

**Trouble in Paradise:**  
*Postwar History of San Francisco's Hunters Point Neighborhood*

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## Introduction:

Once home to a world-class Naval Shipyard, San Francisco's Hunters Point neighborhood now struggles for decent housing conditions, public safety, economic opportunity, and a living environment free of environmental toxins. The 1974 closure of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, once the economic and social hub of the neighborhood, left Hunters Point with a legacy of enduring social and economic structural problems. The conditions in Hunters Point, however, stand in stark contrast to the prosperity that permeates the surrounding San Francisco Bay Area. For instance, while the infant mortality rate for the city of San Francisco is low,<sup>1</sup> the infant mortality rate in the Hunters Point neighborhood is the highest of *any* zip code area in the state of California.<sup>2</sup> In addition, in 2007 the San Francisco Housing Authority found that seven out of the city's eight most distressed public housing projects are located in, or very near to, Hunters Point.<sup>3</sup> These statistics reflect the gravity of the many challenges that currently face the Hunters Point community, including high rates of poverty, devastating gang violence and crime rates, inadequate housing, and limited employment opportunities.

Yet Hunters Point has not always faced such grave social and economic challenges. Before World War II and the construction of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, the Hunters Point neighborhood was both economically prosperous and racially diverse. In the last half-century, Hunters Point has transitioned from a thriving maritime neighborhood to a marginalized urban ghetto, while the surrounding city has boomed. This thesis analyzes the history of Hunters Point, in relation to local and national postwar political and economic trends, in order to identify the

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<sup>1</sup> DCYF 2005.

<sup>2</sup> Lechuk 2006.

<sup>3</sup> HOPE SF 2007.

factors that catalyzed and institutionalized neighborhood poverty in Hunters Point. In examining the postwar development of the Hunters Point neighborhood, I argue that the single largest obstacle to progress is, and has been, the lack of significant employment opportunity for Hunters Point residents. The scarcity of jobs in Hunters Point began with the downsizing and eventual closure of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, and has persisted throughout the later part of the twentieth century. Drawing on the existing scholarship<sup>4</sup>, this thesis argues that Hunters Point's high unemployment rate is a consequence of the postwar decline in low-skilled and manufacturing jobs, the neighborhood's physical isolation and separation from job centers in San Francisco and Bay Area suburbs, and racially discriminatory employment practices. This paper relies heavily on the historical narrative to explain the emergence and persistence of unemployment in Hunters Point, and to provide first hand evidence of its malignant nature.

### **Methodology:**

This thesis is the culmination of an eleven-month qualitative research study in which I collected and analyzed historical data from Bay Area archives and San Francisco city agencies. While the archival materials, including newspaper articles, reports, official correspondence, community publications, and images, provide the backbone for this study, I also conducted a small number of detailed, personal interviews with senior Hunters Point residents. The analysis presented in this paper is my best attempt to synthesize the data I've collected on Hunters Point with the knowledge of urban history and sociology that I've been privileged to develop as an urban studies major at Stanford University.

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<sup>4</sup> Mainly the works of Kain 1968; Wilson 1996; Jargowsky 1997; Kasarda 1989.

## Overview of Hunters Point:

The Hunters Point neighborhood<sup>5</sup> covers 4.8 square miles<sup>6</sup> of land on the southeastern edges of San Francisco. Aesthetically, Hunters Point bears little resemblance to San Francisco's central neighborhoods; instead, Hunters Point draws its likeness from the industrial city of South San Francisco, which it borders along its southern edge. Its other boundaries include: Cesar Chavez Boulevard on the north, the 101 Freeway on the west, and the San Francisco Bay to the east. According to the 2000 census, the neighborhood is home to 33,170 people, with a demographic composition that was 48.0 percent African American, 29.4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander, 16.7 percent Hispanic, and 9.6 percent White.<sup>7</sup> Hunters Point is significantly poorer than San Francisco as a whole, with a median household income of \$37,146 and 21.6 percent of its families living below the poverty level, compared to San Francisco's median household income of \$55,221 and 7.8 percent of families living in or below poverty.<sup>8</sup> In addition its 9.5 percent unemployment rate is more than double San Francisco County's 4.6 percent unemployment statistic.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> For simplicity and consistency, I refer to the neighborhood by the name Hunters Point, although it is important to note that the neighborhood area described in this paper has had several other names, including Bayview/Hunters Point, the Bayview District, and the South Bayshore. Currently, the geographic boundaries of the neighborhood (as described above) align with the 94124 zip code boundaries used by the US Postal Service. However, both census and zip code boundary areas have changed over the past century. All census statistics and calculations in this paper have been standardized to fit the current neighborhood boundaries described above.

<sup>6</sup> *94124 Zip Code Detailed Profile* 2008.

<sup>7</sup> United States Bureau of the Census 2003.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> *2000 Essentials Demography Report* 2000.

Figure 1: Bay Area Map Showing the Location of Hunters Point – Hunters Point is the Area in Black.

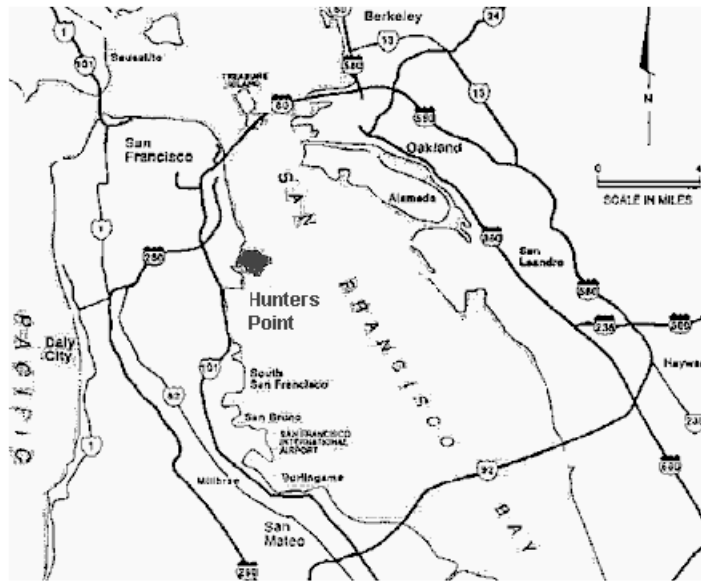


Figure 2: Map of the Hunters Point Area - Hunters Point is Highlighted.



While, on the surface, Hunters Point appears poor and polluted, it is actually a beautiful and lively place, situated on an extremely valuable parcel of land. In fact, Hunters Point has historically been an asset to San Francisco. Boasting the warmest climate and least foggy days of any of the city's neighborhoods, it is, in some ways, one of the city's nicest places to live. As its name suggests, Bayview/Hunters Point, which is situated on hillsides along the bay, has incredible

views of the San Francisco Bay Area. As real estate prices in the Bay Area have skyrocketed in recent decades, the views from the Hunters Point hillsides have become increasingly coveted by developers. The current influx of developers into Hunters Point, however, has been a source of controversy for the neighborhood as many fear it may become too gentrified to maintain its traditionally African American population.

While Hunters Point has many draws, its unparalleled, deep natural harbors have historically been its most valuable attribute. These harbors, which are the deepest in the city, reach more than sixty feet under the surface of the San Francisco Bay. In addition, Hunters Point boasts a protected shoreline and easy access to the Pacific Ocean. These natural amenities make Hunters Point ideally suited for maritime business and are responsible for the growth and success of the shipbuilding and repair industry that has dominated the neighborhood's economic history.

#### **Hunters Point as a Case Study:**

While many scholars have studied urban poverty in East Coast cities, few have applied their analyses to the West Coast, and less than a handful have studied neighborhood poverty in San Francisco. Yet Hunters Point's unique location in the city of San Francisco makes for an especially interesting case study; while the economies of many Northern US cities have stalled since the post-World War II erosion of the manufacturing sector, San Francisco's economy has taken off in recent decades thanks to the growth of technology in nearby Silicon Valley.<sup>10</sup> Like its East Coast counterparts, the city of San Francisco has not been able to prevent the development of neighborhood poverty. The juxtaposition between the average Bay Area lifestyle and the living

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<sup>10</sup> Hartman 2002.



conditions in Hunters Point is shocking.<sup>11</sup> This paper attempts to explain how neighborhood poverty emerged in the regional context of San Francisco, where resources are abundant.

Therefore, while I ground my investigation in the published literature, I focus heavily on the unexplored subtleties of San Francisco's local political and economic history.

### **Review of the Literature on Urban Neighborhood Poverty:**

Scholars of urban history and sociology have typically taken one of two oppositional positions when studying the causes of neighborhood poverty. Scholars such as Daniel Patrick Moynihan<sup>12</sup> and Charles Murray<sup>13</sup> argue that urban neighborhood poverty is caused by deviant cultural norms, inherent in the impoverished classes, which preclude ethnic minorities from rising up the social and economic ladder. This "culture of poverty" approach, however, has been largely discredited by scholars who believe that urban poverty is more accurately attributed to social and economic structural causes. Of these structural sociologists, a majority have identified unemployment, specifically the systematic lack of job opportunities, as the major causes of urban neighborhood poverty.

The foundational scholarship on the structural causes of urban neighborhood poverty comes from sociologist William Julius Wilson, who has stressed the importance of structural economic factors in shaping urban neighborhood decline. In his 1978 breakthrough work, The Declining Significance of Race, Wilson argues that the economic hardships in the 20<sup>th</sup> century

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<sup>11</sup> My inspiration for this thesis came while driving through Hunters Point for the first time. Because the neighborhood is isolated from San Francisco's main transportation corridors, I likely never would have seen or visited Hunters Point, except for that my friend (and fellow urban studies major) needed a ride to her internship placement in the South Bayshore. I was shocked at how visibly deteriorated the public housing complexes were, especially compared to my home on Stanford's idyllic campus. Disturbed by this contrast, and by the fact that I had previously been ignorant of the poverty in Hunters Point, I decided to research the neighborhood. Frustrated by the lack of information that I was initially able to find on the web and in the library, I decided to pursue an honors thesis on the history of the Hunters Point neighborhood.

<sup>12</sup> United States Department of Labor. 1965.

<sup>13</sup> Herrnstein and Murray 1994.

have not affected all blacks equally, but instead have had differential impacts along class lines.<sup>14</sup>

He explains that the growth of the high-skilled service job market, along with affirmative action programs, actually helped a number of educated blacks join the middle class. He points out, however, that when middle-class blacks left the ghetto, those with the least opportunities and resources – the poorest, least educated blacks – remained behind, isolated in the central cities.

Wilson argues that this resulting concentration of poor, lower class blacks catalyzed the institutionalization of neighborhood poverty, as members of this group were cut off from resources and left unable to support the existing infrastructure.

In his 1996 book, When Work Disappears, Wilson further chronicles the lack of resources in inner-city African American communities, arguing that the scarcity of gainful employment opportunities in ghetto neighborhoods is the seminal cause of urban neighborhood poverty and the social ills that accompany impoverishment.<sup>15</sup> Analyzing poverty and unemployment in Chicago since World War II, Wilson finds that a “new urban poverty” has developed in which poor African Americans are living in low-density, highly segregated areas where a majority of individuals are “either unemployed or have dropped out of the labor force altogether.”<sup>16</sup> Wilson argues that the high unemployment rate in these impoverished neighborhoods stems from institutional problems which bar African American residents from accessing gainful jobs. Wilson points out that neighborhoods with high levels of joblessness are likely to experience low levels of social organization, which further leads to the development of problems such as crime, drugs, violence and family dissolution.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Wilson 1980.

<sup>15</sup> Wilson 1996.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, page 19.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, page 21.

Following Wilson's lead, several other scholars have attempted to refine the link between joblessness and poverty by looking at two specific causes of unemployment. The first of these causes is decentralization, which refers to the spatial mismatch between manufacturing jobs, mainly located in the suburbs, and the low-skilled labor force that usually resides in the central city. The second important cause of unemployment is deindustrialization, which refers to the loss of low-skilled jobs in the industrial, manufacturing sector.

One of the first works to examine the link between decentralization and urban poverty was John Kain's 1968 paper *Housing Segregation, Negro Employment, and Metropolitan Decentralization*, which argues for the importance of spatial analysis in understanding urban poverty.<sup>18</sup> Kain asserts that racial constraints on African American housing choices have affected black citizens' rates of employment by spatially preventing inner city African Americans from accessing the growing suburban low-skilled labor market. Before 1968, decentralization hadn't been identified as a leading factor in the mushrooming growth of urban poverty; Kain's research propelled the decentralization hypothesis to the forefront of the scholarly discourse on neighborhood poverty.

Expanding on Kain's work, John Kasarda argued that urban poverty is a result of both decentralization and deindustrialization. Kasarda's work on deindustrialization is particularly relevant to Hunters Point. Kasarda chronicles the loss of manufacturing jobs in large Northern cities, arguing that:

America's major cities have transformed...from centers of the production and distribution of goods to centers of administration, finance and information exchange. In the process, many blue-collar jobs that once constituted the economic backbone of cities and provided employment opportunities for their poorly educated residents have either vanished or moved. These jobs have been replaced, at least in part, by knowledge intensive white-collar jobs with educational requirements that exclude many with substandard education.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Kain 1968.

<sup>19</sup> Kasarda 1990, page 28.

Kasarda's work places responsibility for the increase of urban poverty on the tightening of the low-skill labor market that occurred when large-scale manufacturing companies shut their doors to inner-city workers. Just as many working class inner-city Americans lost their jobs when corporations left the cities during the national shift from an industrial to a service economy, thousands of Hunters Point residents lost their jobs when the Shipyard downsized and then closed in 1974.

Like Wilson and Kasarda, Jargowsky also analyses urban poverty from a structural, economic perspective. Jargowsky, however, tests existing scholarship on urban poverty, including the theories developed by Wilson and Kasarda, by conducting a statistically significant nationally representative study. In his analysis, Jargowsky finds that structural changes in the economy combined with economic segregation, the decreasing need for low-skill labor, and the poor quality of American education have all contributed to the economic decline of urban neighborhoods. However, in contrast to Kasarda, Jargowsky does not find strong evidence that deindustrialization alone leads to urban poverty, except in the Northern cities where he hypothesizes that employees were paid more and thus felt a harder loss.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Jargowsky 1997.

Figure 3: Arial View of the Hunters Point Shipyard, 1966.



## Chapter 1: A Thriving Neighborhood Historical Hunters Point and the War Years

While the Hunters Point neighborhood today is challenged by unemployment and poverty, the Hunters Point of the past was strikingly different. From its settlement in the early nineteenth century to the years following World War II, Hunters Point was a vibrant, economically successful neighborhood. The juxtaposition of the neighborhood's past and present illuminates the extent to which social and economic forces have impacted the neighborhood over the last half-century. Before World War II, Hunters Point's natural resources, including its remarkably deep harbors, allowed residents to live prosperously. Similarly, when the Naval Shipyard first opened at Hunters Point, it created widespread employment opportunities and provided workers with a comfortable, even pleasant living environment. At its prime, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard<sup>21</sup> was both a top-tier Naval institution and a lively place to live and work. While the Shipyard's once positive, prominent role in the neighborhood would make postwar changes all the more difficult for Hunters Point residents, it nevertheless remains true that both the Shipyard and the Hunters Point neighborhood once thrived.

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<sup>21</sup> Throughout this paper, I refer to the shipyard at Hunters Point as the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, which was its most recent official name. However, it is important to mention that the official name of the Shipyard changed several times during its operation. When the Shipyard was first established in 1939, it was designated as an annex to the Navy Yard at Mare Island, and was officially referred to as the Hunters Point Naval Drydock. In November of 1945, it was designated as a separate Naval entity under the San Francisco Naval Base, and titled the U.S. Naval Shipyard at Hunters Point. In December of 1945, the Shipyard was renamed the San Francisco Naval Base. In 1966, the Shipyard was once again placed under the same command as the Mare Island facilities, and became one of the industrial sites of the San Francisco Bay Naval Shipyard. In 1970, however, the Shipyard once again became its own entity when the San Francisco Bay Naval Station was disestablished. From 1970 until its own disestablishment in 1974, the Shipyard was named the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, San Francisco, California.

## Historical Hunters Point:

Before the California gold rush of 1849, Hunters Point consisted of largely undeveloped land used for cattle grazing by the Mission San Francisco de Asis. In 1834, Jose Cornelio Bernal took control of the land from Governor Figuera, and joined with other business interests to subdivide the land and form the new city of South San Francisco. Bernal enlisted the help of New York real estate agents Robert and Phillip Hunter to sell his development. However, at that time, San Francisco settlers considered Hunters Point too remote and detached from the rest of the city, and consequently, the Hunter Brothers had difficulty selling the land.<sup>22</sup> When the gold rush exploded in the second half of the nineteenth century, California's rapid expansion put a great strain on the shipping industry. Predicting the coming expansion of the shipping industry and recognizing the ideal characteristics of the Hunters Point harbor, the California Drydock company purchased the shoreline land and built Hunters Point's first drydock in 1868, catalyzing the modern development of Hunters Point.<sup>23</sup> The drydock was used both to build and repair ships, including Navy ships that docked in Hunters Point while on tour. The success of this first drydock attracted the attention of other businessmen, and by the turn of the century Hunters Point was bustling with shipbuilding and repair business. Hunters Point also became home to many Chinese fishermen who caught shrimp in the bay and sold them in stores along the docks. By 1930, a dozen shrimp camps speckled the Hunters Point shoreline, along with clusters of homes, offices, and warehouses. Many of the residents who didn't work in maritime occupations used the open land to grow vegetables that they sold to San Francisco's inner-city residents. In addition, Hunters

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<sup>22</sup> Bamberg.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Point housed a large number of Italian immigrants, most of whom lived and worked in an area of slaughterhouses referred to as “Butchertown.”<sup>24</sup>

Figure 4: Shrimping in Hunters Point circa 1940.



Figure 5: Old Buildings and New Construction in Hunters Point circa 1940.



In 1908, Bethlehem Steel bought the Hunters Point drydock facilities from the California Drydock Company. By this time, Hunters Point was prospering. Its strategic value as a shipyard

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<sup>24</sup> Butchertown was later the site of the India Basin Industrial Park redevelopment project.



facility, however, became even more apparent when Roosevelt's "Great White Fleet" docked in Hunters Point during its world cruise of 1907-1909. In need of repair, the Great White Fleet came to Mare Island, but found that the harbors were too shallow to accommodate the large ships. As a result, the fleet docked in Hunters Point for 27 days, during which time they were serviced with great expertise by the shipbuilders who lived and worked in Hunters Point.<sup>25</sup> It was indeed a stroke of luck for Roosevelt and the US Navy that the Great White Fleet was able to dock and be serviced at Hunters Point, since Hunters Point was the only deep-water ship repair facility in Northern California. As it happened, the Great White Fleet was able to continue its tour of force without exposing the weaknesses in Northern California's Naval infrastructure, yet it was this incident that led the Navy to recognize the value of the Hunters Point property and initiate the process of purchasing the Hunters Point facilities. A great source of pride for the Hunters Point Shipyard workers, the story of the Great White Fleet was published at the beginning of the Shipyard's official employee handbook.<sup>26</sup>

In 1939, the 76<sup>th</sup> United States Congress authorized the Naval purchase of the 48-acre Hunters Point site, which included two drydocks, for 3.9 million dollars.<sup>27</sup> After purchasing the site, the Navy leased the Shipyard back to the Bethlehem Steel Company, under the condition that the lease would terminate if the country became engaged in a national emergency. In 1941, when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, the Pacific Fleet and the Pearl Harbor Shipyard were heavily damaged. Eleven days later, in need of more shipyard facilities, the Navy terminated the lease with

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<sup>25</sup> Bamberg.

<sup>26</sup> Mayer 1970.

<sup>27</sup> Jones 1972.

the Bethlehem Steel Company and started official operations at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.<sup>28</sup>

When the Navy entered Hunters Point at the beginning of World War II, it needed to rapidly expand the Shipyard's facilities to keep up with wartime demands. In this expansion, the Navy completely reshaped the neighborhood by driving out and building over all non-maritime infrastructure: "By the 1930's there were over 100 residences, three lodging houses, and several restaurants and saloons...Most however, were demolished as a result of the expansion of the Hunters Point Naval Drydocks that occurred after 1940".<sup>29</sup> Both the presence of the Navy and the pollution from increasing maritime commerce devastated the shrimping industry, which ceased to exist in Hunters Point after the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. No longer able to harvest enough shrimp from the bay, the Chinese fishermen deserted Hunters Point, leaving their camps to be bulldozed to make way for the new Navy development. This demise of the shrimping business also marks the beginning of the legacy of environmental contamination that the Navy would continue over the next several decades. In many ways, the entrance of the Navy into Hunters Point in 1938 erased the neighborhood's physical past; new development in Hunters Point would follow the Navy's needs.

### **Hunters Point During World War II:**

The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was at its peak during World War II and quickly became the dominant force in the Hunters Point neighborhood. Because the Shipyard was

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<sup>28</sup> Jones 1972.

<sup>29</sup> Bamburg, page 18-19.

needed to serve the national wartime effort, its initial development took shape in a whirlwind effort to build the Shipyard as quickly as possible, with all hands on deck.<sup>30</sup>

When the Navy first purchased the site in 1939, it covered a mere 48 acres, yet the Navy immediately began to expand the facilities so that by 1945, the Shipyard had expanded over 635 acres.<sup>31</sup> To ready the Hunters Point site for wartime operations, the Navy added four more drydocks, extensive industrial shops and several warehouses. In addition, the Navy was responsible for the building and planning of the neighborhood transportation systems, including roads and railroad tracks.<sup>32</sup> During World War II, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard boasted several unique assets that distinguished it from other nearby shipyards. In 1943, workers at Hunters Point constructed the largest shipyard drydock ever to be built at that time. This was quite an impressive feat, as the drydock, stretching 1,100 feet, could hold five destroyers, two cruisers, or an aircraft carrier.<sup>33</sup> Proud of their extraordinary ship repair facilities, Shipyard tour guides boasted to visitors that this giant drydock, if filled with milk, could satisfy all of San Francisco's milk requirements for three and a half years.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard once boasted the world's largest crane. This crane, constructed in 1947, was built at the Hunters Point location because it was the only shipyard in Northern California with enough space to allow for the maneuvering of large vessels.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Thus, little care was taken to preserve the existing buildings.

<sup>31</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970, page B1.

<sup>32</sup> Cox 1971.

<sup>33</sup> Mayer 1970.

<sup>34</sup> *Suggested Tour Script, San Francisco Naval Shipyard*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 6: Hunters Point Drydock during WWII.



When the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was built, it officially functioned as an annex to the nearby Mare Island facility. Realizing, however, that full operation of the Hunters Point Shipyard and its wealth of equipment would require the daily transport of 1,500 men back and forth from Mare Island to Hunters Point, Navy officials began to actively recruit workers to live in Hunters Point.<sup>36</sup> The Navy recruited so vigorously that by the end of 1944, they were bringing 1,000 new workers to Hunters Point every month.<sup>37</sup> These recruiters primarily targeted young African American men and their families, encouraging them to migrate from the South to San Francisco through a federally funded relocation program.<sup>38</sup> According to a longtime Hunters Point resident who migrated to San Francisco from Texas in 1943, the Navy would recruit men and women by driving wagons through Southern neighborhoods and offering free transportation to the West. Hoping to escape the overt racism and racial violence that plagued the South, as well as

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<sup>36</sup> Bamberg, page 27.

<sup>37</sup> 1,000 War Workers Recruited in Monthly Expansion Plan 1944.

<sup>38</sup> Bamberg, page 37.

its collapsing agricultural economy, many African American families moved to San Francisco believing that they would find employment opportunities and racial equality.<sup>39</sup>

Figure 7: Local Newspaper Reports Thousands Coming to Hunters Point, 1943.



As a result of the Shipyard's expansion and heavy recruiting, the Hunters Point population ballooned in size. Within three years of the initial 1943 recruiting push, the number of African American families in Hunters Point had grown from 2,000 to 12,000.<sup>40</sup> By 1950, the total Hunters Point population reached 51,406 people.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, at its peak employment level during the last months of World War II, the Shipyard employed 17,714 civilians.

#### **Life at the Shipyard:**

During World War II, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard created abundant employment opportunities and a vibrant living environment. The Navy built several complexes of temporary war housing for workers and their families along the edges of the Shipyard.<sup>42</sup> And because workers both lived and worked at the Shipyard, the Navy provided its civilian and enlisted employees with extensive social and domestic amenities, as well as with medical services. At the Shipyard site,

<sup>39</sup> Personal Interviews 2008.

<sup>40</sup> Bamberg, page 37.

<sup>41</sup> United States 1951.

<sup>42</sup> This "temporary housing" would later serve as public housing when the war ended.

workers had access to a cafeteria, a personnel training school, a commissary store, recreational facilities, and a bus terminal.<sup>43</sup>

When the Shipyard was in its prime, it also served as the nexus of social interactions for the Hunters Point neighborhood. Not only did the Shipyard employ about a third of the neighborhood's population and provide a broad range of day-to-day services, it also dominated the neighborhood's social scene through a berth of clubs and social events. The Enlisted Men's Club, Navy Relief Society, Navy Wives Club, religious activities office, and teen club are a few examples of the types of social organizations that permeated life at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.

When a new family moved to the Shipyard, they could always expect a visit from the Navy Wives Club to welcome them to the neighborhood.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the Shipyard scene was always kept lively by friendly competitions of all sorts, ranging from bowling leagues to work safety challenges, to Shipyard girl of the month calendars.<sup>45</sup> The spatial and social setup of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was such that a family living in Navy housing would never have to leave the base in order to have both basic goods and a lively social network.

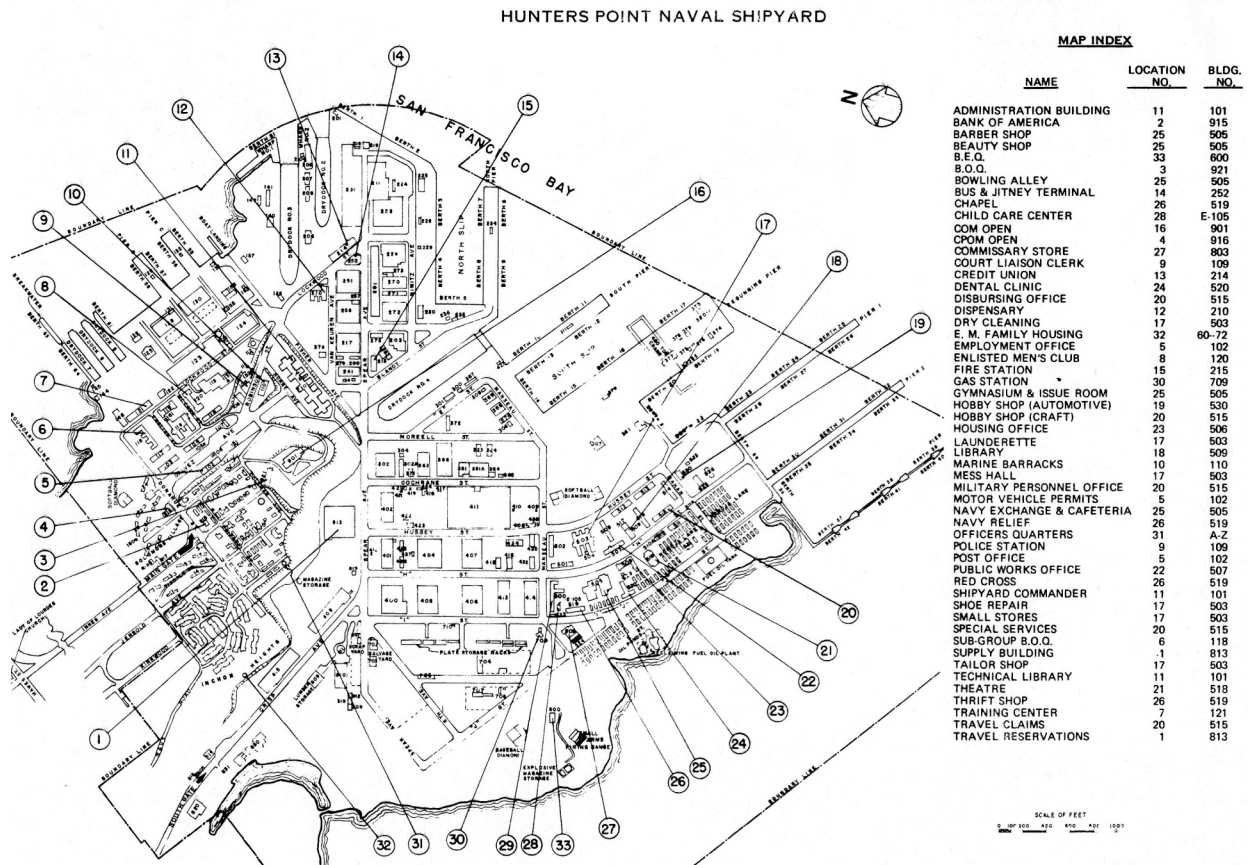
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<sup>43</sup> Bamberg; Jones 1972.

<sup>44</sup> Jones 1972.

<sup>45</sup> Season's Greetings 1965.

Figure 8: Map of the Shipyard Facilities



### Trouble Brewing:

Wartime Hunters Point was by all accounts, a colorful thriving neighborhood, filled with people who had come together to serve their country. There were enough jobs, and the Navy provided enough basic services, to allow most Hunters Point residents, white or black, to live relatively comfortable lives during a time when everyone was expected to sacrifice for the wartime effort. Yet this idyllic characterization of wartime Hunters Point, while accurate on one level, belies the underlying racial tensions that were undoubtedly simmering below the surface. While the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard did provide services and social clubs for its employees, it is

unclear to what extent these amenities were extended to African American workers, and whether African Americans in Hunters Point had the same wartime experience and quality of life as whites.

In the archival materials that I have analyzed, Navy documents, such as the Shipyard's official newspaper, *The Drydocket*, hardly ever allude to racial tension, and certainly never mention it outright. On the other hand, most of the African American publications that I've found tend to focus on racial discrimination and injustice; these publications, however, were not prevalent until the late 1950's and early 1960's. There is little published material from the Shipyard's wartime history that proves, or even suggests, the presence of tangible racism.

However, fact that published material is limited in its coverage of racial issues does not rule out the likelihood that racial discrimination and prejudice were a large component of the Hunters Point wartime experience. The Hunter's Point wartime history is situated, of course, in the larger context of pre-civil rights America, where racial discrimination was still overt and, for the most part, accepted. At the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, blacks and whites did live in separate barracks until housing segregation became illegal in 1954.

While I've found nothing in the archival material that explicitly references wartime racial discrimination or tension, there are clues from which one can infer that racial discrimination did exist at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. The most obvious indicator of racial tension is the fact that Shipyard housing, which later became public housing, was segregated by color until 1954. One of the Hunters Point residents I interviewed remembers living in this segregated public housing as a child, before the Housing Authority was required by law to house blacks and whites in the same projects. That these segregated housing complexes were comparable in quality is doubtful.



Furthermore, while the Shipyard's newspaper, *The Drydocket*, often printed pictures of division managers and Shipyard commanders, none of the elite employees pictured were ever African American. In addition, the newspaper's monthly "female employee of the month" calendar chose only white women until 1965 when it selected Alice Broussard, an African American woman.<sup>46</sup> The *Drydocket*, however, doesn't expressly acknowledge this change; naturally there must have been a conflict or prompting event that led to the integration of the calendar, but neither the integration nor the conflict are talked about in the paper.

Figure 9: Hunters Point Supervisors in the Shipyard Newspaper, 1966.



It is clear, on one level, that the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was an exciting, highly functioning facility that brought both jobs and a sense of community to the Hunters Point neighborhood. During World War II, Shipyard employees rallied both to serve their country and to make the Hunters Point neighborhood an enjoyable place to live. The Shipyard was able to provide enough jobs and social organization, that people were likely busy enough to suppress the underlying racial tensions that were undoubtedly brewing under the surface. The small glimpses of conflict found in the wartime archival materials foreshadow the future of racial strife in Hunters Point that would bubble up once the Shipyard's foundation began to crack.

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<sup>46</sup> Season's Greetings 1965.

## Chapter 2: The Decline of the Shipyard and the Beginning of Neighborhood Change

### The War is Over:

Shipyard workers at Hunters Point had built their lives around the war; both blacks and whites had moved across the country, leaving friends and family behind, in order to fill national wartime labor needs. Thus, the end of the war, for many Shipyard workers, meant the end of a lifestyle. Once war ended, those who had come to work at Hunters Point began to reevaluate their role in the Shipyard, questioning both their ability to contribute, and the Navy's ability to sustain its labor force now that the country was no longer at war.

On January 4, 1945, Rear Admiral Edward L. Cochrane, Chief of the Bureau of Ships for the United States Navy, publicly assured the people of Hunters Point that their jobs would continue long after the end of the war: "I have spent a great deal of time in the past year and a half in considering plans for the development of Hunters Point, in considering projects which go beyond the present war...I do not want anyone here to have the idea that it is a temporary condition. Work will carry on in increasing volume for months, years after the present war is over."<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard had been vital to the Navy's Northern California military strategy, acting as the region's premier shipbuilding and repair facility. As Admiral Cochrane assured Hunter's Point workers in 1945, "the job you have done here is above any criticism of any of us...the WHOLE Navy appreciates what you are doing and is behind you 100 percent."<sup>48</sup> The Admiral's promise to the people of Hunters Point was not without substance,

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<sup>47</sup> Work Volume Will Continue To Increase For Many Years 1945.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

in fact, in April of 1945, the United States Congress had just approved a 43 million dollar budget for the future expansion of Hunters Point.<sup>49</sup>

Rhetoric aside, there was ample reason to believe that the work at Hunters Point would continue long after the war was over. As a shipbuilding and repair facility, the Hunters Point Shipyard served a function that was unique in the region, and one that was necessary both during and outside of wartime. In fact, many predicted that the end of the war would actually bring more work to Hunters Point, as ships returned home from the battlefield damaged or in need of routine maintenance. In addition, 1940's morale at Hunters Point was extremely high; matching the Navy's commitment to maintaining the Hunters Point workforce, many Shipyard employees publicly pledged to stay at Hunters Point as long as the Navy needed. In August of 1945, *The Hunter's Point Beacon*, a local newspaper, reported that the collective sentiment of residents interviewed for the article was, "We're going to stay right here, and right on the job that the Navy has laid out for us."<sup>50</sup> When the war did finally end, both Navy officials and Shipyard publications reported that Hunters Point would become a permanent Navy installation, with enough jobs for every man who wanted to work.

Yet the optimism held by Shipyard workers and leaders proved to be unfounded, as the Hunters Point Shipyard began to downsize shortly after the war ended. At the height of it's operation during World War II, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard employed almost eighteen thousand people, which totaled roughly a third of the Hunters Point neighborhood population. Yet the end of the war in 1945 prompted the Shipyard to reduce its workforce to 5,000 permanent

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<sup>49</sup> Steady Jobs At Drydocks For Men Willing To Work 1945.

<sup>50</sup> "We'll Stay On The Job," Say Workers 1945.

employees.<sup>51</sup> The number of Shipyard employees rose again to 11,000 during the Korean Conflict in the early 1950's, yet the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard would never again reach its World War II employment total nor serve as the neighborhood's primary employer.<sup>52</sup>

### **Demographic Changes:**

The end of World War II had drastically different impacts on the Shipyard's black and white populations. After the war ended in 1945, whites began to leave Hunters Point in droves, while the neighborhood's black population continued to increase. While most white workers and their families had the resources to relocate, blacks faced both financial and racial barriers that kept them restricted to the Hunters Point neighborhood. Many of the African American Shipyard workers had relocated from the South, and had come to Hunters Point for a fresh start. They took jobs at the Shipyard and lived in the temporary wartime worker housing, which gave them little opportunity to build assets. In addition, housing discrimination at that time was very strong and provided a very real barrier for blacks who wanted to move into other areas of San Francisco. Restrictive covenants prevented many San Francisco homeowners from selling to blacks, especially in white neighborhoods. When restrictive covenants were declared illegal, they gave way to exploitative and discriminatory real estate practices such as block busting.<sup>53</sup> In block busting, real estate agents would purchase a property on a predominantly white block and then purposefully sell the property to a black family, which would scare whites into thinking the neighborhood was deteriorating. Whites, acting on racial prejudices and afraid of losing the equity in their homes, would quickly move out of the neighborhood, desperately selling their houses to the same real estate agents for a bargain price. These real estate agents would then turn around and sell the

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<sup>51</sup> Mayer 1970.

<sup>52</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970.

<sup>53</sup> Personal Interviews 2008.

property to a black family for a hefty profit; the more prevalent blacks became in a neighborhood, the more anxious whites were to relocate, thus fueling the blockbusting cycle.

Figure 10: Cartoon Depicting Housing Discrimination - Published in *The Spokesman*, 1967.



In addition to the discriminatory housing practices that kept blacks from moving into other neighborhoods in San Francisco, the 1950's brought the beginning of an era of urban redevelopment that aimed to eradicate "blight" in America's inner cities, which in practice meant removing the black population from urban neighborhoods by means of displacement. In San Francisco, redevelopment took place most intensely in the traditionally African American Fillmore/Western Addition jazz district. Using the power of eminent domain, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency bought a majority of the Fillmore's housing, stores, jazz clubs and community centers from their African American owners, bulldozed them, and rebuilt the neighborhood. Thus, redevelopment in the Fillmore was a tragedy in the way that it erased a vibrant African American cultural center and displaced thousands of San Francisco's African American residents from their homes and their community. During redevelopment in the 1950's many of the Fillmore's displaced African American residents migrated to Hunters Point, which held San Francisco's second highest concentration of black residents.

Redevelopment in the Fillmore significantly impacted Hunters Point because not only did many blacks migrate from the Western Addition to Hunters Point after the war, but also, unlike white Shipyard employees, redevelopment even further limited black Shipyard employee's options for relocation. Before housing segregation became illegal, it was nearly impossible for the African American Shipyard employees to move into white neighborhoods, and still very difficult even afterwards. Blacks who wanted to relocate would have likely moved to the Fillmore, San Francisco's only other predominantly black neighborhood, yet redevelopment destroyed this option. Thus, the African American Shipyard workers who lived in Hunters Point during the war were even further prevented from relocating, since the Fillmore, San Francisco's most prominent African American neighborhood, was in the process of being bulldozed by redevelopment.

After World War II, when the Shipyard no longer needed such a large workforce, whites were able to follow the job market into other areas of San Francisco and its suburbs, while blacks were limited in their relocation options. The structural factors that guided moving patterns led to pronounced demographic changes in Hunters Point. The most dramatic change was the rapid decrease in Hunters Point's postwar white population; most of the people who left Hunters Point after 1955 were white.<sup>54</sup> The dramatic decrease in Hunters Point's white population after World War II can be seen clearly in the figures from the 1960 census that map the increase and decrease in San Francisco's black and white populations. While the 1950 US census recorded that Hunters Point was around 21 percent African American,<sup>55</sup> by 1960, around 50 percent of Hunters Point's

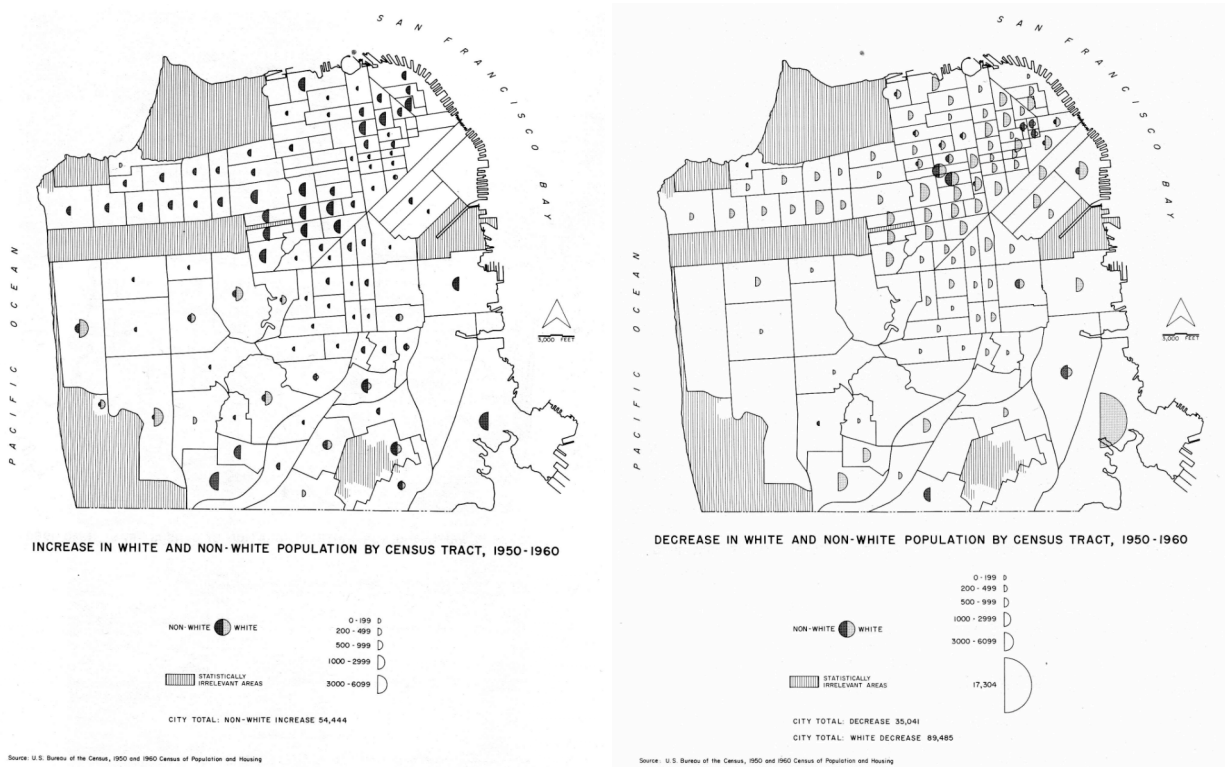
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<sup>54</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970.

<sup>55</sup> United States 1951.

residents were black.<sup>56</sup> By 1970, Hunters Point had become a predominantly African American neighborhood, with a population that was 76% black.<sup>57</sup>

Figure 11: Map of San Francisco Demographic Changes 1950-1960.



### Changing Shipyard Mission:

The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard was at its peak operating potential when the war ended, and work continued at a strong pace until 1946 when the need for ship repair waned.<sup>58</sup> During this time, the Hunters Point Shipyard was assigned to “operation magic carpet,” which meant facilitating the return of the troops. The ships docked at Hunters Point were stocked with transitional provisions to aid soldiers as they returned home. These provisions included

<sup>56</sup> Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard 1970.

<sup>57</sup> Hunters Point Area Statistics, Social Explorer 2008.

<sup>58</sup> Bamberg.

thousands of temporary cots, sanitary and cooking facilities, and fresh water.<sup>59</sup> Also during this time, workers at Hunters Point continued to busy themselves by repairing incoming ships and preparing them for non-wartime storage. Once they were cleaned, repaired, and mothballed, the ships were then stored in the Shipyard's "Pacific Reserve Fleet" area, where "each vessel was laid away completely in shape."<sup>60</sup>

#### **United States National Radiological Defense Laboratory:**

A few years after the war, as the supply of ships needing repair began to dwindle, the Hunters Point Shipyard began to shift its focus to nuclear research. The transition began when ships that had been used during testing of nuclear bombs began to arrive at Hunters Point for repair and cleanup. On September 6, 1946, ships present at Bikini Atoll during 'Operation Crossroads,' the testing of a hydrogen bomb, arrived at this Naval Shipyard.<sup>61</sup> While the Hunters Point facility was well equipped to repair and refurbish non-nuclear battleships, this was the first time that workers at Hunters Point had come in contact with ships containing nuclear material. The arrival of these ships prompted the Bureau of Medicine to create a new nuclear branch of the Shipyard's larger Industrial Laboratory, which they named the Radiological Safety Section. At first, the Hunters Point Shipyard possessed very little equipment to deal with nuclear material; the new lab was equipped with "a coffee pot and two working Geiger counters."<sup>62</sup>

Yet with the growing importance of nuclear technology in Naval operations, the lab quickly expanded in both size and mission. Outgrowing its original laboratory building, the Radiological Safety Section was expanded into two other barracks in 1948. By 1950, the lab, had taken over

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<sup>59</sup> Bamburg.

<sup>60</sup> *Suggested Tour Script, San Francisco Naval Shipyard*, page 2.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, page 44.



more than twenty different buildings on the Shipyard's base. In September of 1950, the Navy renamed the lab The U.S. Naval Radiological Defense Laboratory (NRDL), and designated it as a separate command under the supervision of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard.<sup>63</sup> In 1951, the Navy commenced construction on a new, eight billion-dollar building to house the Radiological Defense Laboratory at Hunters Point.<sup>64</sup> The lab's new unconventional, six-story main building was made entirely out of concrete and had no windows. In addition to this strange building, the NRDL was also comprised a 70-inch cyclotron, a Van De Graaff accelerator, an animal research building, a dog kennel, a large warehouse, and eight other small buildings.<sup>65</sup>

When the National Radiological Defense Laboratory was operative, it was the only laboratory in the country working on atomic defense issues. Its mission was two-fold: "to study the thermal and nuclear radiation effects of atomic weapons, and to devise a means of protection against them."<sup>66</sup> The National Radiological Defense Laboratory employed both scientists and a limited supply of manual laborers. Because it operated at a time when much less was known about the deadly effects of nuclear material and radiation poisoning, the NRDL overlooked safety precautions that today's knowledge would deem fundamental. According to one Hunters Point resident, men who worked in the NRDL were required to shower every day after work in order to remove any radiation. The resident disclosed that her friend, who once worked in the NRDL, was hired to carry barrels of radioactive material from one location to another, a job he held for years before developing a giant tumor in his stomach.<sup>67</sup> Both the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, and the NRDL, have, over the years, brought a myriad of health and environmental hazards to Hunters

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<sup>63</sup> Bamburg.

<sup>64</sup> *Suggested Tour Script, San Francisco Naval Shipyard.*

<sup>65</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard 1970*, page B-14.

<sup>66</sup> *Suggested Tour Script, San Francisco Naval Shipyard.*

<sup>67</sup> Personal Interviews 2008.

Point. While the United States National Radiological Defense Laboratory was disestablished on November 3, 1969, the site has still not been entirely cleaned up, and the fallout from its toxic research is still felt by the Hunters Point community today.<sup>68</sup>

### **Shipyard Specialization and its Implications for Employment:**

As evidenced by the establishment of the United States National Radiological Defense Laboratory, postwar work at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard evolved into tasks that were markedly different from the ship service and repair work that was dominant during World War II. While Admiral Cochrane had pledged that the Hunters Point Shipyard would continue to provide jobs for its workers long after the end of World War II, in actuality, the Shipyard could not deviate from the military needs of its country; after the war, the Shipyard's mission and labor force would continually change to reflect the requirements of the American Military.

By the 1950's the ships that workers at Hunters Point were accustomed to servicing had become out of date with the new military technology developed in the wake of WWII. In order to remain competitive, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard directed its resources towards ship conversion, rather than ship servicing, outfitting older ships with newer technologies. During the 1950's work at the Shipyard involved converting fleet type subs into "killer subs," converting the old carrier BONNE HOMME RICHARD into a new, angled aircraft carrier, and constructing three guided-missile frigates.<sup>69</sup> In 1966, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard undertook the largest

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<sup>68</sup> While the scope of this paper does not allow for a detailed discussion of the environmental problems in Hunters Point, it is important for the reader to know that environmental degradation is an extremely important and current issue facing Hunters Point. In recent decades, it has become clear that the Naval Shipyard, along with local industrial plants, have severely polluted the Hunters Point area. The Shipyard area is so polluted that the EPA has declared it a Superfund site. Much of the pollution is due the nuclear waste created by the National Radiological Defense Laboratory, as well as from the toxic chemical used at the Shipyard. The environmental problems facing Hunters Point have been linked to several devastating public health and environmental consequences, including extremely high rates of asthma and the highest infant mortality rate of any neighborhood in the state.

<sup>69</sup> Mayer 1970.

modernization ever attempted on an aircraft vessel, “adapting the USS MIDWAY to the Navy’s newest and heaviest aircrafts, installing the latest in avionic shops, improving habitability, rebuilding the major share of the ship’s machinery and boilers, and updating the carrier’s weapons, navigation and guidance systems.”<sup>70</sup> After the success of this project, the Shipyard continued to focus on modernizing aircraft carriers until it was decommissioned in 1974.

When the Hunters Point Shipyard began to focus its resources on nuclear research and the conversion and modernization of ships, it no longer needed such a large, unskilled and uneducated workforce. The tasks involved in conversion and nuclear research required much more skill and education than the ship repair tasks during World War II. John Kasarda, in his analysis of postwar urban decline, argues that deindustrialization has been the most significant cause of urban neighborhood poverty.<sup>71</sup> Kasarda explains that deindustrialization caused employers in the Northern cities to replace blue-collar jobs with jobs that required a lot of education and training. Postwar specialization at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard in many ways mirrored the deindustrialization process that dominated the East Coast’s urban economies after World War II. As the Shipyard specialized, it reduced its labor force. While it had employed almost eighteen thousand civilians during World War II, the Shipyard employed only eleven thousand during the Korean Conflict, and an average of eight thousand workers in the following decades.<sup>72</sup>

Yet not only did the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard need fewer workers after World War II, it needed even fewer *low-skilled* laborers. After World War II, the Shipyard began to hire workers who were trained and educated in science and technology, who could design and implement the

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<sup>70</sup> Mayer 1970, page 2.

<sup>71</sup> Kasarda 1990, page 28.

<sup>72</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970.

new, complicated technological updates. Thus, the specialization of the Shipyard's resources dealt Hunters Point's residents a double blow: not only was the Shipyard hiring fewer people, but it was hiring employees with the skills and education that were out of reach to the Hunters Point community at large. Many workers who had brought their families to Hunters Point to work at the Shipyard during World War II were laid-off as their labor was no longer necessary. After 1950, the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard, which had once employed a third of the community, no longer had jobs for the majority of low-skilled, uneducated workers in Hunters Point.

Meanwhile, the low-skilled workforce population in Hunters Point only continued to grow as local blacks lacked relocation options, and others migrated to Hunters Point from redevelopment areas. In the early 1950's, Hunters Point transitioned into a predominantly African American neighborhood, with a large blue-collar workforce. In addition, many of the Shipyard workers who stayed in Hunters Point after the war now had children, and these children would soon need jobs. Thus, the population of people seeking work in Hunters Point did not lessen after the war, but continued to increase. At the same time, specialization of the Shipyard meant that it could no longer sustain Hunters Point's growing blue-collar labor force.

### Chapter 3: The Unemployment Problem

Changes in the Shipyard's structure and labor force had a drastic impact on the Hunters Point community. Reductions in the Shipyard's labor force after World War II caused neighborhood unemployment rates to skyrocket. Furthermore, the effect of the Shipyard's downsizing was exacerbated by several structural factors, including the physical location of Hunters Point, the spatial mismatch between the neighborhood and surrounding job centers, national deindustrialization trends, and employment discrimination. These factors combined to create a postwar employment situation in Hunters Point that was devastatingly bleak.

In 1960, the unemployment rate in Hunters Point was 3.8 percent, which was comparable to San Francisco County's 3.6 percent unemployment rate.<sup>73</sup> By 1970, however, the unemployment rate in Hunters Point had risen to 7.3 percent, almost double San Francisco County's 3.6 percent unemployment rate.<sup>74</sup> In 1971, the Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency reported that unemployment rates within the hardest-hit areas of Hunters Point were estimated between 10 and 15 percent, three times that of the metropolitan area.<sup>75</sup> By 1980, the job situation in Hunters Point had grown even more desperate: census data showed unemployment in Hunters Point reaching 12.4 percent, more than double the county's 6.1 percent unemployment average.<sup>76</sup>

#### **Structural Causes of Unemployment in Hunters Point:**

Hunters Point's physical isolation from the rest of the city significantly limited residents' employment opportunities. Located in the southeast corner of San Francisco, Hunters Point is

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<sup>73</sup> *Hunters Point Area Statistics*, Social Explorer 2008.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Brooks 1970.

<sup>76</sup> *Hunters Point Area Statistics*, Social Explorer 2008.

separated from the central city by physical distance, freeway barriers, and the lack of public transportation. As one 1967 assessment of Hunters Point explained, “unlike other poverty areas of the city [Hunters Point] is physically and socially apart from the center of things, giving the area a certain distinctness. The neighborhood is, for the most part, invisible to its city.”<sup>77</sup> Hunters Point’s isolation from the rest of the peninsula creates, what Kasarda describes as a “spatial mismatch” between the low-skilled labor force in Hunters Point and blue-collar jobs in the central city and suburbs.<sup>78</sup> As the Navy decreased its workforce, physical distance and poor public transportation infrastructure left Shipyard workers in Hunters Point unable to access jobs requiring minimal skill and education in other parts of the city.

This spatial mismatch was also due to the city’s general labor market trends. As Kasarda explains, the spatial mismatch between inner-city ghettos and blue-collar jobs grew more pronounced after World War II as industrial corporations shut down their urban factories and relocated to the suburbs. In Hunters Point, the spatial mismatch was increased as the industrial jobs lost through cuts in the port and Navy labor forces were replaced by both blue and white-collar jobs in the growing Silicon Valley technology industry.

In addition, regional deindustrialization even further reduced the number of low-skilled jobs available in Hunters Point and in the larger San Francisco area. In October of 1969 the Cooperative Area Manpower Planning System reported that, “Several thousand jobs will be lost (in San Francisco) as a result of anti-inflation activities and reduction of hostilities in Vietnam. Primarily these would be in the Navy Yard, on the waterfront and in the post office – many of

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<sup>77</sup> Brooks 1970, page 12.

<sup>78</sup> Kasarda 1989.

them low skilled but good paying jobs.”<sup>79</sup> This regional deindustrialization meant that low-skilled workers in Hunters Point, which was a majority of the community’s workforce, would have a hard time finding jobs outside the neighborhood, even if they were able to overcome the spatial mismatch and the isolation of Hunters Point.

Furthermore, the Shipyard’s presence monopolized Hunters Point’s most valuable land. It’s closure in 1974 bequeathed Hunters Point with a large quantity of unusable, toxic land, and little chance of attracting new industry. While Hunters Point was home to small shops and light manufacturing, it wasn’t able to attract an employer to rival the Shipyard’s employment capacity, especially because the inland area that the Shipyard did not occupy was not adaptable for industrial use. The bit of shoreline land not occupied by the Shipyard, though zoned for industry, was equally unattractive and thus mostly “underused, vacant, or in the process of being filled.”<sup>80</sup> When the Shipyard closed, it exacerbated unemployment in Hunters Point by leaving “many problems in the physical environment...among these inadequate housing and commercial facilities,” which precluded Hunters Point from attracting meaningful economic development.<sup>81</sup>

Finally, in addition deindustrialization and the spatial mismatch that made it difficult for Hunters Point residents to find jobs, African American residents, especially young black men, faced significant, overt employment discrimination. In 1966, when youth from Hunters Point met with the Employment Opportunities Commission to discuss the lack of available jobs, a young man named Ferondus Ellis spoke about his experiences with discrimination: “We’re being given the runaround whenever we go down for an interview for a job. Your applications lay around for months and never be considered. I need money to take care of my responsibilities. All we need is

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<sup>79</sup> Brooks 1970, page 13.

<sup>80</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970, page B-2.

<sup>81</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970, page E-2.

a chance.”<sup>82</sup> Furthermore, when asked by a local newspaper whether downtown officials would improve the job situation, several young men echoed Ellis’s sentiments: “They don’t want Negroes to have big jobs. All they’ve been doing is making promises, promises.”<sup>83</sup> Employment discrimination was also a problem within city agencies, whose jobs were coveted for their security and benefits. Realizing that city jobs were especially valuable, Hunters Point residents organized and lobbied to change the previously discriminatory eligibility requirements for MUNI employees so that African Americans would be hired as drivers.<sup>84</sup>

### **Unemployment on the Personal and Community Level:**

The effect of the Shipyard’s downsizing and closure is readily apparent in unemployment statistics from the 1960, 1970 and 1980 censuses. Yet newspapers, reports, and personal accounts from the postwar period further highlight the extent and intensity of the unemployment problem in Hunters Point. The inability of Hunters Point residents to find legitimate, substantial work was a continually prominent topic in both newspapers and community reports.

The most telling indicator of the pervasiveness and malignancy of unemployment in postwar Hunters Point is that, after the neighborhood’s devastating 1966 riots, *The Spokesman* community newspaper blamed a single underlying cause: “The most urgent need [in Hunters Point], which everyone will unanimously agree, is jobs.”<sup>85</sup> *The Spokesman* went on to explain that, “The death of young Matthew Johnson was not the basic reason for the rioting but a catalyst for

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<sup>82</sup> The Beginning 1966.

<sup>83</sup> The Man on the Street 1966.

<sup>84</sup> Hardin 1994; Personal Interviews 2008.

<sup>85</sup> The Beginning 1966.



what has been plaguing the Negro youth in poverty areas for years. No jobs, previous records of arrest, unfair hiring practices, inferior education...have been the underlying causes of the riot.”<sup>86</sup>

In *The Spokesman*, personal accounts of the struggle for employment were frequent. The majority Hunters Point residents made it clear that they wanted to work: lobbying, advocating and sometimes fighting for decent jobs. As Hunters Point resident Richard Mackey stated to the paper in 1966, “\$1.35 [an hour] won’t get you anywhere. That’s only \$15-16 a week and [the going wage] should be \$1.75 an hour at least. But it’s better than nothing. I hope they get us a job.”<sup>87</sup>

### **Why Unemployment Matters:**

In his 1996 book, When Work Disappears, prominent sociologist William Julius Wilson argues that neighborhoods populated by the “working poor” experience fewer social challenges than neighborhoods where residents are both poor and unemployed.<sup>88</sup> Unlike working poor neighborhoods, urban ghettos of the postwar period, including Hunters Point, were characterized by high rates of joblessness and exclusion from resources in the rest of the city. According to Wilson, the problems in the social structure of these jobless urban ghettos cannot be fully attributed to urban poverty, but instead, to the high rates of unemployment. Wilson points out that “neighborhoods plagued by high levels of joblessness are more likely to experience low levels of social organization: the two go hand in hand. High rates of joblessness trigger other neighborhood problems that undermine social organization, ranging from crime, gang violence, and drug trafficking to family breakups and problems in the organization of family life.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> The Beginning 1966.

<sup>87</sup> The Man on the Street 1966.

<sup>88</sup> Wilson 1996.

<sup>89</sup> Wilson 1996, page 21.

The ways in which unemployment precipitates social problems are complex, and often indirect, but important to explore in order to contextualize the challenges that Hunters Point residents faced as the Shipyard's labor market decreased. First of all, individuals who are systematically excluded from the legitimate labor market have more incentive to steal or pursue illegitimate market opportunities like selling drugs. In Hunters Point, African Americans were excluded from the mainstream labor market both within Hunters Point, and throughout San Francisco, by racist employment practices and physical isolation from the rest of the city. As a result, crime, gang violence, and drugs immersed as central problems in the Hunters Point neighborhood after the 1960's. Furthermore, unemployment wears away at the family and neighborhood structure by changing the roles that guide family and community interaction. As Wilson argues, "neighborhoods in which adults are able to interact in terms of obligations, expectations and relationships are in a better position to supervise and control the activities and behavior of children...[and] are empowered to improve neighborhood life."<sup>90</sup> Unemployment, in which an individual is precluded from filling a specific role in society, has disruptive, often negative, effects on the personal psyche, and on an individual's relationship to his or her family and community. In this way, unemployment is severely disempowering, as it undermines a person's ability to provide for their family, and undercuts not only their class, but also their status position.<sup>91</sup> The altered relationships and personal devaluation that often accompany chronic unemployment have tangible, negative effects on the community and family structures. In

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<sup>90</sup> Wilson 1996, page 20.

<sup>91</sup> Weber, Gerth, and Mills 1946. The terms "class" and "status," as they are used here, were developed Max Weber in order to describe the poly-hierarchical structure of modern social organization. Weber defines "class" as a person's economic worth, whereas "status" refers to the amount of honor society bestows upon a person. Weber explains that both class and status are important determinates of a person's overall position in society. While class and status are not mutually exclusive, they do not always correlate; a person could be in a low class but have high status or vice versa.

Hunters Point, rising unemployment rates also correlated with the entrenchment of gang culture, the rise of female-headed households, and the decline of neighborhood social organization.

## Chapter 4: Neighborhood in Distress

Beginning in the early 1960's, unemployment and the intense lack of resources in Hunters Point began to wear away at the social organization of the Hunters Point community. As Hunters Point residents became increasingly chronically jobless, latent racial tensions and weaknesses in the neighborhood's socioeconomic structure began to erupt into full-scale, devastating problems.

While unemployment was at the center of the postwar challenges that faced Hunters Point, the structural stresses of unemployment manifested themselves in a wide variety of ailments that were economic, as well as social, in nature. As joblessness increased, Hunters Point began to face issues of poverty, segregation, broken homes, crime, and violence.

### **Conflict and Social Stress within Hunters Point:**

In the 1960's the social stress of unemployment within Hunters Point most often manifested itself in violent tension between the Hunters Point community and San Francisco police and government. This tension was most apparent in the relationship between the police and the community, which was extremely strained during the racially charged national climate of the 1960's.<sup>92</sup> Discrimination and harassment by the San Francisco Police Department consistently plagued the Hunters Point community, and was a perpetually popular topic in the community newspapers. Accounts of police harassment were so plentiful that the Hunters Point newspaper, *The Spokesman*, began to run columns on what innocent African Americans should do when they are unduly approached or arrested by police.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> While police-community tension was especially high in the 1960's, the relationship between the police and the Hunters Point community is still strained today. This became especially apparent to me after interviewing Hunters Point residents, who unanimously cited racial profiling and police harassment as one of the top problems in the community.

<sup>93</sup> If You Are Arrested 1969.

On Tuesday, September 27, 1966, police shot and killed 16-year-old Matthew Johnson as he was fleeing from a car that the officer suspected had been stolen. The officer, who was a white man, shot the youth in the back as he was running away. A few hours later, it was concluded that Matthew Johnson had in fact not stolen the car. As news of the incident spread throughout Hunters Point, angry mobs of young men gathered around the Bayview Community Center and demanded that Mayor Shelly come to Hunters Point to discuss the problems that had been plaguing the neighborhood. After leaving the youth to wait for several hours, Mayor Shelly declined to appear. Furious over the unjust death of Matthew Johnson, and fed-up with the conditions in Hunters Point, the youth began to riot. Soon, Hunters Point was in chaos; people marched through the streets, “breaking out windows, attacking white passengers in cars, screaming and looting.”<sup>94</sup> Unfortunately, police and government officials again failed to respond appropriately. After refusing to address the grievances of the rioters and letting the situation escalate, government officials sent in the National Guard to restore order to the neighborhood. In the ensuing struggle, police and soldiers from the National Guard sprayed bullets into the mobs, killing many of the youth organizers who were attempting to quell their peers. At one point, police and soldiers killed eight youths who were attempting to move each other out of the line of fire.<sup>95</sup> After a few days, the rioting began to subside and community leaders were able to step in. By that Saturday, the National Guard had been called off. Though the riots lasted only a few days, their legacy lives on as one of the most shameful and sad events in San Francisco’s history.

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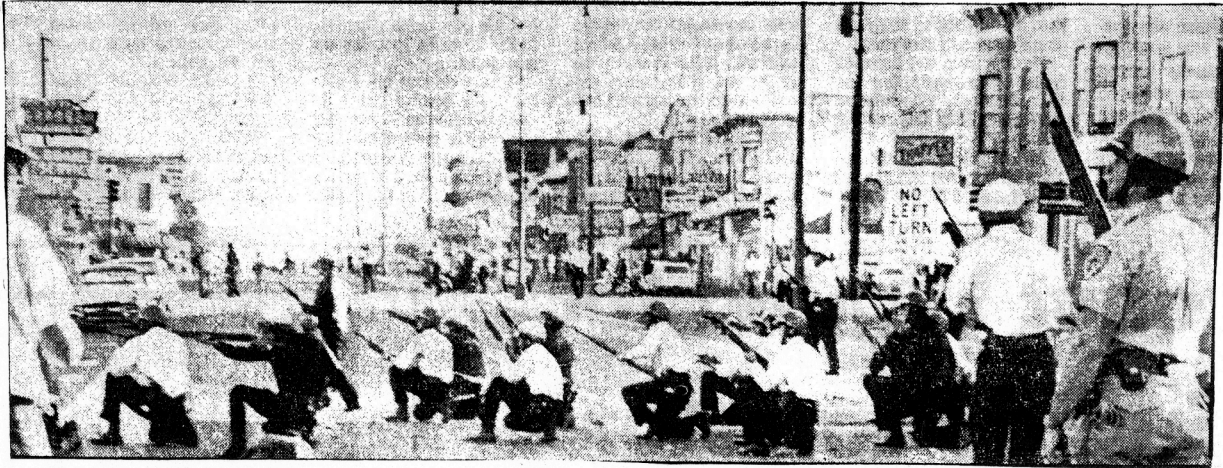
<sup>94</sup> The Beginning 1966.

<sup>95</sup> The Beginning 1966.

Figure 12: The National Guard in Hunters Point.

PAGE 2

SPOKESMAN, SATURDAY, OCT. 8, 1966



In the 1970's and 80's, the most visible effects of unemployment in Hunters Point, outside of poverty, were changes in the family structure, crime, and the increasing prevalence of drugs. In 1967, residents concerned about the changing family structure formed the Bayview Family Action Group, whose mission was to "take action against the forces disrupting marriage in the community."<sup>96</sup> As drug traffic increased, so did violent crime and gang affiliation. Currently, Hunters Point has one of the highest homicide rates of any neighborhood in San Francisco, due in large part to gang violence. In 2003, former Hunters Point resident Kevin Epps released an award-winning, though disturbing, documentary, chronicling rap-related gang wars and their effect on life in Hunters Point.<sup>97</sup> By the time the documentary was released, many of the young men Mr. Epps interviewed in the documentary had become victims of gang-related homicide.

#### **Hunters Point Gains Notoriety:**

As news of Hunters Point's social and economic troubles spread throughout San Francisco, Hunters Point began garner the reputation of a "bad neighborhood." Evidence of Hunters Point's negative reputation is plentiful throughout government reports and news stories from the 1960's

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<sup>96</sup> Family Problems 1976.

<sup>97</sup> Epps 2003.

onwards. For example, the Navy's 1970 Preliminary Master Plan for reuse of the Shipyard site states, "South Bayshore is becoming increasingly a Negro community. It also is an area of large families with dependent children making up almost half of the population."<sup>98</sup> The report goes on to reveal that Hunters Point is "one of San Francisco's ethnic trouble spots. It is currently under study for redevelopment...[and has an] economic and social imbalance".<sup>99</sup>

This San Francisco Redevelopment Agency further detailed the economic and social problems in Hunters Point in their 1960's and 70's push to redevelop the area. In arguing the need for redevelopment, the Redevelopment Agency reported that, "over 90 percent of the households are non-white, there are no children living in 32 percent of the households" and that "the hope of Hunters Point families in creating a new way of life rests on the goals of building a new environment and a more stable and secure family life."<sup>100</sup> The Redevelopment Agency's use of family rhetoric was likely an attempt to connect the problems in Hunters Point to the larger national debate on urban poverty, especially to issues raised by Daniel Patrick Moynihan's report, *The Negro Family: A Case for National Action*.<sup>101</sup> By emphasizing the breakdown in Hunters Point's family structure, an issue that was politically salient at the time, the Redevelopment Agency could bolster the appeal of their proposals with a sense of authority and urgency. Both within the San Francisco government and the city's larger population, the 1960's marked the beginning of Hunters Point's stigma as a ghetto neighborhood.

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<sup>98</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970, page C-2

<sup>99</sup> *Preliminary Master Plan: Hunters Point Naval Shipyard* 1970, page B-2

<sup>100</sup> *Annual Report 1966-67 1967*, page 19.

<sup>101</sup> United States Department of Labor 1965.

*The Negro Family* was a report on American urban poverty, published by Daniel Patrick Moynihan in 1965. Moynihan concludes that the matrifocal family structure is the biggest problem holding the African American population in poverty. Moynihan, a liberal, had wanted his report to serve as the catalyst for increased, family-strengthening social programs. Conservatives, however, quickly championed his report as evidence that urban poverty was the result of a flaw in African American culture. Moynihan's report jettisoned the debate over family structure and urban poverty into the national spotlight.

Since World War II, the social problems caused by unemployment and other structural factors have continually devastated the Hunters Point community. Furthermore, both the socioeconomic problems and their associated stigma have persisted in Hunters Point throughout the second half of the century.<sup>102</sup> The persistence of these problems deserves further analysis, which I will provide in chapter five. The information in this chapter, however, is by no means intended to suggest that Hunters Point is only equal to the sum of its problems. To the contrary, in the face of debilitating social and economic obstacles, Hunters Point residents have formed a strong, spirited and admirable community, whose leaders have fought since World War II to improve the City of San Francisco for everyone.

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<sup>102</sup> However, while Hunters Point is known in San Francisco as an impoverished and blighted neighborhood, I have found it very interesting that most people I talk to in the larger Bay Area have little idea that Hunters Point exists, and little concept of the problems facing the neighborhood. To be fair, most of the people I've talked to are other Stanford students who have had little reason or opportunity to visit Hunters Point. Still, my personal experience has led me to believe that, while the problems in Hunters Point are comparable in scope and impact to issues in other more notorious impoverished urban neighborhoods, there is less outside recognition and awareness of the issues facing Hunters Point. I believe that the lack of outside awareness is a consequence of Hunters Point's isolated physical location, separated by the 101 Freeway, which makes it possible for one to travel through and within San Francisco without ever seeing Hunters Point.



## Chapter 5: Failed Solutions

For several decades, Hunters Point has faced significant social and economic challenges that have persisted despite government and resident efforts to improve Hunters Point. Since the rise of these challenges, both government and resident action has been primarily focused on two improvement initiatives, the Model Cities program in the early 1970's and redevelopment, which has been ongoing throughout the last half-century. While both of these programs have, for the most part, been well intentioned, neither has brought significant progress to the Hunters Point neighborhood. The reason for their minimal impact is that neither program has adequately addressed the core problem facing the Hunters Point community: the lack of legitimate and gainful employment opportunities. The Model Cities program, while it had great potential to bring Hunters Point out of poverty, faced debilitating annual budget cuts until it was discontinued by the Nixon administration only a few years after its inception. Similarly, redevelopment in Hunters Point has, from time to time, been on the right track, yet its projects have consistently fallen short of the neighborhood's needs, especially in the realm of employment. In this chapter I will detail each of these two programs, offering an analysis as to why each fell short of significant and lasting neighborhood improvement.

### **The Model Cities Program:**

The Model Cities program in Hunters Point was part of the larger national Model Cities initiative created by the Johnson administration to rehabilitate America's most blighted urban neighborhoods. The idea behind the program was select the most decayed urban neighborhoods, invest heavily in their welfare by providing both monetary resources and structural support, and then use the improvement processes in these neighborhoods to serve as models for urban

revitalization strategy. The program pushed a comprehensive approach, urging participating cities to “develop a concerted attack on social and economic problems as well as physical decay” through the “coordinated efforts of all relevant agencies [and] meaningful civic participation.”<sup>103</sup> The Model Cities program was administered through the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), which oversaw the program throughout its lifespan.

The City of San Francisco housed two Model Cities projects, one in the Mission district and the other in Hunters Point. Both the Mission and Hunters Point programs had the same administrative structure, consisting of a Neighborhood Committee (comprised of residents) that was overseen by the Model Cities Council (comprised of government officials), and then by the Office of the Mayor. While the community-level initiatives differed in each program, they both shared the same amount of funding and operated under generally similar guidelines and objectives.

The Hunters Point Model Cities program began in 1970 and operated until its federal funding was cut entirely by the Nixon administration in 1976. The planning phase of the program started in 1970, and the Hunters Point Model Cities administration funded their first community programs in 1971. Due in part to a high degree of citizen participation, the programs developed and implemented by the Hunters Point Model Cities administration were intelligently designed. Those involved in the program’s planning process, many of whom were residents, were well informed about the challenges facing the Hunters Point community, including the lack of local employment opportunities. To secure grant money to fund the initial programs, the Model Neighborhood Committee and Model Cities Council published a detailed report outlining the

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<sup>103</sup> Watts 1975.

conditions in Hunters Point and the issues facing the neighborhood.”<sup>104</sup> The report proposed a five-part strategy to improve Hunters Point employment and economic satisfaction, which included measures to match residents with jobs, increase the number of employers in Hunters Point, and earmark jobs in government and neighborhood businesses for Hunters Point residents.<sup>105</sup>

The resources brought by the Model Cities program allowed Hunters Point to implement dozens of new social service programs, including but not limited to programs designed to improve the employment chances of Hunters Point residents. The Bayview Hunters Point Manpower Skills Center was just one of the programs that focused on increasing the available employment opportunities. The Manpower Skills Center housed both the Apprenticeship Opportunity Foundation and the Affirmative Action Program. The apprenticeship program helped young men with little formal education learn a trade and make industry connections, while the Affirmative Action Program worked to place African American residents in stable government jobs. Another initiative funded by Model Cities, called Operation Clean-Up, employed Hunters Point residents to clean up and beautify the neighborhood through landscaping and repair projects. In addition to generating outside employment opportunities, the Model Cities program itself provided jobs for many Hunters Point residents who worked in its administration and in the management of Model Cities service programs. In 1974, Model Cities employed almost five hundred people in both full and part-time positions.<sup>106</sup>

The programs carried out by Model Cities made a serious effort to reverse the trajectory of decay in Hunters Point, which may well have succeeded had the programs been adequately

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<sup>104</sup> Brooks 1970.

<sup>105</sup> Brooks 1970.

<sup>106</sup> Alioto 1973-1974.

funded. There was significant evidence that Model Cities was working in the short run, as program reports documented hundreds of clients receiving services. However, San Francisco Model Cities programs never had the chance to achieve a long-term impact; only three years after the program began in San Francisco, Model Cities faced significant national budget cuts, forcing local government officials and residents to make hard choices about which services to maintain. Federal funding for the program had only been guaranteed until 1976, and in 1974, the Nixon administration began to reduce Model Cities' funding in an effort to phase out the program.

On February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1974, with national funding running out, Mayor Alioto proposed a revised budget plan to gradually cut programs, which the Bayview-Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency rejected.<sup>107</sup> Alioto, torn on the issue, told Hunters Point residents: "I cannot in good conscience recommend that we simply abandon a program into which so much community effort and resources have been poured. But, I also know that we cannot continue with the program as we have started. We simply cannot afford to pick up the federal share of the financing."<sup>108</sup> While both the Alioto administration,<sup>109</sup> and the residents of Hunters Point wanted to keep the Model Cities programs intact, there was little either party could do to contend with the lack of national funding. In further negotiations with the Mayor, the Model Neighborhood Agency voted to use the reduced funding to keep some programs fully funded for as long as possible, while completely cutting others.<sup>109</sup> After 1974, the Hunters Point Model Neighborhood Agency attempted to find other sources of funding to continue the Model Cities programs, looking to such agencies as the Department of Labor. However, attempts to secure funding and

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<sup>107</sup> Alioto March 12, 1974.

<sup>108</sup> Alioto March 20, 1974.

<sup>109</sup> Alioto 1973-1974.

continue the work of Model Cities were largely unsuccessful, and the Hunters Point Model Cities program closed its doors in 1976, with local unemployment and poverty rates as high as ever.

### **Redevelopment:**

Since the early 1960's the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency has been working on several neighborhood renewal projects in the Hunters Point area. The history of redevelopment in San Francisco is complex and has become extremely politicized since the agency's actions in the Fillmore and Western Addition neighborhoods during the late 1950's and early 60's. Many San Francisco residents believe, not without cause, that the redevelopment irreparably damaged the Fillmore district by purposely displacing its African American residents, and replacing their neighborhood and cultural institutions with what turned out to be poorly designed, lifeless buildings. The legacy of redevelopment in the Fillmore has continually plagued the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and to this day many San Francisco residents, especially African Americans, have yet to reestablish their trust in the agency's motives and competency. The history and effects of redevelopment in San Francisco is a subject that could fill several books, and this paper will hardly do justice to the topic. However, redevelopment has been, and continues to be an integral part of the city's improvement strategy for Hunters Point, and so I will attempt to provide a brief summary of the redevelopment plans that have affected the Hunters Point neighborhood.

One of the biggest problems facing Hunters Point after the war was the shortage of adequate housing. During the war, people who moved to the neighborhood to work at the Shipyard were housed in temporary wartime barracks. When the war ended, workers who had saved enough money moved out of the temporary housing and purchased homes in the

neighborhood.<sup>110,111</sup> However, not all of the Shipyard workers who had been relying on Navy housing were able to afford their own homes. In addition, a large number of people moved into Hunters Point after World War II, most of whom were African Americans who had either been displaced by redevelopment in the Fillmore or who faced housing discrimination in the rest of the city. In the housing shortage that ensued, the San Francisco Housing Authority converted the war barracks, which were designed to be temporary, into 1600 units of fulltime public housing.<sup>112</sup>

In the early 1960's nearly 700 families were living in this "temporary" public housing, which the Housing Authority had declared "almost unlivable" in 1948.<sup>113</sup> As the injustice of these housing accommodations became increasingly politicized, the city faced strong pressure to provide adequate public housing in Hunters Point. The city's answer to the public housing problem was to designate these housing complexes, and the area surrounding them, as redevelopment zones, which would be completely torn down, redesigned and rebuilt. Here, the residents of Hunters Point faced a tough choice. Many of the people living in the would-be redevelopment zones had been displaced from their homes in the Fillmore by redevelopment. By now, Hunters Point was a primarily African American neighborhood, and the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency was notorious for its disrespect of African American communities. However, though they mistrusted the Redevelopment Agency, the residents of Hunters Point wanted the temporary public housing structures to be replaced with permanent, decent housing.

While the Hunters Point community was extremely skeptical at first, the Redevelopment Agency worked to convince residents that this new redevelopment would not repeat the mistakes

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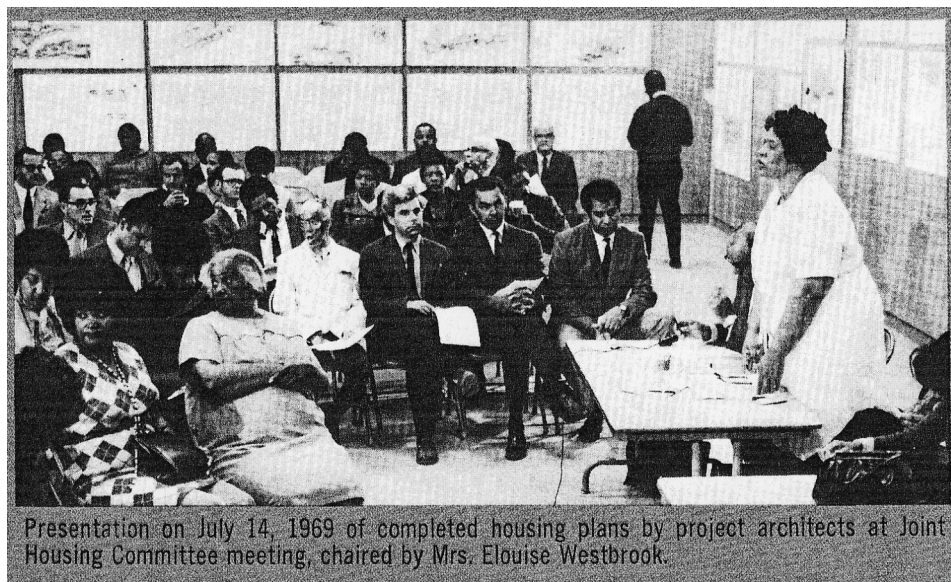
<sup>110</sup> Williams 1994. Notably, the prevalence of African Americans who bought homes after the war served to catalyze the white exodus from Hunters Point, leading to the significant postwar demographic change that occurred.

<sup>112</sup> Herman 1966.

<sup>113</sup> Herman 1968.

of the Fillmore project. Ensuring that they would avoid displacement, the community agreed to participate in redevelopment under the condition that no housing would be torn down until replacement housing had been built.<sup>114</sup> By the mid-1960's, redevelopment plans for Hunters Point were in full force, with the community on board. The citizens of Hunters Point formed an organization, named the Joint Housing Committee, to work with the Redevelopment Agency and provide community input on its plans. The Joint Housing Committee was made up of 125 citizens, who collectively represented 43 different organizations.<sup>115</sup> Now fully in support of redevelopment in Hunters Point, the Joint Housing Committee worked in close collaboration with the Redevelopment Agency to ensure that the redevelopment plans were actualized.

**Figure 13: A meeting of the Joint Housing Committee, 1969.**



After the initial mistrust between the Joint Housing Committee and the Redevelopment Agency dissipated, their collaboration developed into a successful partnership and a positive force of change for the Hunters Point neighborhood. The Joint Housing Committee worked tirelessly

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<sup>114</sup> Williams 1994.

<sup>115</sup> Herman 1968.

with the agency to ensure that redevelopment plans were developed according to the community's needs. In 1968, both the Redevelopment Agency and Mayor Alioto praised the Hunters Point Joint Housing Committee for their collaborative efforts. The Redevelopment Agency lauded the Joint Housing Committee as a model for community participation, publicly stating that: "We are impressed by the demonstration of 'collaborative planning' that is going on in Hunters Point...Local residents and organizations, working through their own committee, have had a strong voice in the project from the outset, assuring crucial community support."<sup>116</sup> Similarly, Mayor Alioto issued a proclamation praising the Joint Housing Committee, which stated that, "The working out of this plan by the Bayview-Hunters Point Joint Housing Committee, a neighborhood organization, in collaboration with the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, is a model of citizen participation."<sup>117</sup>

By the end of the 1960's the Redevelopment Agency, with the help of the Joint Housing Committee, had drafted elaborate plans for the future of Hunters Point. The Redevelopment Agency's vision for the new development featured a planned community in the center of Hunters Point and a new industrial park in the former Butchertown area, which was now called India Basin. The Hunters Point master-plan community was intended to be a state of the art public housing development; its features were to include 2000 new dwellings, two new schools, four child-care centers, a new shopping center, two new churches, a recreation center, playgrounds, tree-lined walkways and complete undergrounding of utilities.<sup>118</sup> The India Basin Industrial Park was slated to be just as promising. The first redevelopment project of its kind, the India Basin development was expected to bring thousands of new jobs to Hunters Point to balance the

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<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, page 4.

<sup>117</sup> Alioto 1968.

<sup>118</sup> Westbrook 1969.



addition of housing. The agency chose a 122-acre plot of underutilized, underdeveloped land along the waterfront as the site for the new industrial park.<sup>119</sup> Typical of land on the outskirts of the Naval base, the project site had previously been serving as a junkyard. The Redevelopment Agency promised that not all companies would be welcomed into the new India Basin development, but instead, that it would only house those industries that would provide jobs for Hunters Point residents. The Redevelopment Agency called the project: “one of the most direct social planning actions in Agency history.”<sup>120</sup> As blueprints were developed, local excitement and support for the redevelopment projects became increasingly tangible; the Joint Housing Committee called the projects a “dream-about-to-come-true,” writing, “we hold the dream of success, of comfortable well-built homes, of good schools, of job openings and job training...and of the long awaited better life.”<sup>121</sup>

Unfortunately, the obstacles toward a “long awaited better life” in Hunters Point continued to stack up against the community. After ten years of planning, which itself had been held up by funding delays,<sup>122</sup> the Redevelopment Agency and Joint Housing Committee were informed that Washington bureaucrats did not intend to release the funds promised for the project. In 1967, the Department of Housing and Urban Development had earmarked over 14 million dollars for the Redevelopment Agency’s Hunters Point project.<sup>123</sup> Both Justin Herman, head of the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, and San Francisco Mayor Joseph Alioto, flew to

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<sup>119</sup> *Annual Report 1966-67 1967*, page 20.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, page 20.

<sup>121</sup> Westbrook 1969.

<sup>122</sup> On November 3, 1964, California voters passed Proposition 14, which sought to prevent the state from enacting any law that would prevent racial discrimination in housing sale or rental. On December 2, 30 days after Prop 14 was passed, all redevelopment projects in California were suspended, pending judicial clarification on the effect of Proposition 14. On May 10, 1966 the California Supreme Court ruled that Proposition 14 was unconstitutional, and the funds that had been withheld were once again released to the Redevelopment Agency. The San Francisco Redevelopment Agency, however, suffered over a year’s delay in the progress of its projects.

<sup>123</sup> *Annual Report 1966-67 1967*.

Washington to negotiate with HUD officials. However, after neither Mr. Herman nor the Mayor could convince HUD to release the funds, a 14 person delegation from the Hunters Point Joint Housing Committee decided to take matters into their own hands.

The Hunters Point delegation flew to Washington to meet with the Federal Housing officials themselves. From the beginning, they were rebuffed and treated poorly; they arrived to find that, despite having sent several letters and telegrams ahead of time, no one was prepared to meet with them. Phil Burton, who had scheduled their appointments ahead of time, was in a meeting with the House of Representatives, “not to be disturbed.” When Mr. Burton appeared, he sent the delegation to meet with the head of HUD, where they waited an extraordinarily long time for him to arrive. Tired of being disrespected, Eloise Westbrook, Chairman of the Joint Housing Committee, decided to prove a point and sat at the head of HUD’s chair with her feet on his desk; when he did finally arrive to meet with the delegation, he had no place to sit. Needless to say, the meeting did not go well.

Coming into the meeting, the Hunters Point residents were desperate for change; they had lived far too long with dilapidated housing, inadequate schools, and sub-par city services. The new redevelopment project planned for Hunters Point was the first chance for tangible neighborhood improvement since World War II, and they had worked for ten years to perfect the plans and secure resources. At first, HUD officials refused to release the funds, “talking down” to the delegation in an extremely heated discussion.<sup>124</sup> When interviewed by the San Francisco Examiner, delegation member Geneva Whitfield explained, “One of these men looked at us as though we were a bunch of animals...As he looked at us that way, I kept assuring myself that I was a human being, and I thought of my children, and their children. And as I thought about all that,

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<sup>124</sup> Hardin 1994.

and their future, I felt that this was the end of the line. I wanted to get him, even if it meant I had to perish...That's, I guess, when I broke down and got hysterical.”<sup>125</sup> Mrs. Whitfield started kicking and fighting, and had to be restrained. Meanwhile, Eloise Westbrook appeared to have had a stroke before she fainted. The HUD officials called an ambulance for Mrs. Westbrook, who was taken to a charity hospital where she refused to be treated. Demanding higher quality care, Mrs. Westbrook was then taken to the Mayo Hospital where members of Congress were treated.<sup>126</sup>

After Mrs. Westbrook's hospitalization, the delegation returned to their hotel rooms, only to find them filled with fruit and flowers, courtesy of HUD. The next day, the delegation received a call from HUD officials informing them that the money had been released and that there should be no further problems. The delegation returned home to Hunters Point where they were greeted with praise from Mr. Herman and the Mayor, and most importantly, with a parade along Third Street where Hunters Point residents came out to cheer and applaud. Although they were relieved that redevelopment would now be able to start, the delegates were nevertheless saddened that they “got it by threat of violence, rather than through reasoning.”<sup>127</sup>

Despite the hard work of the Joint Housing Committee, however, change was not realized in Hunters Point. Although funding for both the master plan-community and the industrial park were released in 1970, these redevelopment projects still are not finished. In 1985, Mayor Diane Feinstein issued a celebratory statement praising the *almost* completed redevelopment projects in “the new Hunters Point.”<sup>128</sup> Feinstein noted that the temporary war housing had finally been torn down, 1,200 homes had been built (with 200 market-rate homes coming), and the India Basin

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<sup>125</sup> Canter 1970.

<sup>126</sup> Hardin 1994.

<sup>127</sup> Canter 1970.

<sup>128</sup> Feinstein 1985.

Industrial Park was 90 percent complete. Her statement didn't mention that 1400, almost complete, homes fell significantly short of the originally planned 2000, or that the temporary war housing, declared unlivable in 1948, was supposed to be replaced by the year 1970. The mayor ended her statement promising that, "it won't be long before the remainder of the 200 market-rate homes, along with convenience shops and churches, go under construction to complete the success story that is...the new Hunters Point."<sup>129</sup> Unfortunately, that success story never took place. Redevelopment for India Basin is ongoing; to this day the project has not been completely finished, and most likely won't be for years to come.<sup>130</sup> The churches that Mayor Feinstein spoke of in 1985 have also not been completed. In 2008, a Hunters Point citizen's committee issued a resolution demanding that the city and the Redevelopment Agency finish the construction started on the Grace Tabernacle Community Church in 1969, noting that "the unfinished plans have created adverse impacts including ADA and unsafe access problems, soil erosion, flooding in and around the [church], and bacteria and mosquitoes from water stagnation that pose serious safety and health hazards."<sup>131</sup>

Sadly, redevelopment in Hunters Point fell markedly short of the dream for which the Joint Housing Committee had fought so tenaciously. The India Basin Industrial Park could have had an extremely positive effect on the community by providing jobs for the unskilled workers who have been excluded from the job market since the postwar structural changes. Indeed, the Joint Housing Committee knew how corrosive chronic unemployment was to the Hunters Point community, and had designed the India Basin plant specifically to curb unemployment in Hunters Point. However, The India Basin Industrial Park never proved to be the solution that it was

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<sup>129</sup> Feinstein 1985.

<sup>130</sup> *India Basin/Hunters Point Shoreline Community Workshop* 2007.

<sup>131</sup> Jackson 2008.

intended to be, mostly because it was never finished. The plant did create some jobs, but its extremely slow pace of construction meant that it couldn't keep up with the increasing number of Hunters Point residents who were unemployed in the 1970's and 80's. Like Model Cities, postwar redevelopment was rife with promise, but mismanagement and lack of funding meant that it too failed to incite positive change in Hunters Point.

## Conclusion:

The story of Hunters Point is a story of many missed opportunities. With its superb location, numerous natural attributes, and spirited community, the Hunters Point neighborhood never should have reached the state of decay in which it currently exists. As this paper has shown, social and economic problems in Hunters Point developed as the result of postwar structural factors, chiefly, the persistent lack of employment opportunity that has plagued the neighborhood since the downsizing and eventual closure of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard. At several junctions in Hunters Point's history, there have been opportunities to correct the unemployment problem, yet at each of these instances, meaningful change has proved to be elusive.

While this study has focused primarily on the history of Hunters Point, its findings are relevant to contemporary issues facing the neighborhood. Today, Hunters Point is in a crucial transitional period. Although the Navy decommissioned the Shipyard in 1974, it retained ownership of the land until the early 1990's when it turned the Shipyard site over to the City of San Francisco. During Naval ownership, the Shipyard land remained largely undeveloped. Since the transfer, however, the city has initiated the cleanup and development of the Shipyard site, and has selected private development company, Lennar, as the project's primary developer. The new development at Hunters Point is being overseen by the Redevelopment Agency, and although some construction has already started, future plans are still under review.

Today's redevelopment in Hunters Point represents yet another opportunity to bring positive change to the neighborhood. Yet at the same time, redevelopment could drive up the neighborhood's real estate prices and displace many of the residents who have lived in the community for decades. In light of this current dilemma, it is crucial to reflect upon the history of

Hunters Point, and to draw wisdom from the mistakes of the past. As history has shown, it is imperative that future development plans strive to correct the neighborhood's economic deficiencies by creating gainful jobs for Hunters Point residents. By improving employment conditions in the neighborhood, perhaps the "the long awaited better life" that the Joint Housing Committee once dreamed of might finally come to bear in Hunters Point.

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