Francisco Regional Office of the Housing and Home Finance Agency (the predecessor of HUD) from 1951–1959 and was critical of the SFRA’s slow and stolid pace (Hartman; 2002, 18). Less than two years before being appointed head of the SFRA, a local paper reported that “M. Justin Herman, regional administrator of the Housing and Home Finance Agency, which controls federal funds for redevelopment projects, accused the agency of ‘the most cumbersome and costly’ handling of funds of any city in the U.S.” (Hartman; 2002, 16).

From the beginning, Justin Herman championed the kind of downtown renewal and slum clearance that the Blyth-Zellerbach Committee and SPUR wanted and, according to Mollenkopf (1983), “He knew the federal program and the urban development business backward and forward, had close personal ties to the Washington bureaucrats whose cooperation would speed his activities, and had strong views about the importance of public control over urban design” (168). Under Herman’s leadership and with the full backing of the city’s power elite, the SFRA systematically swept out poor, often African American, communities to make room for large-scale redevelopment projects. When, in one instance, he was confronted with arguments that the city needed to show some kind of interest in caring for African Americans and other minority populations impacted by redevelopment projects Herman discredited the idea as “Marxist thinking” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Goodbye Slums, Hello Corruption, b). It may have been precisely this cavalier attitude toward the African American community that prompted *Sun-Reporter* editor Tom Fleming to write, “Negroes and the other victims of a low income generally regard him [Justin Herman] as the arch villain in the black depopulation of the city” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1965, San Francisco’s Land Development).

Herman, who died in 1971, was an autocratic leader who insisted on complete discretion over the SFRA and its projects, an unprecedented amount of power that Mayor Christopher willingly gave up (Hartman; 2002, 18). Hartman (2002) describes him as follows: “Herman was more than a redevelopment administrator: He was an enthusiastic proponent of plans to remake San Francisco. Toward this end he used every trick, technique, and legal loophole that could be mustered, and when established procedures did not work, he devised new methods, stretching the laws whenever necessary” (19).

Hannibal Williams, spokesperson for the predominately African American Western Addition Community Organization (WACO), put it more bluntly saying, "We didn't know who the devil was. But we knew who Justin Herman was and that was the devil for us" (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

In 1958 the SFRA began moving families out of a 28-city block area of the Western Addition in what it called the A-1 project. By 1960 it was reported that 8,000 individuals, of whom 40% were African American, had been relocated, 21% to substandard dwellings by the Redevelopment Agency's own count (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Goodbye Slums, Hello Corruption). One of the main goals of this project was to widen Geary Boulevard into an eight lane highway thus providing easy access downtown for commuters who lived in the northwestern part of the city (Hartman; 2002, 25). Describing the redevelopment project the *Californian* noted that

At a cost to the taxpayers of \$8 million (so far), a slum housing area has been torn down, poor families have been thrown out, and a batch of streamlined apartment houses designed for the upper one-third income brackets are about to be erected by private contractors who will reap fat profits at the city's expense. The project is being handled with total disregard for lower and middle income groups, and when it is completed rents will rise all over the city. This is called redevelopment. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Goodbye Slums, Hello Corruption)

In a subsequent article the following week, the *Californian* noted that even James McCarthy and James Kielty, officials from the City Planning Department, were now skeptical about redevelopment. Quoting from the Northern California Chapter of the American Institute of Architects bulletin the paper notes,

Redevelopment, for all its high-minded social purposes, is a potential threat . . . the social purposes of redevelopment are not really being accomplished when, as here (in San Francisco), the displaced have no place to go but into the next block. The next ten years will be crucial, for the program of redevelopment and renewal, and the problems involved are not city-sized, but bring in, in one way or another, the whole region. Attitudes toward racial minorities, certainly as regards housing, will require some changing outside as well as inside the city, if the program is to continue much beyond the three major projects San Francisco is undertaking at present. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Goodbye Slums, Hello Corruption, b)

Strangely, even the main proponent of redevelopment, Justin Herman himself, acknowledged renewal's looming problems when he stated, "Without adequate housing for the poor, critics will rightly condemn urban renewal as a land-grab for the rich and a heartless push-out for the poor and non-whites" (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).



*Figure 6.1* First construction in Western Addition Redevelopment area widening Geary Street and directing it into an underpass at Fillmore Street, 1960. Photo of east end of tunnel was taken from Buchanan Street. Just above tunnel entrance is Fillmore Street. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

It seems McAdoo and Lillian Dixon, a middle-class African American couple, agreed with Herman's critical assessment. As Mrs. Dixon explains, a woman representing the SFRA had come by her husband's shop one day and announced, "This is a redevelopment area—you're gonna have to move." She continues, "Groups were forming to fight the move and we tried to fight it all the way. If we had been Willie Brown or Willie Mays it wouldn't have happened. But we were insignificant people" (*San Francisco Focus*; 1993, *The Legacy of the Fillmore*). If people such as the Dixons, people who were forced to make way for redevelopment, were insignificant they were at least in good company. Hartman (2002) notes that "more than four thousand households, mostly low-income African American and Asian families, were dispersed throughout the Bay Area," nearly none of whom were able to move back to their neighborhoods (63, 25). In addition, he notes that

The poor housing, high rents, and generally unsatisfactory relocation experience of the Western Addition A-1 residents had been well analyzed, after the fact, by scholars and government agencies, and the accompanying condemnation of the Redevelopment Agency served to

alert others to the dangers of relocation. A U.S. Comptroller General's study of SFRA files on Western Addition A-1 relocatees listed as satisfactorily closed found that nearly half of those examined had moved to unsatisfactory housing or were forced to accept massive rent increases. About one-fourth of the dislocated A-1 residents were moved into deteriorated housing in the A-2 area and subsequently forced to undergo relocation a second time. (Hartman; 2002, 65–66)

It is no wonder why so few people were able to move back to the Western Addition. According to the Redevelopment Agency's own statistics, 2,009 new housing units were constructed in the A-1 project area, an area that formerly housed over 8,000 people. In addition, only 33% of the new residences were available for low and moderate-income households while the remaining 67% went for market rate (SFRA, Western Addition A-1, 2007). One report sponsored by the San Francisco Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns indicated that "Relocation in A-1 was a catastrophe. Of 1,716 households on file with the Redevelopment Agency, 80% paid higher rents after relocation" (San Francisco, *A City in Crisis*, 1968).

The NAACP's Garfield Stuart identified the multifaceted complications with redevelopment when he offered the following assessment of the A-1 project:

People removed from the A-1 area often had no place to go. They were restricted from moving into other areas. The law says the people do not have to move until they find housing. But people cannot wait around. They become uneasy. As demolition proceeded in A-1, the street lights went out; buildings came down. It was a deserted wasteland. As buildings were left unoccupied there was a great deal of vandalism. There was a great deal of looting. This frightened the remaining people. With fire, with vandalism and everything else, they could not fight it. Continued relocation will mean the community will be deprived of its stability, of the security that will enable it to expand itself, to establish ties with the remainder of the population. Every time it is dispersed it is just that much more difficult to become an organic community . . . to be able to function . . . to achieve direction. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 23)

But perhaps the most damning indictment of this first Western Addition redevelopment project however, came when Justin Herman admitted that of the 4,000 households displaced in phase A-1 only one family moved back into the area (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

In the early 1960s the outlook for housing was indeed grim as redevelopment and racial restrictions combined for a powerful one-two punch that staggered San Francisco's African American community. In fact, the situation was so dire that Frank Quinn, executive director of the Council

for Civic Unity, declared that based on 1960 census figures, housing segregation was worse than at any other time in the city's history. Attributing segregated neighborhoods partly on racial restrictions associated with suburban relocation and partly on urban redevelopment that eliminated affordable housing for many African American families, Quinn told an audience at the CCU's annual meeting that housing, along with employment, were San Francisco's most pressing issues (*Sun-Reporter*; 1961, Housing Bias Most Extensive). The San Francisco Conference on Religion, Race and Social Concerns corroborated Quinn's assertion when it noted that "A survey of the Redevelopment Agency showed that 34 out of every 35 apartments were banned to Negroes because of color, and the one remaining was usually in a Negro ghetto" (San Francisco, A City in Crisis, 1968). If one was able to find housing, it was often both substandard and expensive. For example, according to the NAACP's 1967 Annual Report, "The fastest growing area of complaints involves rent increases where landlords are not making needed repairs" (NAACP WCRF, carton 26).

When it came to the subject of integrated housing however, many African American San Franciscans may have felt like Daniel Collins who would make the point that "Negroes aren't concerned about integration—they're concerned about the end of segregation. They're not dying to live next door to you. All they want is the right to choose where they live" (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Negroes Surprise an S.F. Audience). That is exactly what Hunters Point resident Mrs. Cunningham noted when she said, "I'd like to be able to live where I want. Nobody asks the color of my money when I buy a car but they do when I try to buy a home" (*SF Chronicle*; 1963, Exclusive: Life In S.F. Ghetto).

In addition to excluding African Americans from apartments and homes, racist practices occasionally cost landlords and real estate agents financially. In one instance at the beginning of the decade, Chinese landlord Koon Gin Wong ended up paying a \$500 out-of-court settlement to an African American couple because he refused to rent to them solely because of their race (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Jim Crow Apartment). Herbert Campbell, a radio announcer, and his wife showed up to an appointment to view a vacant apartment at 100 Scott Street but once Wong saw the couple he informed them the apartment had just been rented. When Mrs. Campbell noticed the apartment continued to be advertised in the newspaper she called the landlord on several occasions without identifying herself and was told the unit was still for rent. When the administrative assistant for the CCU attempted to persuade Wong to rent to the Campbell's he told her the building was "all white" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Jim Crow Apartment). The *Sun-Reporter* noted that this was the first known instance brought against a San Francisco landlord under the 1959 Unruh Fair Housing Act and the first out of court settlement of its kind in California.



*Figure 6.2* Miss Frances Fletcher, Berkeley teacher, details racial discrimination in housing sales and rentals in San Francisco, 1962. San Francisco History Center, San Francisco Public Library.

In a separate case at the end of the decade, \$500 in damages were awarded to Robert Coleman, a teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School, when the court decided he had been discriminated against in the rental of an apartment at 428 Sanchez Street. A public hearing by the Fair Employment Practices Commission revealed that Skyline Realty informed Coleman over the phone that the two-bedroom apartment he wished to rent was available. But, when he went to the realty firm in person, Roberta Serna

told him approval of the owner was necessary before she could rent him the unit when, in fact, Serna was the owner of the building. She later phoned Coleman and refused him the flat because she said the owner did not want to rent to anyone with children. Next, “Serna attempted to rent the unit in question to a Caucasian woman with a five-year-old daughter and tried to enlist her aid in falsely demonstrating the flat had been rented to her earlier” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1969, FEPC Orders Skyline). In the final judgment, both realtor Frank Lembi of Skyline Realty and Serna, who, in addition to being the property owner, was also an employee of Lembi’s, were ordered to pay Coleman \$250 each. The case itself lent credence to the Human Rights Commission’s 1967 finding about property owners and rental agents avoiding renting to African Americans. As one commissioner stated,

Like last year, the most popular dodge was the sudden delegation of authority to someone else somewhere else. Before bringing up the crucial question, I always made sure that the person I was talking to had the authority to rent to me. However, after the crucial question people sometimes abruptly stripped themselves of such responsibility” (Yes, No, and Maybe; John Shelley Papers, box 5)

Race restrictive practices took an enormous toll on African American renters. Restrictive practices were common and as late as 1967 the Human Rights Commission found that 45% of apartment managers, owners and realty firms surveyed refused to rent to African Americans (*Sun-Reporter*; 1967, HRC Rental Survey). In addition, racist housing practices compounded other problems African American San Franciscans faced. One case study that examined San Francisco’s housing market noted,

The tendency to segregate racial minorities forces these groups to pay an inordinate proportion of their income for housing. The supply of housing available to minority groups is restricted, causing available structures to become overcrowded and higher-than-normal rents to be established. This also makes it possible and profitable for certain landlords to maintain substandard facilities. (Arthur Little, Inc.; 1966, 71)

For African Americans, purchasing a home in San Francisco would be no easier in the early part of the 1960s than it had been in the 1950s. As the decade began, Seaborn and Jean Burks were suing the Poppy Construction Company and its president Sherman Kornbloom and realty agents Jules Saxe and Dick Hyman of the Saxe Realty Company because they refused to sell them a home in a newly developed Twin Peaks neighborhood based on their race. Though the Burks’ offered the full advertised price of \$27,950 for a three-bedroom home in the tract called Marietta Park, Mrs. Burks notes, “They told us they would not sell us the home under any conditions” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Refused Twin Peaks Home). Mr. Saxe admitted that the



Burks' claim was true but disclaimed responsibility saying, "The offer was presented in my office. I notified the Poppy company and Mr. Kornbloom came. I tried to get him to sell, but he rejected the offer" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Refused Twin Peaks Home). Mr. Burks, a government electrician, and Mrs. Burks, an elementary teacher, claimed the refusal "offended, humiliated and tended to degrade" them and asked for damages totaling \$30,000 (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, Refused Twin Peaks Home). In 1962 the California Supreme Court, basing its decision on the Unruh and Hawkins acts, ruled unanimously in favor of the Burks'. In his opinion, Justice Gibson detailed overlapping problems that racist housing practices caused when he wrote, "Discrimination in housing leads to lack of adequate housing for minority groups, and inadequate housing conditions contribute to disease, crime and immorality" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, Burkes Win Backing).

Complicating matters further, even when sellers gave real estate agents explicit instructions to sell to anyone who could afford to buy their properties, such instructions were not always honored. Such was the case with Charles Murry. Murry listed his San Francisco property with Ben Williams, a realtor in the Sunset district of the city. Although Murry instructed Williams to sell to any buyer who could meet the price and that it was imperative to sell his house within 90 days, Williams refused to show the property to potential African American buyers because he claimed, "sale of the property to Negroes would depreciate its value and the value of all property in the immediate neighborhood" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1960, White Home Owner). Given such overt racism in the housing market and discriminatory practices of real estate agents, it was not surprising that early in the 1960s the San Francisco Real Estate Board called on the City's homeowners to oppose State Assembly Bill 801 barring discrimination in rentals, leasing or buying homes (*Sun-Reporter*; 1961, SF Realtors Fight Fair Housing).

Given the racist practices employed at all levels of the real estate sector and the push for redevelopment in the early 1960s, it seemed like the later half of the 1960s should have brought some improvement in the housing market either through litigating discriminatory housing cases or by home building in renewal areas. Such was not the case. As devastating as project A-1 was to the people living in the Western Addition, the 60 square block A-2 phase would be even worse. Mollenkopf (1983) notes that the A-2 plan comprised a 276 acre project area with 6,900 housing units of which 4,500 were to be demolished (179). In spite of the 3,752 new units planned to take the place of the old structures, A-2 would significantly reduce the neighborhood's low-rent housing stock because only 200 new units would be public housing, 1,400 would be moderate-rent housing while 1,350 would be market rate housing (Mollenkopf; 1983, 179). Further, Hartman (2002) indicates that some 13,500 people were displaced by project A-2, many of whom were moving for the second time after being forced to move the first time from project A-1 (63). This second phase of Western Addition redevelopment created instability and severely strained the African American

community. As James Herndon, co-founder and President of the Negro Historical and Cultural Society put it, "The redevelopment of the Western Addition takes the Negro community apart, and makes it more difficult for us to get organized. We're being scattered all over town" (*News-Call Bulletin*; 1961, The Negro in San Francisco No. 2). There was, however, one new wrinkle differentiating the A-2 project from A-1. This time the residents of the area were better prepared to fight for their neighborhood and the right to participate in the decision making process of urban renewal.

Project A-2 faced opposition from the very beginning. In 1964, two years before wrecking balls and bulldozers started tearing down large portions of the Western Addition for the second time, the NAACP's housing chairman Joyce Goodwin noted,

Our major objection to the present plan is the existence of substantial evidence that the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency's announced relocation resources are inadequate to guarantee that the lower income families and individuals to be displaced from their homes by redevelopment or Western Addition Area II can be relocated by the Redevelopment Agency in safe, sanitary, decent and integrated housing within the City and County of San Francisco and at rents said displacees can afford. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Redevelopment A-2 Plan Hit)

Not only was there organized opposition to the A-2 project; one organization, Freedom House, actually came up with an alternative plan. The plan, prepared by architect Kenneth Simmons who held a master's degree in planning from UC Berkeley, "calls for the construction of 1,000 to 2,000 new dwellings in land made available by removing residential and non-residential buildings totally unfit for people to work in, or where vacant buildings are in such dangerous conditions that they cannot be economically rebuilt" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1964, Freedom House Plan Presented). Simmons' plan also stipulated that vacant land in the A-1 project area be used for low and moderate rate housing before the Redevelopment Agency developed land in the A-2 area.

When Justin Herman was hired as the Redevelopment Agency's director, he made good on his promise to execute projects quickly and efficiently, thus demonstrating to area residents that there was a need to mobilize and act with equal expediency. From this sense of urgency the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) was born to oppose phase A-2. According to a WACO fact sheet,

WACO was initially organized in January of 1967 by seven Western Addition organizations. These organizations began meeting because of concerns over the current procedures and policies of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, particularly in Western Addition Area A-2, which were going unchallenged. A major portion of this area was slated

to undergo redevelopment, yet most of the residents had never been consulted. And, present residents were being forced to relocate out of the area and out of the city. Not only were there not sufficient housing available so that relocates would not have to leave their community, but there were not even sufficient re-housing facilities available in the entire city at rents Western Addition residents could afford. Thus, a long-standing community of people was being broken up and destroyed without consideration for and consultation with its present residents. (Western Addition Community Organization; nd)

Two of its primary leaders, Hannibal Williams and Mary Rogers, spearheaded organizing approximately 40 groups into what Williams called “a group of groups” meant to slow down Justin Herman and the SFRA and interject citizen participation into redevelopment planning (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*). In his own words, Williams, the chairman and spokesperson for the umbrella organization, described WACO’s purpose as follows:

We’ve been misrepresented by a lot of people who don’t speak for us. I’m a humble man, but one thing I’m sure of, somewhere in federal law there must be something about self-determination. It’s our right and we’re here to get it. We’re not begging or asking for anything. It’s our right, and we want it. (Mollenkopf; 1983, 187)

Through community meetings, mass picketing, direct action and enormous turn-outs for public hearings, WACO was able to apply the brakes to a renewal process that, once Justin Herman had taken over, had been barreling forward with a full head of steam. Williams explains how, in one instance, WACO was able to stymie the SFRA’s plans. In his words he recounts,

Well, I’ll tell you what we did. They opened this project which was supposed to be this great boon to the Black community. We couldn’t afford it. And we looked at it and we said, this is a shame to project this thing as something to benefit poor Black people when it’s just the opposite so we’re gonna stop it. We went to the hardware store. I personally purchased a padlock and I padlocked, we padlocked, that gate and then we stood in front of it and said, this project is closed—by the people. (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*)

There was no questioning the spirit of Williams, Rogers and the many members comprising WACO. Rogers, who moved into the Western Addition in 1965, may have summed up that spirit best when she noted, “I refused to be said [sic] that because I’m Black I got to go somewhere else. And I decided I wasn’t going nowhere ‘till I got good and ready” (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*). If Mary Rogers typified the spirit, Hannibal Williams

encapsulated the drive of the group. In what was one of WACO's defining statements concerning the need for self-determination by area residents, Williams asserted that

Until we are allowed to cooperate in the shaping of our own destinies you can give us golden gondolas to float to heaven in and if we're not participants in the plans, if we can't say within our own souls that we helped build that, we still haven't got the dignity and self-respect that it gets to take poor people to rise up and be people. (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*)

WACO's spirit and hard work paid off when, with the help of the San Francisco Neighborhood Legal Assistance Foundation (SFNLAF), in 1968 it won a federal injunction forcing the SFRA to consult with a community panel to review renewal plans before moving forward with any demolition or construction (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*). Hartman (2002) notes that this was the first time in the twenty-year history of urban renewal a court had actually enjoined an urban renewal project (77). The suit also allowed WACO and SFNLAF attorneys to monitor further relocation practices and prevent involuntary displacement and more than tripled subsidized housing construction (Mollenkopf; 1983, 194). Although Federal Judge William Sweigert granted WACO a restraining order noting that "there had been no compliance by the local agency with some of the provisions on temporary relocation as required by the federal government," Justin Herman, trying to sway public opinion, countered that the suit was "foolish and without foundation" and called the SFNLAF attorney "a clever, well-financed, able, ambulance-chasing lawyer who has no respect for poor people" (Mollenkopf; 1983, 194). Herman went so far as to label WACO a "dissident minority voice" and accused it of prohibiting "the right of a city to survive by renewing and replacing its worn out parts" (Mollenkopf; 1983, 193). The Mayor's office was not quite so flippant however, when it sated, "The injunction, the first in the United States halting a major renewal project because on non-compliance with relocation requirements, further tarnished the national reputation of San Francisco's urban renewal program" (*The Shame of San Francisco*; 1969, 14–15).

Even though WACO was able to slow down the destruction of its community and forced the Redevelopment Agency to involve citizens in decision making, it was unable to halt the most disastrous effects of redevelopment. As a result, hundreds of individuals, families and businesses were forced to move out of the area. Hannibal Williams was confounded by this predicament and noted,

You can talk about relocating businesses and relocating people; the kind of businesses we have in the Western Addition, you know—the kind of barbecue stands and the barber shops that normally cut kinky hair. If you removed the kinky hair population, what good is it to give

the guy a new barber shop? And who knows this but the barber and the people whose hair he cuts? Mr. Herman and his agency do not know these things. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 23)

Although Williams' argument may have been logical, it would prove unconvincing to the Redevelopment Agency. By May of 1968, 60% of the 1,800 households slotted for relocation were forced to move away from the Western Addition and 15% had to move out of the city altogether (Mollenkopf; 1983, 184). This was despite the assurance from the SFRA that

While there is no anticipated deficit in housing for families to be relocated within the next two fiscal years, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency has taken steps to secure builders' and lenders' participation in constructing or rehabilitating housing for low and moderate income families; to make use of special Federal financing aids; to make sites available at reasonable prices; and to eliminate discriminatory practices that limit housing opportunities of minority families. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 18)

In 1967 the San Francisco Housing Authority warned city Supervisor Terry Francois that

Turnover in public housing amounts to 25 per cent of all tenants per year. But this percentage drops off perceptibly in the Western Addition, and becomes almost negligible when applied to the urgently needed big-family apartments—a slim 10 per cent in the projects in the Western Addition area. Consequently, and to emphasize the point, the Housing Authority supply of housing is not an unlimited resource for relocation housing, but, in fact, has quite severe limitations in what it can provide. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 21)

Just one week later the Housing Authority notified Mayor Shelley that as a result of the A-2 phase a housing shortage was eminent stating,

The need for the 1,000 additional units is urgent, particularly the need for studios for senior citizens and larger apartments for big families. The Housing Authority's waiting lists stretch back for years and include more than 3,200 applicants, 1,800 of whom are single elderly. 638 applicants need three or more bedrooms for their families. Housing studies showed a minimum of 9,650 standard units for low-income families will be needed between 1966 and 1972. Some 4,200 will be provided by public housing construction[sic], if—and it's a big IF—federal funds are forthcoming.

Section 23 provides a ready housing resource so desperately needed if redevelopment is to move ahead and if San Franciscans generally are going

to be better housed. The 500 allocated units will be gone before year's end and long before the relocation from Western Addition A-2 reaches full tide. The 1,000 are needed to help accommodate relocation and to insure that San Francisco holds to the road of peaceful and orderly progress. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 21)

It was obvious that the Redevelopment Agency knew a catastrophe was close at hand but chose to ignore the warnings when just three months later, as renewal efforts continued in full swing, T. J. Kent, Deputy for Development, wrote to the Housing Task Force,

We are presently faced with a dwindling supply of housing which poor people can afford. Major government-sponsored programs, such as code enforcement and urban renewal, intended to improve the City's physical housing stock have, in fact, caused a net decrease in low and moderate income housing.

The relocation process increases social and civic tension by confirming feelings of the persons adversely affected that they have little or no control over their own lives, and that they are being shoved aside for others whom they feel society values more highly. (John Shelley Papers; box 4, folder 21)

Therefore, it was no surprise when the Human Rights Commission of San Francisco indicated that there were no public housing units that low income A-2 residents could afford built in 1967 and that in 1968, although 110 units specifically for the elderly were built, none were constructed for families or people with moderate incomes (NAACP WCRF, carton 11). The future held little hope of anything better. By 1971, the Family Service Agency of San Francisco recommended that the SFRA halt any further relocation from or demolition in the A-2 area because such activity was deepening the housing crisis. The *Sun-Reporter* highlighted this situation when it revealed that

Family Service Agency's resolution states that demolition and relocation in the Western Addition had destroyed thousands of low-income housing units and forced thousands of poor people to lose the only housing that they can afford; that the Redevelopment Agency has produced fewer than 300 replacement units in spite of its many promises; that there is a housing crisis in San Francisco particularly affecting old, poor, and Black people; that further demolition and displacement will only exacerbate the housing crisis; and that, finally, "there is vacant land in the Western Addition, on which construction could be started." (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Redevelopment Agency Told To Stop)

Unfortunately, WACO spokesman Hannibal Williams was right when he claimed, "It is a cruel fiction to believe that there will be any place for

poor, black people in A-2 as it is planned now” (San Francisco, *A City in Crisis*, 1968).

Hannibal Williams was also aware that Western Addition residents were not the only group adversely affected by the A-2 project; African American businesses also suffered a tremendous blow. In a 1968 speech he indicated that “As of last week 180 businesses were—as the Agency put it—‘removed from workload’. Removed from the face of the earth would be more like it. Only 48 were relocated. The other 132 are gone—probably for good” (San Francisco, *A City in Crisis*, 1968). A Black Business Survey noted that 70% of the city’s African American owned businesses were in the Western Addition (Tresnon; 1969, San Francisco Business). However, when redevelopment removed these businesses, it wiped out one of the community’s brightest achievements and all but assured the destruction of the economic base and vibrancy of the Fillmore district. In addition, although the Redevelopment Agency gave out certificates of preference to Fillmore businesses that indicated they could return to the area once renewal was completed, rent increases and the time between when businesses were forced to vacate and when they could move back in caused 96% of the certificates to go unused (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

As Peter Stein’s documentary film *The Fillmore* illustrates, things in the Western Addition after redevelopment would never be the same. Lamenting the loss of cohesion and vitality of the African American community, Hannibal Williams notes, “But in the end, urban renewal performed pretty much what we feared that it would; urban renewal became Black removal.” Elaborating on that point, historian Albert Broussard, who grew up in San Francisco’s Western Addition, assessed the damage that redevelopment had on the area stating, “The Fillmore didn’t just change. I think it was destroyed. It was devastated as an African American community, as an important African American Community.” Finally, well known saxophone player John Handy, who honed his skills in one of the city’s most famous jazz clubs, Bop City, was more succinct but equally poignant when he juxtaposed the Fillmore’s once thriving African American community with what it had now become noting, “It certainly can’t be the way it was. We’re not there anymore” (Stein; 1999, *The Fillmore*).

## 7 The 1970s, Progress and Setbacks

For African American San Franciscans the 1970s opened with many of the same needs from past decades still unmet. The housing market was still characterized by racist practices and dwindling supply, employment options for both adults and youth were few and police community relations were at rock bottom. Added to this was the fact while the city continued to decline in terms of total population, the percentage of its African American population increased by 21,695 to 13.4% ([www.bayareacensus.ca.gov](http://www.bayareacensus.ca.gov)). Population was not the only growth sector however. Poverty was also a growing concern. Although 4.1% of the city's population fell below the poverty line in 1970, the rate for African American San Franciscans was 21.1% (Wirt; 1974, 39). And, even though the African American population of the city was expanding, it was also being redistributed, largely due to the impact of urban renewal and the associated effect of "Black removal." For example, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency demolished so many housing units in the Western Addition that, even accounting for the construction of more than 1,000 new units, the total stock in the area was reduced nearly 18% from 12,334 in 1960 to 10,306 in 1970 (Mollenkopf; 1983, 200). One of the consequences of the reduced housing supply was that the African American population of the Western Addition, once the economic and social hub of Black life in the city, declined by 25% from 14,631 in 1960 to 10,926 in 1970 (Mollenkopf; 1983, 202–203). Furthermore, Mollenkopf (1983) indicates that by some estimates, less than 25% of the 3,177 units which urban renewal left standing in the Western Addition project area ended up being occupied by African Americans (201).

For decades San Francisco's African American women were active in their communities, performing services such as running fund drives, setting up tutoring classes and organizing people to fight discriminatory practices. Although it was long over-due, by the 1970s these women were finally gaining some public recognition for the leadership they provided and work they did. For example, at a conference in 1973 more than 300 African American women turned out for a conference put on by Black Women Organized for Action (BWOA). Here the women participated in workshops and listened to speakers lecture on topics such as "Media and the Arts," "Economic Opportunity" and "Women Prisoners" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Black Women Organized). In



particular, the media workshop suggested that BWOA sponsor a conference or business orientation for African American artists, proclaiming a need to, “. . . show concern for the kind of Black representation and involvement on T.V. and radio. Both behind the scenes and in front of the cameras and microphones [sic]” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Black Women Organized). According to small business owner Joan Brann, proprietor of Homemaking Sojourners, in the economic opportunity workshop, “We talked about the need for expertise and information being made available to the women attending this conference and to the women of the community who want to go into business and don’t know all that is involved” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Black Women Organized).

Although clearly a positive force in the African American community, BWOA seemed to experience some problems getting women to volunteer as evidenced when it chided the women of the Western Addition for failing to show up at a Mayor’s Commission meeting on the Status of Women. The organization asked, “Where were the women of the Western Addition? All of the churches and stores in our area were leafleted, radio announcements were made and Ministers promised. Yet very few women responded” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, BWOA Black Women). Despite the low turn-out, BWOA sent a report to the Mayor’s office noting, in part, the following problems with health care delivery in the African American community:

The Black consumer does not receive quality health care, which is intensified by financial barriers and lack of services in the community; and There are not adequate numbers of health workers (physicians, dentists, nutritionist [sic], nurses, social workers, pharmacist [sic], and so-on) to provide for the health needs of the Black consumer; and Professional schools discriminate in their admission and retention policies, thus available health agencies do not provide services that are sensitive to the cultural and emotional differences of the Black consumer. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, BWOA Black Women)

One organization that seemingly had little problem recruiting help was the Bay Area Service League, an African American women’s volunteer service organization that began at the same time that tens-of-thousands of African Americans came looking for war-work in Bay Area factories during World War II. In 1973 it hit a milestone when it celebrated its 30-year anniversary. Over the course of 30 years the League, whose membership included many prominent City residents such as Helen Stratten, Vera Haskin and Fannie Beaver, provided services such as: financial assistance to indigent families, personal loans to families returning to their homes in other states, contributions to the NAACP, YWCA and Scholarships to High School Students among many other organizations. At the time of the anniversary gala, which was held at the University of San Francisco, volunteer services were being furnished to the Youth Guidance Center, Booker T. Washington Center, Hunters Point Youth, Laguna Honda Home, Parent

and Infants Neighborhood Center and the Cancer Fund (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Bay Area Service).

Not only did African American women give freely of their time and energy for volunteer work, some were also at the vanguard of entrepreneurship, running their own businesses and thereby achieving a sense of independence from the discrimination that was so common in both the private and public sectors. One such example was Loretta Franklin, the first African American woman to own a bookstore in San Francisco's history. Franklin, who claimed to hate every minute of the 13 years she worked as a social worker and a buyer, decided to do something she enjoyed by opening Franklin's Tales at the corner of Haight and Cole streets. Of her occupation she said, "Doing something you like to do is the grandest feeling in the world . . . to not hate Sunday, 'cause the next day is Monday (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Different Women). Franklin recalled that in her early days in business, many Black businessmen called her "sister" but refused to help her. That all changed when Julian Richardson, owner of Marcus Bookstore, helped her in selecting distributors, locations and encouraged her to persevere. Although Franklin loved the independence the store allowed her, she still endured some slights, noting, "It cracks me up when a white person comes in the store and asks me 'do you think the owner has any job openings?'" Still, Franklin concluded in an upbeat fashion stating, "I'm very lucky to have had a dream realized. I know how to survive, and I know how fast you can get and how fast you can lose (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Different Women).

Also breaking new ground was Pat Reese, a plumbing contractor who initially began helping her husband run an appliance store called First Africa Plumbing (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Different Women). After taking over the business however, Reese, who employed three assistant plumbers, found it difficult to secure contracts because of both her race and gender. She noted, "I don't know which is more difficult to deal with in negotiations . . . the fact that I'm a woman or that I'm a minority." Further elaborating on her difficulties obtaining work, Reese lamented, "They always give the same reasons for refusing the bid . . . not equipped enough, not enough manpower, understaffed, or negotiations have been completed" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Different Women). Still, Reese planned to keep her business afloat by securing contracts for large apartments and housing complexes and, in the future, hoped to open a plumbing school for women, stating, "Women spend most of the time in the kitchen and there's no sense in her having to wait for a man to come and fix something in it (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Different Women).

One concern that had been brewing during the previous decade but finally surfaced with a vengeance during the 1970s was segregation in the schools. As early as 1954, when the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision was handed down outlawing segregation in public schools, the San Francisco public schools denied that any such segregation existed. To this effect, in a letter to Dr. Holland Roberts of the California Labor School, Superintendent Herbert Clish noted,

Insofar as segregation is concerned, such does not exist in the San Francisco public schools. It is true that our elementary schools are districted as neighborhood schools. Our Child Guidance service, however, has absolute freedom in assigning a child, with his parents approval, to any elementary school in the city when such is necessary in order to promote an improved adjustment of a child in school. Parents may themselves request permission to have a child attend an elementary school outside his own district. (SF-AAHCS archive, Clish letter)

Clish then stated that the school system was working closely with the Council for Civic Unity and the local Urban League “in handling matters involving so-called minority problems.”

Clearly though, some kind of problem did exist. In 1962 the Council for Civic Unity and the local branches of CORE and the NAACP prepared reports documenting the de facto segregation in the city's schools. The NAACP report disclosed that 17 elementary schools and two junior high schools had student populations that were over 60% African American. In asking the school district to officially recognize the existence of de facto segregation, the three organizations emphasized that “contrary to what had been interpreted, they are not asking the Board of Education to change the policy of the neighborhood school pattern, only to adapt the existing districts to create racially integrated districts” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, Background of School Situation). Shortly after the reports were completed, members of several civil rights groups, teachers, and parents attended a Board of Education meeting where they advocated for a “positive program to eradicate existing de facto segregation in the San Francisco schools,” and recommended that a study committee investigate and devise a plan to erase the problem. Rather than constructing a citizens committee, James Stratten, the only African American on the Board of Education, insisted on a three member ad hoc committee of Board members to look into the issue. The committee would then report back to the full membership at the end of the following school year (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, De Facto Segregation). Such a proposal invoked NAACP President Terry Francois' ire, prompting him to note,

I am very disgusted with Commissioner Stratten's performance. The Negro community has no spokesman on the Board to articulate its hopes and aspirations. Jim Stratten is a tool and a pawn and has demonstrated his lack of qualifications, concern or appreciation for the problems of the community. We probably would be better off without his presence on the Board. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1962, Reaction Sets In)

By the mid-1960s, problems concerning student integration and minority hiring began to appear more often. In one example Mrs. Arthur Bloomfield, member of the education committee of the local NAACP, urged students' families to join prospective litigation against the school district, indicating that

They continue to bus Negro children to Negro schools and white children to white schools—to relieve overcrowding’—and in most cases where bussing looks integrative, actually the bussed children are of certain grades only and are kept to their own classes instead of mixed. (SF-AAHCS archive, Bloomfield, 1966)

Bloomfield closed the letter noting, “The law is on our side. The Court can be persuaded to force the San Francisco Unified School District to integrate the schools. But we have to ask them to, and we may have to be patient.”

The 1968 report “San Francisco, A City in Crisis” spelled out one major educational concern facing schools in predominately African American communities. The report states,

The schools in Hunter’s [sic] Point, Bayview, and Fillmore districts are the most overcrowded because of the higher density of population and larger families. Thus, where the problem is the greatest, since it is clear that disadvantaged students require more attention and exert greater demands upon a teacher than middle class students, the teachers have the least time to devote to each student because the schools are the most overcrowded. (San Francisco, A City in Crisis, 1968)

The report also identified a problem that would continue to evade a solution for several more years, that of bussing students to achieve greater integration in schools. According to the report, “the goal of quality education which requires integration, can only be attained through transportation of students. And bussing has become a bugaboo, an impasse, and at times a subterfuge” (San Francisco, A City in Crisis, 1968). Although their reasons may have differed, it seems neither Black nor white parents were particularly enthusiastic about the prospect of transporting kids across the city. At a February 1968 Board of Education meeting, one hundred representatives of Mothers Support Neighborhood Schools, a predominately white anti-bussing organization, accused teachers of having become “social engineers” rather than educators. Speaking for the African American community, Inez Andry of the Hayes Valley Schools Committee responded, “We don’t want our children bused anymore than you do—but for different reasons. We want neighborhood schools too, with a curriculum geared to Black people” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, School Board Uproar). Noting the convergence of the two groups, Mayor Alioto declared that to him, it looked as if, “no one in the community, including a large segment of the Negro community, really wanted to bus school children,” and that bussing should be viewed as a last resort (*Sun-Reporter*; 1968, School Board Uproar).

After more than a decade of dealing with the problem of segregated education, local NAACP president Charles Belle was pushed to the brink. Mincing no words, Belle editorialized, “We are sick and tired of ‘de facto’ segregation in our school system. We are ashamed of this cancer of a school

district as it exists today, and we don't intend to stand for piecemeal plans for quality and equality in education." He went on, "Like all of us in the NAACP, I'm tired of all this pussyfooting and deception—this sham in pretending that we're making strides toward integration. We're not" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, NAACP in Action). Belle concluded,

We are firmly convinced that the current discussion concerning bussing by various white racist groups and the San Francisco Mayor proves an intent to continue 'de facto' segregation, and the cancerous condition of the school district. We know that the white racists want segregated black and white schools. We do not know if the Mayor is aware of the 100,000 children being bussed to their schools in California. We do not know if the Mayor is knowledgeable about the millions of dollars being spent in California on bussing. We challenge the Mayor to make public the exact figures, and we challenge him to produce the mythical 'black leaders' who oppose bussing. He just won't find them. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, NAACP in Action)

The following week, and in opposition to the Mayor's deferment plan, the Board of Education voted unanimously to go ahead with its pilot bussing project. Called the Quality-Equality Education Plan, it aimed at integrating the Richmond and South-Park districts (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Alioto Loses, Bussing Wins). Speaking for the San Francisco Classroom Teachers Association, the Association's President Patrick King endorsed the project and emphasized that integration was an essential part of a quality education. Suggesting that children are short-changed when they are denied the opportunity to learn, work and play together in their formative years, King stated, "I want my children to have the opportunity to become more complete human beings by coming into contact with the white family of mankind" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Teachers Endorse Complex). Shortchanged was an understatement. According to the NAACP, "Twenty-eight of the elementary schools in the city are 80% black. The achievement lists of these schools are the worst in the city. The NAACP holds that the 28 have the lowest-paid teachers and who are not wanted at schools with mostly white students" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Court To Hear NAACP). However, as late as April 1970 the 20-school, 9,000-student, \$2.8 million plan remained stalled because the Ford Foundation refused to fund it due to the Mayor's opposition (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Black Parents Fight).

After three years of debate, the School Board adopted a plan for racially balancing grades 7–10 in 1974 and adding grades 11 and 12 in the following two years respectively. According to this plan some 3,300 students were assigned to schools across the city from their homes in an attempt to achieve racial balance at 13 schools. However, a 1974 *Sun-Reporter* byline stated clearly what many African American San Franciscans already suspected, "S.F. School Desegregation a Sham." The article noted that

“Figures released Thursday show that 13 of the city’s secondary school [sic] did not meet racial guidelines set by the Board of Education, exactly the same number of schools that did not meet the guidelines last spring” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, S.F. School Desegregation). In one instance of resounding defiance, African American parents in Hunters Point held a press conference to announce they would encourage students in their neighborhood to boycott the plan and ask for transfers back to their neighborhood schools. Obviously they were not the only parents who were unhappy about the plan as only 270 of the 1,215 students eligible for free school bussing at the beginning of the 1974–1975 school year used the service prompting the local NAACP to label the desegregation plan “worthless” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, S.F. School Desegregation).

In a 1975 article, *Sun-Reporter* journalist Anne Sigmon interviewed three African American school administrators to discuss some of the problems facing the city’s schools as Robert Alioto, the district’s new superintendent, began a four-year term. According to Henry Marshall, an administrative assistant to Alioto, integration was still a major problem. He stated that “Right now the problem is still one of getting bodies into the different schools” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss). Marshall observed that although there was a plan to integrate San Francisco’s schools the previous year, it was not strictly enforced and many students were issued temporary permits to remain in their neighborhood schools. Exceptions to the integration policy were only to be made for students with medical problems or for whom bussing would impose a hardship; however, the unofficial policy was, according to Marshall, to give anyone who requested a permit one, resulting in the allocation of 7,450 temporary attendance permits (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss). By contrast, only about 700 permits had been issued for the 1975–1976 school year.

Pupil services director Wayne Phillips identified a different problem, noting, “From my vantage point, the biggest problem facing us is that the administrative staff at the district level does not work together as a team.” Phillips continued, “My feeling is that we’re being emasculated. We (Black administrators) are being stripped of many of our administrative responsibilities which are keys to our being able to implement things we’d like to see done” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss). Phillips also identified teacher’s attitudes as a problem facing African American students, indicated that “We just have not been working together to understand each other and many of the teachers are suffering from prejudice, whether conscious or unconscious.” To back up his assertion, Phillips indicated that although African American students comprised 25% of the total K-3 population, they accounted for 55–60% of the suspensions, a disproportion he attributed to teachers’ failure to understand those students. The article also indicated that while African Americans made up a little over 30% of the district’s student body, only 11% of the teachers were African

American. By contrast, white students totaled just over 25% of the district's population while 71% of the teachers were white (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss).

Assistant superintendent of professional and pupil services Frederick Kennedy pointed out "the need to develop a school curriculum which is both acceptable to the parents of the community and palatable to students." Kennedy stated,

We need a curriculum which will make the students want to come to school, to stay in school, and to comprehend what is being taught. Today students sometimes seem to feel that the school curriculum is not relevant to their needs and the current job market" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss).

Perhaps hinting at the need for a more diverse curriculum, one that would take into account the needs of the various minority groups represented in the school district, Kennedy concluded, "In the past, public schools offered a curriculum geared to the majority and serving what administrators perceived to be the needs of the majority. Now we are trying to deliver education on a more individual basis" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Administrators Discuss).

Segregation in San Francisco's public schools was not the only issue to bubble up at the end of the decade. Employment discrimination in the public sector also came to a head in the 1970s. In particular, the San Francisco Fire Department (SFFD) had long been accused of racial discrimination in its hiring practices. It was not until 1955 that the SFFD hired its first African American, Earl Gage. Upon his hiring, Gage denied that there was any racial bias against him or preferential treatment for him; rather, he insisted that "There were no organized or political pressures which prompted my taking the [civil service] exam, and I don't believe there were any pressures in my hiring." Whether out of hope or naivety he continued,

I am inclined to say that I have been accepted the same as anybody else, in the American democratic spirit. I have had no trouble at all. The men down at the department are very good to work with. I feel that any man who enters the fire department will be accepted as I have been (*Sun-Reporter*; 1955, S.F. Gets Negro Fireman).

But Gage's optimism had faded after 12 years of being the Fire Department's sole African American and thereafter only one of four in a 1,756-man department. By 1969 Gage was of the opinion that "Something drastic has to be done," suggesting a moratorium on hiring exclusively from the Civil Service lists where African Americans placed too low to qualify for the Department (*S.F. Chronicle*; 1969, Racial Plan for Fire). For example, each year the normal turnover in the department was about 45 spots. In 1969

only three African Americans had passed a recent Civil Service exam to qualify for employment with the SFFD, but the highest scorer placed 239th on the hiring list spurring Gage to conclude, "It's going to take a miracle to get him into the department," (*S.F. Chronicle*; 1969, Racial Plan for Fire). In response to Gage's request that the Human Rights Commission pressure the Civil Service Commission to revamp the fireman's test or instate a testing moratorium, Chief Murray stated, "That's ridiculous. Everybody should be treated equally. It's an open race for everyone and I can't see preferential treatment" (*S.F. Chronicle*; 1969, Racial Plan for Fire).

In 1970, after nearly four weeks of unproductive negotiations concerning minority hiring between various community organizations and the SFFD, a civil action seeking an injunctive and declaratory relief to require equal opportunity for employment in the San Francisco Fire Department was filed on behalf of the community organizations (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Racial Discrimination In Hiring). The brief charged that fully qualified African American and Chicano applicants were "barred from such profession solely due to defendants' illegal and discriminatory, nonmerit, anti-ability test." Sidney Wolinsky, a representative of one of the plaintiffs in the case, explained, in contrast to what one might expect, an applicant's physical condition carried little weight but his score on the written test was decidedly important. He noted further that "The eligibility tests are irrelevant. They measure expertise in trigonometry rather than the ability and agility to climb a ladder or drive a fire truck" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Racial Discrimination In Hiring).

Perhaps in response to the criticism it received, the Fire Department initiated a fire safety technician program designed to train men from minority areas for community relations work and entrance into the uniformed fire fighting force. However, the program was criticized by state personnel officials as "not meeting the needs of minority people—the way stiff specifications for applicants are drawn up and required for recruitment" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Minority Firemen Program Criticized). The officials charged that "An 11-page application form for entry screening is so full of irrelevancies and trivia that it won't serve the purpose it has set out to accomplish—hiring of minority people in the fire department" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Minority Firemen Program Criticized). Some characteristics disqualifying applicants were badly broken teeth, severe acne scars, long side-burns and membership in "subversive groups." On this last item, it was noted that eligibility in the technician's program required applicants to have evidence of working with and as part of community groups in ghetto areas but disbarred applicants belonging to any radical groups or leanings toward them (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Minority Firemen Program Criticized).

State personnel officials were not the only ones skeptical of the Fire Department's minority hiring practices and in 1971 Federal District Court Judge William Sweigert ordered the San Francisco Civil Service Commission and the Fire Commission to modify the examination format so as



to allow more minority representation in the SFFD (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Court Orders Fire Commission). This court order forced both parties in WACO vs. Frank Alioto, Rudy Tham and Morris Bernstein of the Fire Commission to recommend changes to the hiring practices currently in use by the SFFD. As it stood, the hiring test for the Fire Department called for a sufficiently high score on the written examination which covered a broad range of topics including: mathematics, verbal skills, reading comprehension, general knowledge of mechanics and the physical properties of various materials, topics which WACO contended were not typically indicative of one's ability to perform as a fireman (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Court Orders Fire Commission). While a test modification may have been a good beginning, clearly that alone was not enough. In March of 1972 a further step was taken when a Superior Court Judge, noting that the Fire Department employed only three African American firemen out of a force of over 1,800, ordered that 17 new cadets, almost all black, be hired over the opposition of the Firemen's Association officials (NAACP; WCRF, carton 33).

The problem with discrimination in San Francisco's Police Department was little better than in its Fire Department. In November 1973, Federal Judge Robert Peckham ordered that minorities be hired at a 3-2 ratio over whites until minorities in the patrolman's ranks reached 30%. The judge further ordered that minority patrolmen seeking to become sergeants be promoted on a one to one ratio with white patrolmen until 30% of the force's sergeants were minorities (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Police Will Appeal). The suit, filed by the Officers for Justice, the NAACP and the League of United Latin American Citizens, noted that only 9% of the SFPD were minorities but that the city's population was 43% minority. Furthermore, according to the plaintiff's attorney, William Hastie, "The discrimination was the worst in any police department," he had known. In light of the ruling, Police Chief Donald Scott was particularly unhappy with the promotions provision and noted that "I will expect an appeal on promotions within the department" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Police Will Appeal). By 1975 the situation was not much improved. One article noted that even though a Federally funded minority recruitment program qualified enough applicants to produce about 450 new women and minority police officers over the following three years, at a swearing-in ceremony during the summer of 1975 only seven of 72 new officers were minorities. Further, at the date of the article's publication, August 23, 1975, the SFPD totaled 1,937 sworn personnel of whom 93 were African American, 80 Latino and 16 Asian, thus resulting in almost no progress in minority officer hiring in two years (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Putting Minorities On).

This was not, however, the first time during the decade that minority representation had come up. In the Fall of 1970, the Officers for Justice, a predominately African American organization of San Francisco police officers, demanded that they be included in policy making in the department. In an open letter to Chief Alfred Nelder the Officers for Justice asserted:

Where are the Black policy-makers in the department?

The charge of racism was hurled at the last administrator because of his failure to demonstrate his concern, in a concrete way, for the welfare of all of the members of this department.

How was this charge substantiated? Whenever there was an opportunity to elevate a Black man, it always took the active urging of the Black members for a Black to be considered. In most cases the arguments of the Black members went unheeded. Whenever a new unit or detail was created, the last member to be assigned was the Black member, if at all.

Chief Nelder, you have stated that you are interested in the unification of the Blacks and whites in this department. Of the 14 categories to which a member can be appointed—and this does not include the Community Relations Unit, as they are not listed in the organization chart—only three categories have Blacks. None of these categories are policy positions. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Officers For Justice)

More generally, the employment situation opening the 1970s, as Bay Area Urban League executive director Percy Steele noted, was in very bad shape. In a frank assessment Steele stated,

Unemployment in the San Francisco Bay Area has reached crisis proportions. There is a dangerous rise in the number of people left idle because of a lack of employment opportunities. Business and industry must take the initiative immediately to stem the tide of unemployment or it may soon seriously affect the stability of life in the Bay Area. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Unemployment Reaches Crisis)

However, Steele offered some good news as well when he announced a new Urban League on-the-job training contract funded by the Department of Labor and aimed, at least in part, at reimbursing employers for the cost of training unskilled and semi-skilled minority workers. Detailing the way the program worked, Percy Steele noted,

OJT encourages employers to add minority workers to their staffs, train them in the techniques of their firms and gain, in the end, an able, enthusiastic workers [sic]. The Urban League handles the paperwork and takes care of the recruiting, screening and interviewing of each applicant, referring the most qualified to the employer for his final selection. Upon completion of training, the OJT program will reimburse the employer a part of the cost of training, relieving the businessman of some of this expense. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Unemployment Reaches Crisis)

There was one catch, a problem that Steele identified when he said, “Our biggest problem is convincing employers that unemployment should be their

concern as much as it is that of the hundreds of anxious applicants who daily come to the Urban League for help" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Unemployment Reaches Crisis).

The job-training program would, in practice, be similar to another program initiated in the early part of the decade. It was well known that the building trades sector was an area long closed to African Americans because of the racist policies of many unions in the field. However, the 1970s opened to some encouraging news when the Human Rights Commission brokered an agreement between community leaders in Bayview-Hunters Point, labor officials and representatives of the major building contractor associations allowing "ghetto neighborhood residents into the ranks of the building trades unions and related job opportunities in San Francisco" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, More Minorities). The agreement held that no less than half of the work force used in construction jobs in the Bayview-Hunters Point Model Cities Project should be recruited from residents of the area and further emphasized securing "greater minority group representation into the skilled trades of the building industry of San Francisco," cumulating in more minorities classified at the journeyman level (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, More Minorities). There was only one problem, the agreement was specific only to Hunters Point residents and did not guarantee a specific hiring goal it would reach.

The verdict on just how well the building trades were doing with regard to equal employment opportunity for African Americans was still out however. In 1970 HUD official Clifton Jeffers testified that his department conducted non-discrimination compliance reviews with 76 contractors' projects receiving federal assistance and found some unions still adhered to "exclusionary membership policies, especially with respect to Blacks" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Job Discrimination Hearings). Some of the unions Jeffers identified as employing racism rather than minorities were the Sheet-metal Workers Local 104, Elevator Constructors Local 8, Iron Workers Local 337, Tile Settlers Local 19 and Plumbers Local 38. Jeffers urged that these and any other unions not complying with equal opportunity clauses be precluded from bidding on projects.

The same year that Jeffers testified about union discrimination Malcolm Holliman, a contract specialist with the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, evidenced that despite employing 22 different contractors on 18 Federally funded construction jobs in San Francisco involving more than \$117 million in HEW funds, there was not a single African American contractor employed (California Labor Federation; box 13, file 10). Furthermore, a comprehensive study on minority group membership in local unions in the building trades showed that of 380,850 members, 22.7% came from four minority groups of which 6.1% were African American. In addition, the study found that minority groups were concentrated in those unions at the lower end of the wage scale (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, Minority Union Membership). Although the most highly skilled and best paying

unions—those classified in the mechanical trades such as the boilermakers, electrical workers, iron workers and sheet metal workers—represented nearly one-third of the building trades locals, minorities only comprised 13.8% of that segment and African Americans representing just 3.0%. In the lowest paying trades including laborers, painters and roofers, minority membership soared to 44.8% of which 13.7% was African American (*Sun-Reporter*; 1974, Minority Union Membership).

The situation for African Americans in the building trades improved markedly however, when the United Minority Business and Professional Association under the direction of Gerald Johnson, negotiated an affirmative action program for the reconstruction of San Francisco's public schools. Under the program the school district agreed to a minimum of 25% minority participation in the work mandated by the Field Act to make San Francisco's schools seismically safe. Milton Reiterman, a school district administrator who helped design the agreement, noted that, "no other schools district has made such a legitimate and concrete commitment to minority business," and that the 25% plan would aid in the training of new workers and businessmen. When the plan was accepted, some \$40 million worth of construction on 40 different schools remained to be done (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, A Break For Minority Firms). Recalling those negotiations, Gerald Johnson states,

The school district was doing earthquake retrofit so we went before the school board. I wrote a demand the school board and we work together. And so they did some studies and we found that of contracts let by the labor department, that seven white contractors got all of the contracts. So . . . my first demand was [that] 50% of the contracts go to minorities, Black and otherwise. And then we settled for 25%. (G. Johnson, personal interview, 2005)

An agreement that guaranteed local participation in building projects like the one made for Hunters Point would have benefited those remaining residents in the Western Addition as well, especially in the construction of the Primrose Apartments. Here, African American businessmen, many belonging to the Black Businessmen Association (BBA), claimed to have been systematically excluded from contracting opportunities in favor of Berkeley based F. M. Taylor and son (*Sun-Reporter*; 1976, Down the Primrose). Although F. M. Taylor was a Black-owned firm, the Association claimed it was a front for Jack Baskin, a Vallejo-based white contractor who had already done approximately \$30 million worth of redevelopment work in San Francisco "with negligible utilization of minority contractors" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1976, Down the Primrose). Speaking for the BBA, Norman Smith charged the Redevelopment Agency of banning two African American-owned businesses, the Johnson Lumber company and his own company, Golden Spear Construction, from local renewal projects. He asserted

that a 1968 Federal housing law required contracts for work on low-income housing projects to be awarded to businesses located in the area where the projects would be built wherever feasible and that his company should have been awarded the Primrose project contract (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking). Furthermore, the BBA estimated that large white-owned contracting firms received about \$42 million worth of business on Western Addition projects while minority-owned firms garnered only \$4 million, thus prompting Gerald Johnson to remark, "The myth that the money is being re-circulated back into the community is false" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking).

Smith's allegation that the two companies were banned from Redevelopment contracts was based on a memo written by HUD Area Director James Price stating that Smith and Johnson, "allegedly have used extortion methods to obtain contracts, and are considered unacceptable as sub-contractors by the SF Redevelopment Agency (per Arthur Evans orally)" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1976, Down the Primrose). Price insisted that not only had Evans made such a comment but that he had also declined an opportunity to withdraw it when the memo was made public. Evans, the Director of the Redevelopment Agency, denied making any such comment to Price (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking). Interestingly, even though this incident generated a good deal of controversy about the allocation of urban renewal contracts, the Golden Spear Construction Company never even submitted a bid to do work on the Primrose project and the bid that Johnson's lumber company put in was, according to general contractor F. M. Taylor and Sons, \$122 higher than the lowest bid obtained. In addition, journalist Peter Magnani noted that "Despite their differences over the Primrose Project, the Black Businessmen Association said it was pleased that of twelve sub-contractors accepted by F. M. Taylor and Sons, all but two are minority owned" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking).

Primrose was not the only project at issue in the Western Addition. The Black Businessmen Association also contended that improper contract awards and "kickbacks" were commonplace in the construction of the Freedom West projects. According to the Association,

The subcontracts on Freedom West I Project were awarded pursuant to a scheme of payoffs in which minority contractors could not be awarded subcontracts unless they made payoffs. This was part of a pattern and practice of payoffs required to get contracts throughout the A-2 area. (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking)

The BBA's complaints regarding the Freedom West Projects were forwarded to the FBI for investigation and a separate investigation concerning the Primrose Apartments was undertaken by HUD (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Black Contractors Seeking).

Another carry-over from the 1960s to the 1970s was the discrimination African American workers experienced at the Post Office. According to William Patton, president of the San Francisco local of the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees, the Post Office's disciplinary policy regarding attendance time and leave, "borders on discrimination in its effect on minority and particularly Black postal workers" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Postal Workers Charge Racism). Reasons given to support this point were that some white supervisors were unwilling to listen to even legitimate excuses for missing work from minority employees and that undependable baby sitters disproportionately cause African Americans to be absent. According to Patton, more than half of the 1,200 dismissals for absenteeism during 1970 were attributable to the baby sitter problem and of those cases about 85% involved African American employees (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Postal Workers Charge Racism). Former postal employee David Johnson, who held a negotiating position with the National Alliance of Postal and Federal Employees, also indicated that absenteeism was one of the primary problems at the Post Office. As Johnson notes, "In that job we represented our employees who got in trouble. And most of the employees we represented were in big trouble, they were about ready to be fired." He then offered, "Typically people would be fired for absenteeism" (D. Johnson, personal interview, 2005).

The problem at the Post Office was large enough that when, in February of 1971, the Reverend Cecil Williams opened up Glide Memorial Church for a town hall meeting to discuss the issue, about two hundred postal employees showed up. Reporting on the meeting for the *Sun-Reporter*, Thomas Fleming wrote, "The postal workers all seem to unanimously agree that Russ James, Regional Director of the post office, is the ogre who is responsible for conditions which make it impossible for them to hold any certainty of job security" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Postal Workers Air). During the meeting William Patton noted that many postal workers had families with young children where both parents had to work and suggested initiating a baby sitter center like the one used by the Chicago Post Office to stem absenteeism. Under this plan, an employee encountering baby sitter problems could call the foreman and get the name and phone number of a sitter who lived nearby. In addition, postal carriers would ask people on their routes who would be available for babysitting in order to increase the child care pool (*Sun-Reporter*; 1971, Postal Workers Air).

While some employees at the Post Office were missing work because they could not secure baby sitters, some Fillmore area merchants were missing business because of redevelopment. These merchants faced difficult times when demolition of large swaths of the African American community also dispersed their primary clientele and essentially starved out the proprietors of Western Addition stores. Chauncey Bailey's description said it all: "You have to walk those three blocks down Fillmore—between Turk and O'Farrell Sts.—to really appreciate why the dying business community here doesn't appreciate staying another day" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Redevelopment's

Squeeze). Assessing a grim situation, a cloth store owner in the A-2 project area said, "Nothing is being built, everything is being torn down and its hurting my business." A loan company worker added, "It (A-2) looks like it's been through a bombing raid; until they make something commercial I'll lose money" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Redevelopment's Squeeze).

Although shop owners wondered just how good an idea redevelopment was, Arnold Baker, Director of Central Relocation Services, saw the picture a bit differently when he noted, "We come [sic] in and lowered rents, provided maintenance and insure the tenant that we want him to stay in business and we'll assist in his relocation." In an apparent contradiction to his assertion that redevelopment's purpose was to help the community, Baker continued, "Most of these businesses are marginal. They really can't tell us how much they make. I'm not saying they don't pay income taxes, they just can't come up with an income statement." Whether or not the Redevelopment Agency was there to help revitalize the local community or there to make the area more friendly to middle- and upper-income residents and businesses, Baker made it clear that any misunderstanding about the role the Redevelopment Agency played fell squarely on the backs of the locals as he stated, "People just don't understand this agency, they just don't read our printed material correctly" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1973, Redevelopment's Squeeze).

One interesting example of how urban renewal adversely impacted the Fillmore comes with Helen Erickson's story. Erickson and her two sons moved from Milwaukee to San Francisco in 1943 where she took a job with the Painless Parker dental office and later ran her own office in the Western Addition; that is, until 1973 when the Redevelopment Agency took over the building from which she operated. A wispy older white woman, Erickson was elected president of the Fillmore Street Merchants and Improvement Association and "spends most of her days talking and writing letters and mothering and fighting to boost the morale of the little band of merchants who still remain in what's left of the Fillmore District" (*SF Chronicle*; 1974, *The Grand Old Lady*). Her fight, however, was uphill to say the least. Pointing out garbage-filled stores closed by the SFRA, unfenced lots where buildings were torn down and the shell of her former office, Erickson stated, "All this desolation shows disorganization and the fact that they've been tearing down without building, they're at fault for not building a place for us to go before they throw us out" (*SF Chronicle*; 1974, *The Grand Old Lady*). Although the newspaper article asserted that drug addicts crowding Fillmore Street frightened customers away, "The bigger, more complicated problem for the Fillmore's merchants is that urban renewal has effectively eliminated their customers, who moved away when their homes were torn down" (*SF Chronicle*; 1974, *The Grand Old Lady*).

No one made the point that customers were scarce more clearly than First Wester Bank manager Robert Trethewey. He explained that

This is a declining area, obviously, and there just isn't any place to go to get business here. The customers are afraid to come into the area to do their banking. We've had a run-off in deposits for nine or ten years. We do have a sense of obligation to the community, and we would have kept it open if it was just a break-even proposition, but we're losing money. (*SF Chronicle*; 1974, The Grand Old Lady)

Furthermore, the forecast for luring any kind of business that could sustain a bank in the area was bleak. As indicated at a meeting of the Fillmore Merchants Association, even though the Federal government, through the Redevelopment Agency, had programs to buy property and build new housing, it had no programs to maintain or rebuild the commercial life of the area; "in other words, what ever else Redevelopment can do under current regulations, it cannot build a shopping center to provide a commercial nucleus for the area" (*SF Chronicle*; 1974, The Grand Old Lady).

The Fillmore was not the only neighborhood experiencing problems however. In 1972, a week-long series of articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* examined Hunters Point and painted a picture of many contrasts. Describing the area in some detail, reporter Tim Findley writes,

Up on Hilltop Avenue in the early afternoon it is quiet. Kids squeal and romp with pleasant, distant gaiety in a nearby school yard. It could be called peaceful except that there are sullen remnants of trouble and the quiet is wispy, wary, like that of a ghost town . . . And on the dingy grey side of the nearest two-story housing unit, the inevitable spray paint signs curl out their messages: "Anthony was here." "Kill or be killed."

Outsiders are not welcome in Hunters Point, not just because the people have become hostile, but because most of them have become too accustomed to the snooping of welfare workers or minor bureaucrats from the housing authority, or to police officers whose own tension is infectious.

Statistically, it is a young community, with nearly half the population of 60,000 under 25 years of age. But in the afternoons on the hilltop, few young people can be seen. Some are in school, but others are merely drifting in the idleness of poverty.

Unemployment is around 15 per cent for the overall community, but among the young men under 30 the unemployment statistics are even higher. For the men under 20, unemployment has been as high as 53 per cent in recent times. (*SF Chronicle*; 1972, Inside Hunters Point)

Pointing out one further downside, assistant director of the neighborhood Economic Opportunity Program Adam Rogers states, "Yeah, dope's a lot of the problem. The hypes [drug users] shoot up and then they can't afford the habit so they got to steal. They don't steal somewhere else, they steal



right here in the community, so everybody loses” (*SF Chronicle*; 1972, Inside Hunters Point).

But Hunters Point was more than a neighborhood of assorted problems, it was also a community that attempted to build a better future by building from the inside out, often taking its lead from women. One *Chronicle* article reports that from early in the 1960s, “Wherever decisions were to be made about Hunters Point, there was Mrs. [Ardith] Nichols or one of the ‘the women’ to make sure the community would have a part in the decision.” The report continues, “The women became a virtual institution in Hunters Point—the ‘Big Five’ as a community newspaper later described them: Mrs. Nichols, Louise Westbrook, Julia Commer, Oeola Washington and Bertha Freeman (*SF Chronicle*; 1972, Hunters Point—The Power). Rosa Lee Williams, Ethel Garlington and Ruth Williams were also among women who held a great deal of influence in Hunters Point (*Sun-Reporter*; 1972, Community At Crossroads). According to Joel Skidmore of the *Sun-Reporter*, although exactly who the five were was debatable, “The Big Five began meeting in 1956 at the Crispus Attucks Club and they gradually developed into the core of the Bayview Neighborhood Center,” and, over time, they overturned evictions by the Housing Authority, picketed Third Street merchants so that they would hire African American employees and administered consumer education programs. However, one veteran of community organizing, Mrs. Oeola Washington [Means] feared the community had lost its way when she noted, “The community has lost respect for its unity. They have one thing in view and that is themselves. Just pay me my money . . . Just give me my job . . . they seem to be saying” (*Sun-Reporter*; 1972, Hunters Point—Community).

Though women held tremendous influence in the area, once the Hunters Point poverty programs started-up in the mid-1960s, groups of young men—most born and raised in the area—took on leadership roles. One man in particular, Adam Rogers, developed into one of the most influential community leaders in Hunters Point. Rogers, who had been wounded by gunshots on four separate occasions while growing up in Hunters Point, worked his way into a position with the Economic Opportunity Council and was also a coordinator of the Security Guard program that watched over redevelopment sites and a commissioner on the Model Cities Commission. Because Rogers owned a home outside of Hunters Point and earned a good salary he could have left the neighborhood permanently but, indicating his commitment to the area, he stated, “I’m staying because I’m proud to be part of this community” (*SF Chronicle*; 1972, The Poverty Industry).

At the beginning of the 1970s securing a job was not the only concern for African American San Franciscans. As in previous decades, finding affordable housing that was not in serious disrepair remained a priority not easily met. Realizing the dire need to secure federal money to build housing and help create an economic infrastructure while facing significant cutbacks in

redevelopment grants, Mayor Alioto declared, "The Federal government has a moral commitment to complete the building of new housing for the people of the Western Addition as well as to create new businesses and generate jobs (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Alioto Blasts Housing). Though Justin Herman insisted that the Redevelopment Agency needed \$15 million annually for several years to restore the Western Addition, HUD Secretary George Romney reported that one last allocation of \$10 million was all that was on the way. San Francisco was not alone in this dilemma as similar notifications were delivered in over fifty cities nation-wide that same year (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Alioto Blasts Housing). Compounding the impact of the monetary shortfall, Peter Groat, San Francisco City Planner, told Human Rights commissioners that the city was likely to face a net housing loss. Groat indicated that "Unless there is adequate money, the San Francisco housing problem will see no change" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Housing Situation Dim). Groat's report concluded ominously that "We are facing a crisis in the housing market which cannot be offset by public and private programs of new construction and/or redevelopment of dilapidated and deteriorated areas. It is impossible to satisfy any part of the demand for housing" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Housing Situation Dim).

In an all too familiar refrain, the NAACP's West Coast Region Annual Report from 1973 identified one of the largest problems facing African Americans in the 1970s, the lack of affordable housing. In a section titled "Housing" the report stated,

Several patterns are emerging that characterize the current practices of those who control the housing industry. Generally, new housing built by the developers can be purchased by black home seekers. However, the excessive cost of these new homes, the high down payments and skyrocketing mortgage installments effectively limits this housing market for the vast majority of the black community. The Nixon Administration curtailment of funds for subsidized housing and public housing has left the black community with virtually no available housing market. Particularly hard hit are the young married couples who have been priced out of the housing market. (NAACP; WCRF, carton 26)

Further diminishing the available housing stock for African Americans in the Western Addition was the purchasing power of gay white multiple-income buyers interested in owning or "flipping" (buying a house, making minor repairs to it, and selling it for a profit) one of the remaining Victorian homes left standing around the fringes of the redevelopment area. Mollenkopf (1983) indicates that during the mid-1970s the Western Addition developed one of the highest concentrations of gay households in the city and organized around issues such as assault and crime, issues that usually pitted the gay community against the area's African American residents (198). Clearly, African Americans felt unfairly targeted by the anti-crime

efforts of their new neighbors and resented the fact that gays could come into the Western Addition to buy and sell property that they themselves could scarcely afford, often evicting them in the process. Summing up this ability, a gay real estate speculator in the Western Addition commented, "Before 1977, you could pick up anything, kick out the blacks and put in gays, unload it in three months, and make \$30,000. What do you think 'good tenants' means in the multiple listing books? It means the dirty work has been done" (Mollenkopf; 1983, 201). In one instance, as anger and resentment intensified, violence was narrowly averted at a meeting involving liberal activists and members of the Western Addition Project Area Committee (WAPAC) where the topic of discussion was the "gay invasion" of the Western Addition (Mollenkopf; 1983, 203).

In other parts of the city, it was not multiple income gay whites but middle and upper-income African Americans that prohibited lower-income Black families from moving into homes. Under the Turnkey program, low-income families were able to rent apartments in small public housing projects scattered throughout the city. These projects, built by private developers, would then be sold back to the local Housing Authority who was able to let them at subsidized rates due to the subsidy HUD provided the local Authority. However, echoing the sentiments of many white home-owners who faced low-income African Americans moving into predominately white neighborhoods, a group of African American property owners in Merced Heights opposed a 16-unit project for fear that allowing lower-income Blacks to move into such a project in their neighborhood would depress property values and add to the problems already facing area residents as they shared scant city services such as parks, schools and busses with new residents (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Low Income Housing). Walter Scott, deputy executive director of the Housing Authority, expressed concern over the area's refusal to allow the low-income project stating, "Once the people learn that black people in Merced have opposed the project there, whites could use it to thwart public housing in their areas (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Low Income Housing).

However, there were some positive moments scattered throughout the housing crisis. In one instance, Eloise Westbrook, chairman of the Bayview-Hunters Point Housing Committee, led a "poor peoples" campaign that was able to convince federal housing officials in Washington to release millions of dollars of renewal funds for low-income housing in Hunters Point. Upon the committee's return to San Francisco, Justin Herman met the delegation at the airport and noted that all the money was earmarked exclusively for Hunters Point. He further noted that Mayor Alioto would make a separate appeal to secure funds for the reconstruction of the Western Addition later that month (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Hunters Point Delegation). Herman's proclamation was met with some skepticism however. Harry Tate, a Western Addition resident who had also gone to the airport to welcome the Hunters Point delegation home, stated, "He has lied to

us all along. There is no place in the community to relocate even a dog. Herman runs off to Africa and China claiming to be interested in ghetto problems and he doesn't do a damn thing" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Hunters Point Delegation).

Another bright spot of a different sort occurred as a result of landlord Gerald McGowan's decision to force Barbara Corley, a white woman, to move out of her apartment because she had African American friends. According to Corley's complaint, McGowan told her, "I have had complaints about your dark friends. I don't wany [sic] my wife being mugged, tires slashed or windows broken. I wish you had told me about this before" (*Sun-Reporter*; 1970, Landlord Pays \$500). The silver lining in this instance was that McGowan was fined \$500 for his racist behavior, sending a stern message to other property owners and apartment managers that such blatant racism would now cost them dearly.

Unfortunately, overt discrimination in San Francisco's rental market was not unusual. In fact, the 1973 NAACP West Coast Region Annual Report indicates that "While there have been major improvements in eliminating discrimination in housing sales, there continues to be widespread discrimination in the leasing and rental of housing for black applicants" (NAACP; WCRF, carton 26). A prime example of the situation facing African American renters in 1973 was evidenced in a Human Rights Commission pamphlet entitled "Sorry It's Just Been Rented, Twelve Cases of Discrimination in San Francisco." The pamphlet states,

Despite existing State and Federal laws declaring it illegal, discrimination in housing continues to be widespread. Owners and their agents seldom practice discrimination openly. Instead, more subtle means of breaking the law have been devised. Many of these evasions can go undetected by a minority housing seeker unless a caucasian checks the same apartment or house and the treatment is compared. (Alioto Papers; box 8, folder 26)

And compare the Human Rights Commission did. In one instance, an African American woman attempted to rent a room in response to a newspaper add but was told by the assistant manager that no vacancies existed and none were expected. Fifteen minutes later a white woman entered the same residence club and was told by the same assistant manager that he had two vacancies. She was then told she could pick between the two and was then invited to dinner to meet the other residents. In another instance, an African American man was helping a white woman move into her Pacific Heights apartment. The manager asked her if it was her "old man" and the woman responded no. He then asked the woman if her old man was Black to which she responded affirmatively. The manager's response: "You can't move in here; we don't want any blacks around" (Alioto Papers; box 8, folder 26).

Although such racist practices were commonplace, just a few years after McGowan was slapped with a fine another landlord would feel the financial impact of his racist behavior; however, this time the impact was far more substantial. In a 1975 case, Dr. Irwin Schonfeld and his wife Marsha, owners of a 24 unit Pacific Heights apartment complex, were penalized \$20,000 for refusing to rent to Cassandra Parker on the basis of race (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Big Settlement Against Racist). It turns out that after interviewing with apartment manager Ann Stuckey, Parker left a deposit for a unit. However, when she returned a few days later she was told her deposit was inadequate and shortly thereafter was also informed that her references were not checked and that the landlord was unable to verify her employment. Upon her third return visit, the manager told Parker that the apartment was in litigation and would be unavailable for many months. Stuckey subsequently called Parker and informed her that the landlords had instructed her not to rent to "Blacks." Moreover, during the trial Stuckey's testimony revealed that the Schonfelds often quoted African Americans monthly rents between \$25 and \$50 in excess of the usual rent and in some instances prohibited the apartment managers from answering the door if African Americans had been seen in the area (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, The Case Against Racist). An all white jury awarded Parker, a microbiologist, \$10,000 as compensation for her humiliation, embarrassment and mental suffering and an additional \$10,000 for "punitive and exemplary" damages designed to punish the defendants and deter them from further acts of discrimination (*Sun-Reporter*; 1975, Big Settlement Against Racist).

The struggle for equal rights would continue on through the decade for African American San Franciscans. By the mid-1970s Virna Canson took over as NAACP West Coast Regional Director replacing Leonard Carter who had passed away in April of 1974. In that same year, Canson noted that going forward it may well be more difficult to advance an equal rights agenda because there was "less glamour in the civil rights movement today," a result of the assassinations of Martin Luther King, and John and Robert Kennedy. She concluded, "People are afraid to have their emotions hanging out and to attach themselves to heroes" (NAACP; WCRF, carton 26).

# Conclusion

Immediately following the war and for some decades later, the single most significant issue African American San Franciscans faced was securing housing that was both affordable and adequately maintained. Although finding a place to live was a problem that many city residents encountered regardless of ethnic group, African Americans had to overcome barriers that most other groups did not face in the same extreme. Whereas prior to World War II the African American population of San Francisco was less than one percent and was met with very little overt discrimination, by 1950 the African Americans comprised 5.6% population. As the community grew discrimination grew along with it. Race restrictive covenants and redlining, the practice of denying or increasing the cost of housing services to a particular group of people, kept all but the most influential and affluent African Americans hemmed in to just two neighborhoods, Hunters Point and the Western Addition. In turn, these neighborhoods suffered from neglect and blight and were targeted by federal and local government for the wrecking ball under redevelopment plans.

Gradually both neighborhoods fell into serious disrepair and the Western Addition gained a reputation as a center for crime and vice. The problem was deemed so acute that the local African American newspaper—*The Sun-Reporter*—periodically ran special issues on combating crime in the Fillmore, the name by which most residents referred to the Western Addition. As structures decayed, so too did the infrastructure of African American neighborhoods. This was particularly true for the Western Addition, once called the Harlem of the West. Where clubs, theaters, small businesses and hotels once thrived during the late 1940s and 1950s, by the 1960s urban renewal—as it was called by the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency—pushed both residents and businesses out of the area to make room for a new six-lane traffic corridor connecting downtown's financial district to the outlying western suburbs. Furthermore, a great deal of the area's affordable housing was torn down and replaced with moderate and upper-income apartments and town homes that were financially inaccessible to most of the African American residents that had been displaced.

After securing housing, the second highest priority for most African Americans living in postwar San Francisco was to find or maintain employment. The end of the war and consequent loss of jobs associated with the war industry in combination with increased racial discrimination resulted in an employment disaster for many in San Francisco's African American community. Despite the egalitarian actions of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and Marine Cooks and Stewards Union, most unions closed their doors to African Americans and made it difficult for them to secure employment in any but the most menial and unskilled—and therefore underpaid—jobs in this very union-strong city. Furthermore, white collar jobs were scarce in part because few African Americans possessed the requisite skills or training necessary to obtain these jobs and also because virulent racism prevented even qualified individuals from getting hired in areas such as accounting, clerical or management positions. In addition, many employers were reluctant to hire African Americans in positions that required significant public contact for fear that they would lose business. However, civil rights organizations such as the Urban League and the NAACP assisted people in finding jobs or getting deserved promotions thereby continuing to push the envelope of equal opportunity into the 1960s and beyond.

Mirroring the activism taking hold in the rest of the nation, San Francisco's African American community began to demand its rights more forcefully than ever before in the 1960s. Often the flash point of protests was that a certain employer hire more minority workers. Such was the case in the decade's two most high profile demonstrations, one at the Sheraton Palace Hotel and the other on Van Ness Avenue's Auto Row. In these demonstrations coalitions of young people abandoned the go-slow approach of litigating civil rights for direct action campaigns designed to bring immediate results. Such actions were relatively successful in the short term and evidenced that there had emerged a new more activist leadership among San Francisco's African American community, one that would not only stand up for equal opportunity in employment but also one that would stand in front of bulldozers to claim a share of the decision making power in urban renewal projects.

Although San Francisco did not experience the severity of racial strife that Newark, Los Angeles or Detroit would, clearly there were racial antagonisms. Nowhere were these antagonisms more evident than in the relations between the African American community and the police. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, officers of the SFPD committed hundreds of cases of harassment and brutality against the City's African Americans residents. Demanding accountability and change, the *Sun-Reporter* ran special features on police brutality in the Black community throughout the 1950s and 1960s. For example, following the 1964 Palace Hotel and Auto Row demonstrations the paper criticized the large police presence and numerous arrests that were made. Tensions reached a crescendo when, in 1966,

a police shooting sparked the city's only race riot. When a white police officer shot Matthew Johnson, an African American teenager, in the back while the teen fled a crime scene, San Francisco's Hunters Point neighborhood erupted in a 5-day long upheaval that resulted in tens of thousands of dollars in damage and an emotional scar that would not soon heal. The shooting of Matthew Johnson was the nadir of police-community relations in San Francisco and by 1975, despite the police department's implementation of some community relations units, the situation had not markedly improved.

This book has only scratched the surface of San Francisco's postwar African American history. It is my hope that as a result of this work many areas of inquiry will be opened to further exploration. In particular, more research that details the lives of African American women in the city would shed light on their efforts to ensure that living conditions were the best they could possibly be under the circumstances. African American women in San Francisco—like their counter-parts in cities and towns across the nation—were organizers, the glue that provided cohesion and action to groups such as the Bay Area Service League, the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination and the Western Addition Community Organization. Without their efforts, tutoring programs would have gone unstaffed and underfunded, demonstrations would have had smaller turn-outs and some of the most effective civil rights leadership would have been lacking or missing altogether.

Also of interest is the complex manner in which the many civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, the Council for Civic Unity, CORE, the Urban League and the Ad Hoc Committee to End Discrimination functioned both within their own groups and between each other to map out a coherent path or, in some instances, a haphazard approach for achieving civil rights victories in San Francisco. Of keen interest is the schism between the established, older, male and usually more conservative leadership and the younger more direct action-oriented leadership led mostly by southern migrants or the children of those migrants. The dynamics both within civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and between organizations such as the Ad Hoc Committee and CORE are so intriguing and complex that this subject alone deserves a manuscript length project able to uncover the minutia of San Francisco's civil rights organizations. Add to this the interaction between African American, Native American, Chicano, Asian and Asian American groups and the research possibilities abound.

One other area needing further research is that of economic class stratification among African American San Franciscans. In many instances it was the African American middle and upper-classes that provided the financial and strategic means necessary to advance civil rights in the city. However, it was by-and-large the working-class and students that walked the picket lines and got involved in demonstrations. In my interview with him, Tom Fleming challenged the integrity of upper-class "Black



intellectuals” noting that they would rather play bridge than walk a picket line. Research into the differences and similarities of African American San Franciscans in varying socio-economic classes would allow for a more nuanced picture of San Francisco’s postwar African American community and how this community responded to the challenges of agitating for and securing civil rights.

Although many details concerning San Francisco’s postwar African American community remain unclear, one thing is certain; it changed the contours of the city forever and made an imprint that would last a lifetime. This book is an attempt to recount that imprint as both the City and the nation moved ahead in one of the most transformative periods in American history. In many ways it is a natural follow up to Albert Broussard’s *Black San Francisco*, a book that examines San Francisco’s Black community from the turn of the century through the war years. This work also dovetails with Peter Stein’s brilliant documentary *The Fillmore*, a film that explores the intricacies of this San Francisco neighborhood from the early 1900s through the 1960s. As both the film and this book illustrate, from the late 1940s on the Fillmore was the hub of San Francisco’s African American community and it was here that many civil rights struggles were conceived and put into action, where a bustling night life emerged, where economic successes abounded and where redevelopment would fracture both the economic and residential core of the Black community. Furthermore, like Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo’s *Abiding Courage* and Shirley Ann Wilson Moore’s *To Place Our Deeds*, both books that explore the postwar history of African Americans in the East Bay, this work depicts how restrictive housing policies, redevelopment projects and crumbling structures caused hardships for many in the Black community. And, like all the works aforementioned, this book shows how the spirit of a people struggling forward, often against overwhelming odds, worked tirelessly to forge a better day coming.

In the same way that the war industries associated with World War I did for large Northern cities such as Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago, World War II opened employment opportunities on the West Coast for African Americans. Such opportunities were largely unavailable in the South due to racial discrimination and many African Americans from that region of the country seized this chance to make a better life in San Francisco than they had in states such as Mississippi, Texas, Arkansas and Oklahoma. The African American population of the City increased so dramatically in such a short span of time that, under the leadership of Fisk University’s Charles Johnson, a special study was conducted by over 100 different agencies to assess the impact. In 1944 the results were published in *The Negro War Worker in San Francisco*. Although the report suggested some changes it was still unclear what specific challenges this growing population would face in the decades to come and how African American San Franciscans would cope with issues such as

diminishing employment, a prolonged housing crisis and growing incidents of police brutality once the war ended. This book describes and explains the conditions of San Francisco's postwar African American population from 1945–1975 and, at least in part, attempts to fill in this missing section of history and give this community a voice and a place in the historical record.



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