Entangled in Flows of Capital: Gentrification and Policing in San Francisco’s Tenderloin District

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What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore—
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over—
like a syrupy sweet?

Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.

Or does it explode?

- Langston Hughes

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to the people of The Tenderloin and Mission districts in San Francisco, California. To the friends, families, and loved ones who remained amidst a sea of change, who marched together when our neighbors were gunned down by the SFPD, and to the Frisco Five, who held a hunger strike demanding justice for our loved ones. Our community deserves better than what our elected officials have given us - this will change. It must.

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Introduction

One day, while sweeping a sidewalk in 2020 as part of my fieldwork in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, I began to reflect on the fact that I had been sweeping the same trash off the ground for weeks. It just didn't go away. I asked myself why instead of looking at where the trash was coming from and dealing with it there, I spent so much time sweeping it off the sidewalk onto the street. I realized I was not solving any problems. Looking into the street, it felt like all the trash I'd been sweeping just kept piling up. I knew this wasn't the case, but something in me saw a pattern. I swept the cigarette butts, used needles, burnt fragments of aluminum, and other debris from the sidewalk into the street. From there, trash got collected into trucks that came and swept the curbs, only to be deported to a landfill, where it would sit until the landfill became too big, and was then shipped to an even bigger landfill somewhere else, perhaps in another part of my country, or another continent altogether. What happens to the problem, then? This reminded me of the rhetoric of development that has been deployed in San Francisco – neighborhood improvement seems to be everyone's goal, but in executing these programs, what ends up happening is a kind of sweeping of people, in which the problems of society have been inscribed, and with it, an assumption that making them disappear will also make the systemic problems of capitalism disappear alongside them. Layers of displacement collapsed onto one another like the waves of the pacific crashing onto the rocks below the Golden Gate. I wanted to drop the broom and run home. I felt complicit in the violence, sweeping trash out of sight. Was I? Are we?

In San Francisco, California, I have witnessed my neighborhood's transformation unfold over the last decade. Among the key moments in that transition are the 2008 economic crash that catalyzed real estate speculation the world over, the subsequent exodus of the black community in San Francisco, an increase in policing in particular neighborhoods, and an unfolding conflict

between "gentrifiers" and the "gentrified".[1] These movements are part of larger processes and are not themselves to blame for the changes that I witnessed in San Francisco's Mission District. In 2020, I started fieldwork in the Tenderloin, another neighborhood where the term gentrification was commonly used by locals to describe the changes happening around them. New coffee shops, galleries, and apartment complexes were sprouting up left and right in these two neighborhoods, and it seemed that most of the newcomers were white, middle-class, and college-educated. Sitting in coffee shops in both neighborhoods, I often pondered the way that newcomers perceived me, especially when they exhibited a kind of reflexivity at the moment when I revealed I was a native. One conversation that stands out, in particular, involves a white couple that moved into the Mission a few blocks from my grandmother's house who said, "Oh, so we must look like gentrifiers to you." The moment they said that, yes, though before that, they were just another white couple at the same coffee shop as me. The moment hung like a small decoration among a constellation of other significant moments – what does a gentrifier look like? Who are the gentrified? It was also around this time that the death of Alex Nieto rocked our neighborhood, sending a message to Latinos like myself that at any time, gentrifiers could call the police on us, and we would be executed within a minute of their arrival, as was the case when the two officers who responded to the call arrived at Bernal Hill Park.

This thesis reflects the completion of a project that started in 2019 when I volunteered with the Tenderloin Community Benefit District's Safe Passage program. It also is the culmination of a lifetime of wondering what gentrification was doing – beyond the literal meaning of the word, I had become curious to know more about how the word was being used in conversation, who was using

[1] For more on the means by which race was a key factor in urban revitalization projects, see: "Neoliberalism, Race and the Redefining of Urban Environment" by Christopher Mele. For more information on how the 2007/2009 economic crash affected the San Francisco Bay Area, see "Origins of an Urban Crisis: The Restructuring of the San Francisco Bay Area and the Geography of Foreclosure". This offers a well-detailed analysis of how the foreclosure crisis was concentrated primarily in the suburbs of the Bay Area, where predominantly ethnic and low-income minorities resided. For more on the increased policing that displaced black residents from the City of San Francisco, see "Policing the 'progressive' city: The Racialized Geography of drug law enforcement" by Lynch et al.

it, why, and in what particular contexts its meanings remained stable, or changing. I had become curious to know more about how we organized ourselves in relation to the word, as "gentrifiers" and as the "gentrified". In this thesis, which focuses explicitly on the Tenderloin district of San Francisco and treads lightly into the Mission as well, the term shall be unpacked, and its many uses unfolded before your eyes. Ultimately, what will be conveyed is the sense that gentrification is not one thing; there is no one person sitting in a room deciding where and what to gentrify. Rather, it is a social phenomenon composed of many intersecting processes on local, national, and global scales.

The goal of this research has been to find ways to engage in conversations regarding gentrification without needing to define who is on the side of gentrifying and who is on the side of being gentrified. Rather – my goal has been to elucidate the many historical processes that have been interwoven within our urban environment. Significant attention is paid to the increased policing that has occurred as gentrification spreads – and this requires a nuanced understanding. My goal is not to say that the police gentrified, nor is it to claim that they are the cause of gentrification pressures being amped up in particular neighborhoods. Rather, there is a strong correlation between where so-called "quality of life" policing has been practiced intensively and neighborhoods that have gentrified in San Francisco. The findings from this project are not intended to be expanded beyond the city of San Francisco. Rather, these findings are meant to support the communities where I was raised to come together to form a consensus on what has been going on in our city and build a sense of solidarity between our longtime locals and our new arrivals.

From the beginning of this project, I have known that the problem lies not in the people coming to San Francisco. Instead, I suspected, as I will lay out in the following pages, that gentrification is a process that grows in the crevices of a deteriorating social safety net, the racially motivated containment of problem populations in skid rows and ghettos, and the disproportionate policing of low-income and minority communities by the San Francisco Police Department.

Together, these processes have laid the groundwork for a speculative housing market that exploded after the 2007/2009 recession, leading to the conflicts between locals and newly arrived residents that we see today. These conflicts can sometimes turn fatal, as was the case with Alejandro (Alex) Nieto, who was killed by police while eating a burrito in his neighborhood after newly arrived residents assumed he was a threat to their safety. The gap between new residents and longtime locals is what I have endeavored to close with the information presented in this thesis. That while on the surface, we may appear diametrically opposed, there may actually be social threads that have entangled us all in the physical and cultural spaces where we live and work - threads that need to be addressed and discussed in order to facilitate a greater sense of solidarity amongst workers of across the spectrum of identities that exist in our society.

Theoretical Foundations

The gentrification problem is a complex one that, in order to be resolved, might start with an investigation of the term and where it came from. The term was coined in 1963 when sociologist Ruth Glass observed a pattern of middle-class tenants "returning" to inner-city London neighborhoods that were once filled with working-class residents. Her development of the term served as a reference to the "gentry" of the 19th century, the landed elite that commanded power not through a political office, but rather through their significant wealth, and ownership of the land[2]. Glass identified the process as being made up of "…physical improvements to housing stock, housing tenure changes from renting to owning, price rises and the displacement of the working class population by the new middle class" (2401). Almost a century later, the process looks very much the same, though some significant changes still exist. However, the problems that gentrification exacerbates were there to begin with; that is to say, they were present before particular neighborhoods saw their housing stock improved. San Francisco's Tenderloin district has

[2] Gentrification and the Middle-Class Remaking of Inner London, 1961 - 2001

historically been home to vice, its very name being a reference to an expensive cut of meat that police officers were rumored to dine on after taking bribes from local business and mafia interests[3]. The Mission district, where I grew up, had been battling drug trafficking and gang violence since the 90s when as a child, I was warned against wearing red or blue because of territorial disputes between the Bloods and the Crips, two gangs that had been at war with each other throughout the 90s and early 2000s. Gentrification did not create these problems, nor did it solve them. Rather, the issues of crime, racial segregation, and minority poverty have laid the groundwork for today's conflicts to explode, with the gentrification process using police to sweep problematized residents from larger areas into smaller ones, making real both Gloria and JaLil's claims of dispersion/containment. Supporting this claim is research done by Douglass Massey, of the University of Chicago, in 1990, who argued that an increase in minority poverty led to a dramatic increase in the concentration of poverty when it occurred within a racially segregated city, which in turn led to socioeconomic changes in these neighborhoods, leaving them deteriorated, riddled with crime, struggling with funding for public schools, and home to excessive mortality rates, and single-parent households[4]. One could point to multiple important events in the nation's history of economic and social reforms as having contributed to these problems, from Reagan's dismantling of the social safety net to Clinton's welfare reform of the 1990s, where the narrative of "welfare queens and super predators" was used to justify a transition to "workfare" and an increase in police funding to support a war on drugs. Other important factors include transformation's in the nation's economy, where industrial labor and manufacturing jobs were outsourced to cheaper labor pools outside of the US and were replaced instead with the service sector, which provided low wages, and jobs in tech that required a college education, something that our nations education system has struggled to

[3] *The Tenderloin,* by Randy Shaw

[4] American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass

provide for millions, especially those from minority, lower-class, black, brown and indigenous communities.

Neil Smith, perhaps one of the most fundamental theorists in gentrification scholarship to date, first wrote his “rent gap” thesis as a doctoral student at John Hopkins University in 1979. Smith’s critical contribution to the theorization of gentrification, articulated in his article “Toward a Theory of Gentrification" was that the gentrification process is facilitated by the development of rent gaps, which he defined as “…the disparity between the potential ground rent level and the actual ground rent capitalized under the present land use” (Smith 1979). This disparity is itself a product of a speculative housing market that undergoes changes brought about by a series of preceding processes, including redlining, blockbusting, and abandonment. Redlining and blockbusting have followed historically racialized patterns, with blockbusting having been practiced early on by real estate agents who exploited racist sentiments held by property owners by promising a decline in real estate values with the arrival of black residents (Smith 1979). Following this, properties were purchased at below-market rates, only to be resold to black families at a considerable markup. Redlining, on the other hand, is the refusal to administer loans to residents of particular neighborhoods, most of which were black and minority communities. Together, these processes funnel a rapid decline in property values, generating what Smith termed the “rent gap”. As rent gaps widen, the areas in which they thrive become alluring targets for capital reinvestment – fueling a movement of capital that led Smith to conceptualize gentrification as a “…back to the city movement of capital, not people” (Smith 1979). Smith’s articulation of the rent gap serves as an important analysis for understanding how changes in industrial production affect labor (i.e., from factory work concentrating laborers in inner cities to factories being expropriated overseas, and the new application-based ‘gig economy and the corresponding tech boom), have not only led to the restructuring of the urban landscape of San Francisco but also how the flow of capital has

restructured configurations of race and access to vital resources such as healthcare and housing. Specifically, in the Tenderloin, rent gaps have been facilitated by not only redlining and blockbusting, but also through the process of containment, whereby crime and services for low-income, and marginalized communities are contained in the most dense and diverse neighborhood San Francisco.

The rent gap, as it has unfolded in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, unfolded in the Tenderloin district alongside containment strategies that have been enforced by heavy-handed policing strategies keeping problem populations from spilling over into neighboring districts. As the rent gap expanded in the neighborhood, the flow of capital into San Francisco since the mid-1990s has risen following the election of pro-growth candidate Willie Brown, whose coalition of business and development interests transformed the city into a hub for the emerging digital economy (Hu 2012). Since Brown, the city has become a "growth machine" for the tech industry, with former Mayor Ed Lee creating tax incentives that exempted companies valued over $250,000 from paying payroll taxes (Hu 2012). Since the arrival of tech in the Tenderloin, the demographics of the neighborhood have changed, with the number of Whites increasing 2.5 percent, the number of Asians increasing 8 percent, and the Black population declining by 6 percent (Alfrey 2018). The median income for Tenderloin residents in 2015 was $15,000, while the average income for newly arrived tech employees in the neighborhood was $100,000 (Alfrey 2018). The neighborhood has since become a site wherein extreme poverty rubs shoulders with extreme privilege – in a sense, a microcosm for the rising gap between the rich and the poor that has characterized the nation's economy over the past two decades. To abate this, Mayor Lee included Community Benefit Agreements into the tax breaks extended to tech companies, requiring that they commit their employees to volunteering for a certain number of hours in the neighborhood each month (Alfrey 2018).

The idea adopted by City Hall's pro-tech growth policies has been that in bringing wealthier residents into the district, their wealth would spill over into the district itself. This has been referred to as "compassionate capitalism", which is characterized as "…philanthropic commitments that accompany corporate development efforts in underserved neighborhoods" (Alfrey 2018). These commitments, however, do more for tech companies themselves than they do for the community, as researchers who conducted interviews with tech employees regarding their CBA-mandated volunteering experiences in the Tenderloin. To be clear, while volunteering at a neighborhood soup kitchen may indeed help the people who are served by the kitchen that day, it is not a solution to the long-standing systemic problems that have been concentrated in the Tenderloin since the decline of manufacturing in the 1970s. Systemic problems require systemic solutions, and CBAs are more branding campaigns for tech companies than they are solutions to the Tenderloin's multiple ongoing crisis. Compassionate capitalism, as articulated by Lauren Alfrey, serves as a useful tool for understanding how City Hall has sought to use the flow of capital into the city to address the neighborhoods problems, through gestures that could be considered more symbolic than substantive. The same idea can be used to understand San Francisco's Community Benefit Districts/ Business Improvement District (CBD/BID) plan, which went into effect in the city in 2004, right around the time that Tech companies were settling into the city.

There are significant contradictions in how the city of San Francisco has addressed its marginalized, low-income communities, and how the city has branded itself on the national stage, as a liberal bastion, and home to a progressive political base. Moreover, these contradictions trickle-down into the assemblages of care that low-income, houseless and recovering addicts must navigate to access vital resources such as treatment and housing. Following Neil Smith's 1979 rent gap thesis on the flow of capital, what has been revealed is that while the city has steadily pulled back on social services for the poor, and concentrated them in the Tenderloin district, it has also pursued an

intensive project of urban revitalization through its Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) and Community Benefit Districts/Business Improvement Districts (CBDs/BIDs). These projects, while branded as "urban revitalization" by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD), are in fact, state-sponsored projects intended on guiding the multiple interconnected phenomena that constitute the gentrification process in San Francisco's neighborhoods.

In short, gentrification has become the method by which the state of California, through Community Benefit Districts like the TLCBD, which seek to manage the degree to which particular neighborhoods become gentrified. This process is constituted of multiple institutions working separately on paper, but in conjunction regarding their purpose – sweeping the poor, disabled, and mentally ill populations of low-income neighborhoods out of sight and replacing them with higher-income residents. The SFPD's strategy of containment serves as a strategy for preventing these struggling residents from spilling over into the neighboring districts, while increasing the rates of crime, violence and overdose-related deaths to historic highs in the district, culminating in the most recent "state of emergency" declared by the current mayor of San Francisco. Together, these economic and social changes have produced a highly racialized pattern of policing that has steadily reduced the black population in the city since 1971, while steadily increasing the population of White and Asian residents over the same period. In conclusion, Smith's assertion that gentrification is a "back to the city movement of capital, not people" stands true – though the contribution of this essay has been to outline how the flows of capital Smith alluded to in his text have contributed to a highly racialized pattern of policing that has steadily displaced the black community, exiling them either to the suburbs, or imprisoning them at rates that are disproportionate to their population in the city. Indeed, the city of San Francisco remains a "progressive dystopia", having failed for the last few decades to live up to its promise of social justice and progressive politics.

Methods: Volunteering for Community Benefit Districts in San Francisco

The methods I used in completing this project included volunteering at a community run organization named the Tenderloin Community Benefit District (TLCBD). This included the Safe Passage program, which was aimed at making the streets safer for families and students to commute to and from school and work during the week. While volunteering at the the TLCBD, I also conducted interviews with a few of the employees who ran the organizations various departments. Among them were JaLil Turner, director of the Safe Passage program, and Kevin Thomason, from the Lower Polk Community Benefit District (LPCBD). Additionally, I met with Gloria Wilder, former head of pharmacy for the San Francisco Public Health Department (SFDPH), who provided me with key insights regarding the transformation of the Civic Center area near one of the many pharmacies she oversaw during her time with the SFDPH. Finally, observations from community meetings between local business owners, doctors from the newly opened Sutter Health Hospital on Van Ness Avenue, and local police officers provide key a larger vignette into how the solutions to the Tenderloin's problems with homelessness, the opioid epidemic, and crime were being created and discussed by these three influential parties.

My fieldwork with the Tenderloin Community Businesses District (TLCBD) stands out simply because it is where I spent a significant amount of my time. Before delving into the observations themselves, I would like to explain what the TLCBD is and how it functions in the neighborhood. In a study published in 2012 and commissioned by the Office of Economic and Workforce Development (OEWD) of San Francisco, the city's 12 Community Benefit Districts / Business Improvement Districts (CBDs/BIDs) were found to have exceeded the expectations of their organizers by significant margins. These expectations included criteria that were intended to benefit primarily property owners and local merchants (Ellicott and Pagan 2012). The plan, inspired originally by a similar project in Toronto, Canada, sought to "…catalyze neighborhood

revitalization and development", especially in depressed neighborhoods like the Tenderloin. The study repeatedly mentions that the goals of the CBD/BID project in San Francisco is to generate "higher revenues for district merchants; stabilization or growth in property values; new jobs and streets that are safer and cleaner than before" (Ellicott and Pagan 2012). In the entire study, there is only one mention of resident's interests, namely, that "CBDs/BIDs are accountable to property owners, business and residents…." (Ellicott and Pagan 2012). What exactly that accountability looks like remains unclear, as the rest of the study goes into great detail as to how CBDs/BIDs are funded (an assessment levied on property owners based on the square footage of their properties), how long they are to last once created (after receiving the support of at least 30 percent of the property owners in the district, they are given a 15 year tenure). Among the benefits that CBDs/BIDs have brought into their respective districts, the study outlines a few principle findings: (1)districts with CBDs were reportedly cleaner, safer, and better maintained than those without CBDs/BIDs, (2) CBDs/BIDs have reportedly experienced declining rates of crime, (3) CBDs/BIDs were insulated from the effects of the '07/'09 recession, (4) CBDs/BIDs raised significant revenue from "non-assessment sources" (donations and grants), (5) CBDs/BIDs have leveraged community support (though this statistic merely refers to the number of people employed by CBDs/BIDs, not all of whom are from or even live in the respective CBDs/BIDs where they work), and (5) the scale of CBDs/BIDs (in terms of revenue raised from both assessment and non-assessment sources) is correlated with the level of improvements documented in their respective districts (Ellicott and Pagan 2012). All of these statistics appear fantastic on paper, yet the Tenderloin does not seem to be benefitting as much as the OEWD study would like one to believe. Indeed, the neighborhood remains as troubled as ever, with recent spikes in crime, and overdose related deaths causing Mayor London Breed to declare a state of emergency in the district in 2021.

The Tenderloin Containment Zone

San Francisco's Tenderloin district is situated in the center of the city itself, bordering the commercial district of Union Square, the upscale residential neighborhood of Nob Hill, the infamous Polk Street district with its many bars and restaurants, and finally, Market Street, itself one of the main arteries of San Francisco since its inception the 1800's. The Tenderloin's history is a storied one, starting with the construction of worker residencies during the Gold Rush, brothels, and bars later on, continuing with its eventual association with the early gay rights movement, vice, gambling, and drug trafficking in the middle of the 1900's, to the present day, where it is now one of the city's most contentious neighborhoods, and at the center of the opioid epidemic, with a staggering rate of deaths happening daily due to drug addiction, homelessness, and street violence (Lopez, 2020). All of these transformations occurred in the midst of large-scale shifts in manufacturing and industrial labor throughout the 20th century which saw the eventual decline of manufacturing and industrial jobs and the rise of the "dot com" industry, and global tech corporations who have since dominated the narratives of change and job development in the city since the mid 1990's (Hu, 2011). During these transformations, urban revitalization projects have been advanced by political regimes that have debated over whether to encourage the city to transform itself into a hub for the new era of service and technology based jobs, or to enhance protections for local and small businesses native to the city. Both have had as their focus the objective of combatting the stagnation of urban centers, particularly the Tenderloin and its bordering neighborhoods. These revitalization projects have been touted as being directly beneficial to property and business owners, were sold as beneficial to residents of these districts and their communities. The eventual development of Community Business Districts/Business Improvement Districts (CBDs/BIDs) was touted as a means of addressing the needs of locals who demanded cleaner and safer streets, while also prioritizing the steady growth of capital for property owners.

In many ways, what I witnessed throughout my time volunteering with the TLCBD was a kind of paradoxical move wherein the desire to serve and improve the community was recognized, and also conflated with recourse to police force, the displacement of houseless communities, and at times, mentally unstable individuals. The ways in which the TLCBD walked the fine line between meeting the demands of business owners, local residents, local police chiefs, and their own moral and ethical values reveals much about how gentrification is a complex process that pulls each of us into webs of relation with people who we might not think are our allies or adversaries.

An example of this would be one morning, when training with JaLil at the TLCBD for the Safe Passage program which he was in charge of, I found myself mimicking the language and protocols of police officers – practicing code words for different kinds of problems, using walkie-talkies to communicate with the team, and in a sense, policing the individuals on the street who were openly selling drugs, occupying the sidewalk with tents, and working at a crosswalk where I would often times order drives to slow down or outright come to a stop to let families and commuters get by. I was, to put it in a simple term, a traffic guard.

During this period, I often thought about how gentrification was producing this. The businesses who contributed to this fund were mostly new to the neighborhood, with a few exceptions, and were concerned with cleaning up the neighborhood to boost foot traffic, and hopefully their profit margins. Many individuals I spoke with felt trapped between their business interests, and trying not to partake in the violent cycle of displacement that had come to define the experience of low-income, and houseless communities living in the district. Niko, for example, a small-business owner who opened a retail shop in the Tenderloin, openly tried negotiating with the people who would set up cardboard boxes in front of her shop when she was closed, trying to find a path forward where she didn't call the police on them, and they didn't obstruct foot traffic when potential customers were walking the streets. Others, like Kevin who worked at the neighboring

CBD, recognized that the CBDs could be recognized as tools of the gentrifiers, and sought to work from within these systems to address the needs of marginalized and low-income communities.

In our interactions, Kevin claimed that the CBDs sought to manage gentrification, because if the process went too far, the neighborhood would lose its "character", the thing he claimed brought people there in the first place. Both Kevin and Niko demonstrated to me a kind of nuance in the gentrification process – neither wanted to be gentrifiers, yet both recognized that their particular positions could easily be recognized as such. Moreover, both recognized that the resources most readily available for them to call upon, including police, health and human services, and the Department of Public Health (DPH), did not address the root of social problems, and in fact exercised strategies that only exacerbated the problems that gentrification was known to produce, displacement, alienation, and an unbearable increase in the cost of living for locals. Police officers themselves expressed similar sentiments, when, in one community meeting between local business owners, the police captain of the Tenderloin district, and a team of doctors from the newly constructed Sutter Hospital campus on Van Ness Avenue met to discuss strategies regarding homelessness, drug abuse, and improving the neighborhood.

Officers in this meeting discussed their struggle with being the primary point of contact for local business owners dealing with mentally unstable, and homeless populations – stating clearly that there was little they could do to address theses issues short of arresting and detaining people, a solution that only temporarily took people off the street. The experience of these police officers was valid, especially since, following significant changes towards mental health care, where welfare reform and social spending were adjusted to encourage "workfare" in the early neoliberal era, and mental health illnesses such as bipolar disorder and schizophrenia were criminalized[5] and left to the police to deal with. Between 1980 and 1992, the nation saw a 154 percent increase in the number of

[5] Rembis, "Madness and Mass Incarceration in the Neoliberal Era"

incarcerated mentally ill people. This has led to confessions like the one I overheard from the officers that day, who remarked that police are not equipped to deal with these issues, and as members of the CBD seek to renovate the neighborhood, more and more often, police are the ones they call to deal with mentally ill, or unhoused people on the street.

Interviews and transcripts from community meetings in the Tenderloin reveal the ways in which these changes are discussed by local business owners and police in intimate settings, where, rather than the word gentrification, other goals are discussed, such as business development, neighborhood renewal, public health and sanitation, among others. While the Frisco Five are demanding that the city defunds the police, local business owners in the Tenderloin are demanding more police on the streets to address issues that the police themselves recognize they are ill-equipped to deal with. One officer went so far to admit that regarding the systemic issues of homelessness and drug-abuse in the neighborhood, “We’re not going to arrest ourselves out of it”[6].

Drawing on an interdisciplinary body of research, this article argues that CBDs/BIDs are in fact organizations designed to manage the direction and progression of gentrification [7]in neighborhoods like the Tenderloin, where social problems have been concentrated and allowed to fester at the expense of public health and safety. While the Office of Economic and Workforce Development in San Francisco has argued that since their inception CBDs/BIDs have exceeded their expectations in terms of improving commercial revenue and the quality of life in their respective districts, the Tenderloin has witnessed a trajectory that counters this narrative. Residents themselves express frustration over how the rest of the city seems to have gentrified, while their neighborhood has become more dangerous, and populated with more homeless encampments and cases of drug addiction than ever before (Knight, 2022). Another important argument made in this

[6] Community meeting transcript, October 30th 2019

[7] Managing gentrification is a how CBDs were described in an interview with a CBD administrator.

paper is that while CBDs/BIDs seek to manage gentrification in the Tenderloin, their efforts are hampered by the San Francisco Police Department (SFPD) and City Hall's strategy of "containment", which has been long documented in the neighborhood by local non-profit organizations, mainstream news organizations, residents, and social science researchers (Shaw 2015, Miguel 2022, Mona et al., 2013, Nevius 2021, Lynch et. Al. 2013, Lopez 2020). Containment here refers to the containing of homeless populations, drug trafficking, prostitution, and social services for the aforementioned in the Tenderloin by the SFPD.

A microcosm of this exists in the Tenderloin itself, where, one day while walking with the TLCBD's Safe Passage director, Jalil, I asked why one block on Turk street appeared so full of people. There was a stark contrast to the street on the other side. JaLil explained to me that this block was referred to as "shooter's alley" for it's high crime rate. The block looked so packed now because the people who occupied it once also occupied to the other blocks on Turk street. However, after a recent remodel was done to a building, the police maintained a more constant presence and the group's activities moved across the street. The process repeated itself with every new remodel, every new building purchased and converted into a new retail or apartment complex meant a corresponding displacemt/containment of people. This example outlines the ways in which gentrification is related to an increase in violence for some, and the realization of better neighborhoods for others. We were all living on one side or another of that intersection. Either we could afford to access the newly remodeled residences, or, we were left on the streets, and thrust, either with police force, or through the sharp increase in housing, farther away, on the other side of traffic, out of sight, and temporarily out of mind.

The SFPD practices containment in the Tenderloin by engaging in intensive "quality of life" policing strategies, including coercive, nonconsensual searches of Tenderloin resident's occupancies, and expending significant resources on policing the neighborhood. In 2010 alone, the

rate of drug-related police contacts in the Tenderloin were “…two-and-one-half times greater than the next highest district” (Lynch et al. 2013). Even more staggering is the fact that in 2010 30% of all drug-related police contact made by SFPD in San Francisco occurred in the Tenderloin, despite the neighborhood being home to only 3% of the city’s population (Lynch et al. 2013). All of this follows a trend nationwide regarding the containment of minority, and low-income communities that sociologists going back to the 1960s have studied under the label “urban segregation” (Massey 1990, Wacquant and Wilson 1989). Douglass Massey’s data, collected in 1970, argue that since the 1970s, the urban poor have been more geographically concentrated in the inner city, with the trend being far more acute for blacks and minorities than other populations (Massey 1990). Counter to other social scientists of the era, Massey argued that the transformation of inner-city ghettoes into primarily black and minority enclaves was not the result of “white flight”, but rather, that “…racial segregation was the key factor responsible for the social transformation of the black community and the concentration of poverty in the 1970s” (Massey 1990). Furthermore, Massey argued that increases in the concentration of poverty in a racially segregated city is associated with increases in crime, poor education, and excessive mortality (Massey 1990).

Massey’s models apply to San Francisco, which, in the 1970s was a highly segregated city, demonstrated both by Massey’s own research in the Bay Area during the 70’s and criticized openly during a visit by writer, and activist James Baldwin in 1966, who commented on the discrimination blacks faced in achieving employment, “To get to the most meager opportunity, you’ve got to be five times as good as anyone else around” (Knight 2018). The Tenderloin, being the neighborhood where poverty has been concentrated since the 1970s has seen a steady increase in crime and violence, to the point that in 2021, Mayor London Breed declared a “state of emergency” regarding the sharp increase in the number of deaths happening in the neighborhood due to drug overdoses (Woodrow 2021).

The combination of San Francisco's CBD/BID program, with its policy of containment in the Tenderloin has led to a contradictory social landscape that parallels the "Progressive Dystopia" that anthropologist Savanna Shange illustrated in her ethnography of a social-justice oriented school in San Francisco's east side (Shange 2019). While Shange deployed the term with regard to the high rate of black and minority students being targeted for suspension and punishment in a school that was intended to embrace the ideals of Black Lives Matter and the progressive legacy of San Francisco itself, her definition of the term works when discussing San Francisco's citywide promises of community benefits to be bestowed upon residents after City Hall offered significant tax breaks to tech companies like Twitter and Yelp for setting up their headquarters in its struggling city-center neighborhoods.

Anthropologist Andrea M. Lopez illustrates the same contradiction in her fieldwork conducted in the Tenderloin district with drug abuse and addiction treatment centers in the neighborhood (Lopez 2018). Lopez demonstrates that the urban precariat is "…governed simultaneously by two logics of intervention that are highly contradictory: compassion and brutality" (Lopez 2018). Lopez spent nearly two decades working with low-income, marginalized women who navigated the complex assemblages of San Francisco's drug outreach and treatment centers, arguing eventually that these institutions, and the bodies of the women themselves were governed by a necropolitical regime that subjected them to years of bodily suffering throughout their lives, marking their bodies as disabled "beyond the point of no return" in order to receive SSI benefits such as monetary aid and housing (Lopez 2018). Even then, when housing was provided, it was situated in the Tenderloin's "containment zone", right alongside streets filled with the dealers that recovering addicts formerly frequented. Lopez ultimately concludes that the contradictions between providing care and marking patients for death inhibits their ability to recover and survive, demonstrating that within the assemblages of care the city provides, there exists a "politics of

death" that has become embedded within the city's institutional and cultural structures (Lopez 2018). Lopez cites the significance of the war on drugs in the development of a naturalized approach to treating drug use as one of criminalization, and disciplinary regimes that seek to "maintain order" through controlling access to care. This argument, advanced by Lopez, is taken further in the following segment, wherein the rise of a security landscape has not only criminalized drug use, but also shaped the path that gentrification has taken within the city of San Francisco.

Since its beginnings, the war on drugs has justified the funneling of millions of dollars into police departments around the nation by state and federal governments. In San Francisco in particular, the neighborhoods in which drug trafficking was most heavily policed are the same neighborhoods that have become gentrification battlegrounds, illustrating what activists working at the Anti-Gentrification Mapping Project have claimed for years now, that: "Police are the shock troops of gentrification" (Maharawal 2018). The execution of the war on drugs has followed a highly racialized course in San Francisco, with more arrests being made in racially diverse neighborhoods than white neighborhoods, and blacks convicted of felonies being 28 times more likely to be sent to prison than whites (Lynch et al. 2013). Since the 1970s, the same decade during which the war on drugs was announced, the black population in San Francisco has steadily declined from 13.4% to 6.1% in 2010 (Lynch et al. 2013). Evidence of the racial disparities in policing are plentiful: in 2013 the black population of San Francisco was only about 6%, yet blacks made up 56% of the prison population (Maharawal 2018). Nationwide, between 1980 and 200, the arrest rate for Blacks increased from 6.5 to 29.1 per 1000 persons, as opposed to an increase for Whites from 3.5 to 4.6 (Lynch et al. 2013). Finally, regionally, blacks make up about 7% of the population in the Bay Area (including Oakland, Alameda, Marin, San Jose and more), yet account for 27% of those killed by police (Peele et al. 2020). Herein lies the point where Shange's conceptualization of San Francisco as a "progressive dystopia" is made most apparent – since the 1970s San Francisco has

transformed itself into a global center for technological innovation, and has made significant improvements to its public and private infrastructure. Yet – those improvements have come with a steady exodus of black and minority residents amidst an eviction epidemic that has targeted primarily black and minority low-income neighborhoods in what anthropologist Manissa Maharawal has called the "suburbanization of poverty" (Maharawal 2017). What all of this alludes to is that in the city of San Francisco, long championed as a liberal bastion for minorities, immigrants, and the LGBTQ++ community, there is a disturbing contradiction between who, in the words of Henry Lefebvre, may access their "right to the city" (Purcell 2002), and who is expelled through violent encounters with police, and an explosive speculative housing market. The racialized execution of policing and the subsequent restructuring of the urban environment are the two phenomena that sit at the core of our analysis, to which this paper will now turn its focus to in an effort to unpack how the interconnected system of institutions that constitute the gentrification process have transformed the sociocultural landscape of San Francisco from the 1970s to today.

Unraveling the Many Threads of Gentrification in San Francisco

The criticisms levied towards gentrification in this paper thus far are important – namely, that the promise of neighborhood improvement is unequally realized, and looks more like a police occupation to communities where a pattern of officer-involved shootings are followed by non-guilty convictions have created an atmosphere of fear and frustration. However, throughout my fieldwork in San Francisco, interviews with San Francisco natives, such as Gloria Wilder, the former director of pharmacy at the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) brought up many questions regarding health care, gentrification, and the long-term systemic problems the city has faced for generations now. Gloria is a native of the city, and worked for 10 years in the DPH to improve its programs and services.

During our interview, Gloria outlined for me how gentrification looked to her, and how the 2008 economic crisis crippled the DPH during a period when drug addiction was spiraling out of control due to the ensuing the opioid epidemic. According to Gloria, the gentrification of the mid-market area over the last ten years resulted in homeless populations being pushed from that area closer to her pharmacy, where she saw both positive and negative outcomes. On the one hand, it meant that these people were closer to a pharmacy that could provide the necessary medication to help people combat their illnesses and addictions. On the other hand, it made things more dangerous for her and her staff as they navigated the alley outside of the pharmacy on their way to and from work. It got so bad that at one point, employees completely stopped using the the alley for fear of running into trouble. Furthermore, Gloria contested the narrative of containment, likening it instead to "dispersion", where homeless people were shuffled around, with not stability for them, or neighbors living in the district. She recognized that before the gentrification of the midmarket area, nobody seemed to mind their presence. It wasn't until 2009, when Twitter bought a building in the middle of downtown that these homeless people were being pushed away from the area, into the Tenderloin, where today, Jalil and his team at the TLCBD work on finding ways for families and their children to navigate the streets safely, while avoiding confrontations. Most of the recently developed areas, including the Transbay Terminal, South of Market, and Mission Bay areas were once places where homeless and people engaging in deviance could reside without being hassled. Today, all of these areas have been redeveloped, and the people who once occupied them have since been concentrated into smaller and smaller areas.

While Jalil talks about containment, Gloria talks about dispersion, exhibiting a kind of push and pull that is indicative of the post-revanchist strategies that San Francisco has engaged in over the last ten years. Walking from her house in North Beach, to Jalil's office in the Tenderloin, I ponder her last question to me regarding her disapproval of the word gentrification and how it

frames improving bad neighborhoods in a negative light, “Do we really want to preserve neighborhoods where people are walking around untreated, and houses are dilapidated?”[8]

Gloria’s question served as an important touchstone in the gentrification debate that I had entered. The gap between the neighborhood development, realized in the construction of new condos and hospitals, and the neighbors who can access them, demonstrated by the cost of living (about $1320 per square foot), and the construction of barricades outside of new hospitals to keep homeless and deviant populations away, reveals so much about what works and what doesn’t work with gentrification. Her criticism of the word itself also hails a kind of social register – who uses the word and why. Gloria’s question has an obvious answer for me – of course I want to see neighborhoods improved. One would find it hard to walk around the city like Gloria did during her tenure at the DPH, tiptoeing over used needles and human excrement, and say to oneself, this needs to be preserved. At the same time, living in the city and seeing how much the Mission has improved, while witnessing an increase in officer-involved killings of black and brown natives doesn’t seem like an improvement.

Conclusion: A Movement of Capital

Local writer, Rebecca Solnit published a piece in the Guardian where she made the claim that “gentrification killed Alex Nieto”. In her piece, Solnitt unpacks the events leading to Nieto’s death, where gentrifying residents clashed with Nieto earlier in the day, and later on described him as possibly being a member of a gang. Police later made the same claim when justifying their actions – claiming that his 49ers jacket was a sign of possible gang affiliation, an ironic claim give the ubiquity of team-themed clothing in San Francisco. The truth is that Nieto was a community college student committed to serving his community, with the hopes of working with formerly incarcerated people looking to start life once again outside of prison. However, the discourse

[8] Interview Transcript, Februrary 6th, 2020

regarding his appearance constructed him as a menace, and as a threat to the newly-formed social order in the Mission District. This newly-formed social order as I have described it, unfolds as a result of gentrification, and is why in the Mission district I make the claim that gentrification represents the making of white space, a space wherein non-white bodies are heavily surveilled[9], and assumed to be linked to the "iconic ghetto"[10], such that they must first prove themselves as not-criminal before their presence can be tolerated. The effect of this "iconic ghetto", itself a symbol of social problems located within the bodies of black, brown and non-white populations, is a sort of predetermined criminality – the black body is criminality, and it's very presence in the white space poses a threat to social order.

Paying close attention to how Nieto's body was described by members of the court during the 8 day trial reveals much about how significant a factor race played in the assumption that Nieto was a threat to the community. Take for example Evan Snow, a dogwalker who allowed his dog to chase Nieto around the park earlier that day while he was trying to relax and eat a burrito. The two got into an argument when Nieto demanded that Snow do something about the dog, and allegedly aimed his taser at the dog and Snow, after being cornered on a bench with the husky howling at him. Snow later admitted to using a racial slur at the end of their argument, which he repeated in court "…as if it were harmless for him to do so"[11]. Snow was later reported to have remarked that had this incident occurred in Florida, he would have been entitled to kill Nieto then and there, inadvertently foreshadowing what was to occur only hours later, and creating a relay over to the recent killing of Travon Martin, a teenager who's only crime was being black and wearing a hoodie in the wrong place and wrong time. From then on, Nieto's appearance as an intimidating Latino male would constantly be referred to, with the police eventually describing him as a superhuman

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[9] Anderson, Elijah. "The White Space"

[11] 59 Shots: Closing Arguments in the Nieto Case

who charged at them, withstood multiple gun wounds, and even while bleeding on the ground apparently kept his taser aimed at them from a prone position. Again, police would claim that his 49ers jersey left open the possibility that he was affiliated with gangs, a claim that clearly indicates the differences in being a brown or black male wearing sports-affiliated clothing, and being a white one.

The most challenging part of this project thus far has been unraveling the ways in which intentions and actions often get entangled, such that accusing the police as an entire entity obscures the reality that in their own eyes and actions, they are responding to calls of distress from residents in newly gentrified and gentrifying neighborhoods. One of the goals of this paper has been to demonstrate how individuals are pulled into interactions with others where larger processes and sociocultural processes are at work, guiding preconceived notions of bodies and actions, with fatal consequences for some, and no consequences whatsoever for others. Another goal is to demonstrate how gentrification as a process is referred to by different groups. Take for example the words of Edwin Lindo, a member of the Frisco Five, a group of activists from San Francisco who went on a hunger strike and rallied a movement to demand justice following the killing of Nieto, Mario Woods, and Luis Gongora Pat:

"Gentrification is a huge issue and it's why we have criminalization, and the killing of the black and brown community. What's ironic is that we are starving ourselves for justice in a city that has been starving our communities for decades. It continues to do it. It leaves people on the streets living in tents. It is pushing black communities to less than three percent of this population. This is not by chance. It has been calculated and planned. We are starving ourselves because the discomfort that we feel is nothing like what these victims felt. When I think of my hunger, I think of the 59 bullets going through Alex Nieto. And that's what keeps me here."

Mission and Tenderloin residents are grappling with the results of such policies, with the influx of middle-class, mostly white residents only exacerbating the problems that have gone unaddressed for so long.

Nieto's death was a critical moment in my neighborhood. It should have never happened. To blame it on gentrification is an important step in generating a dialogue on how recent changes to the neighborhood have affected our communities. However, the problem, like most social problems, goes much deeper, reaching decades into the past to economic, social and cultural reforms that have coalesced into particular neighborhoods, with social deviance being mapped through language and culture onto the bodies of some through the gaze of a white social register of others. This paper has sought to achieve a balance in perspectives, recognizing that there is not one person, group or institution to blame, but rather, a collection of decisions, policies, and institutional actors congealed into a process that is people by many, not all of whom are as homicidal as it would appear. It entangles many on opposite sides, homeowners who work in medicine, to local organizers looking to make streets safer for families. Police officers trying to do their best while also recognizing that they are not trained to deal with particular problems are on the forefront of gentrification pressures – where they are often deployed as the shock troops of neighborhood transformation. Like the broom in my hand, sweeping these problems into the street won't solve anything, the same way that sending an untrained officer with a gun and a badge into situations where chronic poverty and a lack of social funding for mental health care have created crisis after crisis won't produce anything positive. Instead, a long list of names has been inscribed, Alex Nieto, Mario Woods, Luis Gongora Pat, and Oscar Grant are only a few. All of whom deserved so much more, lives that could have unfolded freely, in tandem with their families and friends.

Conclusion

Since my fieldwork the world has changed tremendously. A global pandemic unfolded, and our lives were thrust into chaos. The process of producing this thesis was interrupted by one traumatic event after another, as all our lives undoubtedly have been. The culmination of it all led to my departure from the United States - for after having researched this problem thoroughly came the killing of George Floyd, an example of police brutality that shocked the nation, and prompted many into action. For two weeks I marched in the streets of San Francisco and Oakland, California, in a landscape that had been drastically militarized - both against the virus, and the peoples movement to demand police accountability. Police from all over the Bay Area lined the streets of downtown San Francisco on the day of a popular protest on Market street, just blocks away from the Tenderloin district. As I passed through the district to take a glance at how the pandemic was being dealt with here, I made a chilling observation. Homeless populations had been rounded up and contained in the small space between the San Francisco Public Library's Main Branch and the Asian Art Museum in Civic Center. The containment strategy had intensified tremendously, concentrating the most precariously positioned population into a small, fenced-off area the size of one or two city blocks. I reached out to JaLil as the pandemic unfolded and found out that the Safe Passage program had been temporarily shut down. A bleak shadow had been cast on a district that had already been experiencing disrepair and disinvestment.

Whether or not gentrification remains the strategy that San Francisco chooses to pursue remains to be seen. The benefits of gentrification, those that can be listed under the banner of urban development, ought to be accessible to everyone, including those who are experiencing homelessness, and who are in need of access to mental healthcare resources. What this thesis has endeavored to demonstrate is that the increased policing that occurs in gentrifying neighborhoods such as the Tenderloin and Mission districts has directly contributed to an exodus of the black

population, and a sharp increase in shootings where black and brown bodies are killed by those who have pledged to serve and protect their respective communities. Through community meetings and one-on-one interviews with residents, program coordinators and other stakeholders, I have demonstrated how increased policing is often times requested by new residents, and local business owners, though the police themselves recognize that they cannot be the solution to problems that go beyond their capacity - namely, chronic homelessness, drug addiction and other mental health emergencies. If cities are to continue pursuing redevelopment projects in struggling neighborhoods, more needs to be done regarding the care and access to essential resources that residents are allowed. The state of the Tenderloin district today demonstrates that the problems of the neighborhood have only been compounded yet again, as the district has witnessed an uptick in deaths related to the opioid epidemic. Addressing this requires that the city's planners pay, local business owners, and all other vested interests consider other options to dealing with the neighborhoods issues - options beyond relying on increased policing, to address the systemic problems such as chronic homelessness, drug abuse and poverty that have been concentrated in the neighborhood for decades now.

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