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THE RACIAL CONTOURS OF YIMBY/NIMBY BAY AREA GENTRIFICATION

Erin McElroy
Andrew Szeto

ABSTRACT

In this article, we trace the emergence of the false YIMBY/NIMBY dialectic now dominant in San Francisco housing rights discourse, studying its constitution and material effects. Specifically, we investigate how racial capitalism is constitutive of both YIMBYism and NIMBYism, drawing upon Cedric Robinson's argument that racialization has always been constitutive of capitalism, and racism is requisite for capitalism's endurance. We make our argument by drawing upon empirical research conducted by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP), a data analysis, oral history, and critical cartography collective of which we are both a part. We also draw upon collaborative research between AEMP and community-based housing rights nonprofits and local housing justice organizing efforts, as well as literary and cultural analysis. Such a methodological approach facilitates the unearthing of the racial logics undergirding YIMBYism, pointing to the need for alternative analytics to theorize and mobilize against heightened forms of racialized dispossession. We begin by outlining San Francisco's YIMBY and NIMBY genealogies, and then proceed to unravel the basic statistical logic underpinning YIMBYism. In doing so, we introduce an additional analytic that we argue is requisite for deconstructing YIMBY algorithms: aesthetic desires of wealthy newcomers. We suggest that the YIMBY "build, baby, build" housing solution fails when architectural and neighborhood fantasies are taken into account. We then study how racialized surveillance informs not only the NIMBY but also the YIMBY gaze, arguing that both camps are ultimately tethered to racial capitalism's liberal legacies.

At the height of San Francisco's hyper-gentrification in 2014, capitalist development groups began coopting anti-displacement grammar, thereby promulgating market-driven solutions for rising rents and eviction rates. Despite the historic roots of pro-development, this new form of San Francisco pro-growth activism emerged as a reaction to a renewed housing justice movement. It was during this time that over a dozen tenant's rights and nonprofit housing development organizations consolidated the Anti-Displacement Coalition, collectively framing the "housing crisis" as increased eviction and homelessness rates. Coalition members called for specific policies such as eviction moratoriums, taxation on real estate speculation, and enforcement of short-term vacation rentals to stop the displacement of long-term working class communities. Through direct action and strong anti-displacement policy advocacy, the Coalition united a renewed movement against gentrification. In reaction, pro-development groups that were amplified by the Bay Area Renters Federation (BARF) initiated a surge of what they called "YIMBYism" against housing justice groups' putative "NIMBYism" (Yes in My Backyard versus Not in My Backyard). While NIMBYism has long been understood as linked to racist and wealthy neighborhood preservation, in this article we assert that despite YIMBYism's framing of housing justice activists as NIMBY, both YIMBYism and NIMBYism shelter similar racist onto-epistemologies.

In 2014, BARF came to fruition after its founder, Sonja Trauss, read a slow-growth critique by then *TechCrunch* reporter Kim-Mai Cutler (2014), which amplified a pro-growth solution to San Francisco's housing crisis. Since its formation, BARF has grown into a larger YIMBY movement. Galvanizing momentum on state and national scales, YIMBYism enjoys support from technocapitalists, developers, politicians, and urban think tanks, trumpeting new development, luxury or otherwise, as the only remedy (Bay Area Renters Federation 2014; Swan 2016; Szeto and Meronek

2017; YIMBYtown 2017). According to Trauss, those opposing new luxury developments in working-class neighborhoods “just got confused” (Hammill 2016). “YIMBYs” blame slow-growth advocates for the reduction of available housing stock, a cutback that they assert drives up property values. As such, YIMBYism grows by mobilizing a common enemy: resisters of new luxury and market-rate housing development. While these resisters are largely rooted in anti-racist politics, YIMBYism renders them racist “NIMBYs.” This discursive strategy conflates wealthy NIMBY property owners who are determined to maintain the “traditional character and culture of their backyards” with housing justice advocates who are fighting evictions and prioritizing affordable housing construction (HoSang 2010).

YIMBYs disseminate their free market remedy into discursive geographies far and wide, participating in national annual conferences such as YIMBYtown, as well as in lobbying efforts in Washington, DC and Sacramento. In San Francisco, however, BARF and its fellow YIMBY cohort endeavor, more than anything, to impact policy. In a January 2016 Planning Commission hearing around the deceptively titled Affordable Housing Density Bonus program, BARF pushed for the implementation of a citywide up-zoning measure. This would facilitate the razing of homes and businesses for the development of market-rate and luxury buildings, eventually offering low-income tenants below market-rate dwellings elsewhere. During the hearing, the San Francisco YIMBY Party’s Policy Director, Brian Hanlon (a white man), proclaimed,

While I’m angry at many so called affordable housing leaders for consistently failing their constituents, I am also angry that by not allowing sufficient housing to be built in San Francisco they’re going to make me complicit in displacing even more vulnerable populations...
When I move to East Oakland, I will most likely be replacing someone who does not look like me.

Hanlon’s ultimatum to poor communities of color—to accept luxury housing construction or else be displaced by this white YIMBY man—echoes the paternalism of pro-development forces during previous waves of dispossession. In this article, we unravel YIMBYism’s racist logic to reveal an underpinning genealogy of NIMBYism. In doing so, we argue that when it comes to racialized housing dynamics, the dialectic between YIMBYism and NIMBYism is fictive.

In what follows, we trace the emergence of this false YIMBY/NIMBY dialectic, studying its constitution and material effects. Specifically, we investigate how racial capitalism is constitutive of YIMBYism, drawing upon Cedric Robinson’s argument that racialization has always been constitutive of capitalism, and racism is requisite for capitalism’s endurance (1983). We make our argument by drawing upon empirical research conducted by the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP), a data analysis, oral history, and critical cartography collective of which we are both a part.¹ As a project committed to producing data *with* and not *for* impacted communities (Tallbear 2014), the AEMP endeavors for its work to be useful in thwarting Bay Area racialized dispossession. This paper also draws upon collaborative research between AEMP and community-based housing rights nonprofits and local housing justice organizing efforts, as well as literary and cultural analysis. Such a methodological approach facilitates the unearthing of the racial logics undergirding YIMBYism, pointing to the need for alternative analytics to theorize and mobilize against heightened forms of racialized dispossession.

We begin by outlining San Francisco’s YIMBY and NIMBY genealogies, and then proceed to unravel the basic statistical logic underpinning YIMBYism. In doing so, we introduce an additional analytic that we argue is requisite for deconstructing YIMBY algorithms: aesthetic desires of wealthy newcomers. In doing so, we suggest that the YIMBY “build, baby, build” housing solution fails when architectural and neighborhood fantasies are taken into account. We then study how racialized surveillance informs not only the NIMBY but also the YIMBY gaze, arguing that both camps are ultimately tethered to racial capitalism’s liberal legacies.

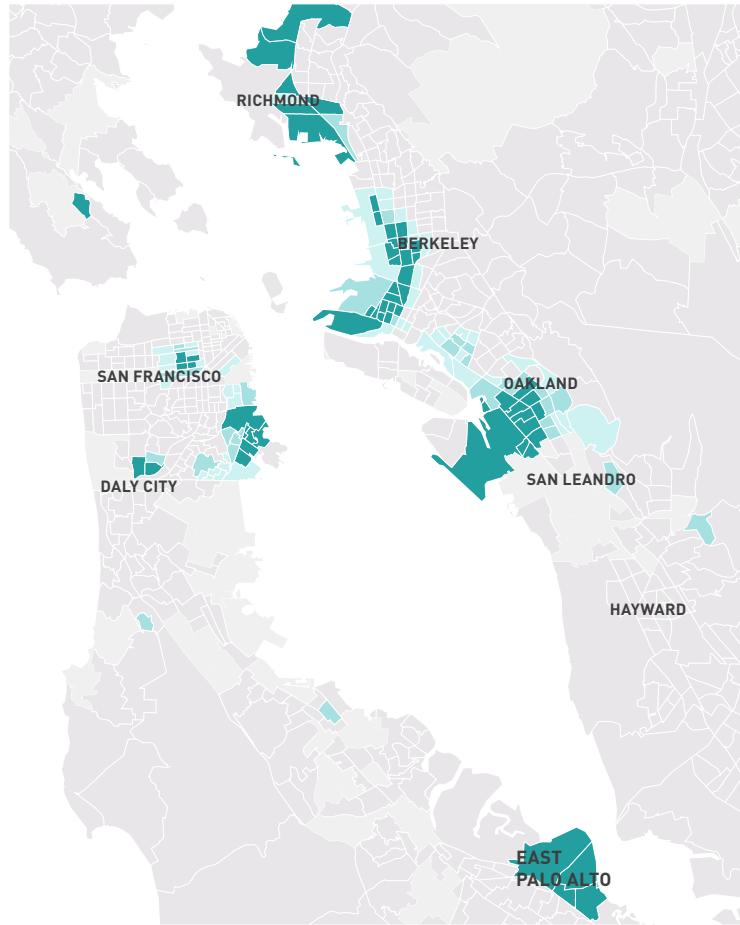
GENEALOGIES

The neoliberal analytics embraced by YIMBY and NIMBY groups have precursors in the San Francisco Bay Area’s development history. The United States urban crises of the 1960s and 1970s, popularly discoursed as the growth of metropolitan decay and blight, were informed by the restructuring of urban and suburban landscapes in the prior era, which

1. The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project is an activist data visualization, data analysis, and digital narrative project founded in 2013 and currently working in San Francisco, Alameda, San Mateo, and Los Angeles Counties, as well as New York City. For more on the project, see Maharawal and McElroy 2017a.

FIGURE 1

BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION, 1970



PERCENTAGE

20%

>80%



By the AEMP

(For an interactive map, see <http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/black.html>)

FIGURE 1

BLACK OR AFRICAN AMERICAN POPULATION, 2015



PERCENTAGE

20%

>80%



By the AEMP

(For an interactive map, see <http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/black.html>)

generated white flight from urban centers (Sugrue 1996). In the Bay Area, white flight was a response to the Great Migration of African Americans from the South, along with other transnational migrations into urban spaces. During this era, while urban spaces experienced divestment and were rendered racialized ghettos, the “white noose” of the surrounding suburbs became valorized, leading to new forms of exclusionary and racialized space (Self 2003). As Richard Walker and Alex Schafran suggest, “The Bay Area’s liberal reputation belies the degree to which blacks lived in segregated neighborhoods, especially during the first wave of postwar suburbanization” (2015, 24). It was against this racialized and exclusionary spatiality that San Francisco’s slow- and anti-growth movements emerged, opposing what Walker calls the suburban “spatial fix” (2004).

While at first, opposition to the construction of wealthy surrounding enclaves made sense according to anti-racist ethics, it began to make less sense as twentieth-century exurbanization changed forms and as parts of cities became newly desirable and invested in (Schafran 2013, 666). This reinvestment in some urban spaces was paralleled by heightened forms of divestment in others—not to mention failed redevelopment and displacement projects—and led to new forms of racialized exurbanization, pushing poor and working-class communities of color into the suburbs through its racialized practices of increasing mortgages, subprime lending, and carrying out foreclosures (Wyly et al. 2012). Therefore, San Francisco’s Black population began to dramatically decline in the 1980s (see figure 1), diminishing the 1970s’ 13% population to 2015’s 5.5% figure (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2016a). In fact, since the 1980s, of all US cities, San Francisco has experienced the fastest declining Black population (Brahinsky 2012).

For instance, the Western Addition and Fillmore, which boasted a 60 percent Black population in the 1940s, were racialized and declared blight in 1948, leading to an “urban renewal” redevelopment project in 1964. Utilizing eminent domain, 60 square blocks were effectively destroyed, displacing 883 businesses, forcing out 4,729 households, and demolishing roughly 2,500 homes (Fulbright 2008). Although people were promised by Justin Herman’s Redevelopment Agency the right to return, the promise was never fulfilled. As the Reverend Amos Brown of the city’s branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People explained, “They wiped out our community, weakened our institutional base and never carried out their promise to bring people back” (Fulbright 2008).

Later, in the 1990s, deteriorating towers were demolished across the country for “mixed-income,” low-density buildings in the name of redevelopment. In effect, countless tenants were evicted in areas previously targeted during urban renewal (Howard 2012; Pattillo 2007; Tracy 2014). Those exurbanized and forced out of San Francisco and other cities, which were now driven by valorized “creative capital,” have been disproportionately low-income communities of color, and it is no coincidence that they later bore the brunt of the subprime mortgage crisis. As research by Elvin Wyly et al. has revealed, foreclosure and delinquency rates in largely minority neighborhoods across the country have been twice as severe as those in white neighborhoods, thereby establishing new “racial meanings of housing in America” (2013, 577).

In San Francisco, each wave of development and displacement that has followed Black communities and communities of color—whether through state abandonment and divestment, redevelopment and gentrification, or exurbanization and foreclosures—demonstrates how racial capitalism underpins these forced dislocations and crises. Yet, as YIMBYs advocate for up-zoning across the city, they mistakenly argue that redlining and segregation are the result of low-density housing policies rather than those predicated upon technologies of speculation and dispossession (Clark 2017; Florida 2016; Lens and Monkkonen 2016). YIMBYism’s demands for up-zoning liberalization as a remedy to contemporary urban segregation neglect these racialized histories, failing to acknowledge how capitalist urbanization has created crises for communities of color in every iteration. By projecting NIMBYism onto these histories, YIMBYism disavows its inherent racism.

It is true that slow- and anti-growth Bay Area histories have contributed to structures of racialized exurbanization by opposing the earlier suburban spatial fix and by attaching to a liberal imaginary of a perfect, quaint city. However, the movement has been more heterogeneous and nuanced than simply that (Hartman and Carnochan 2002). From opposition to Proposition 13² to dissent against lofts of the 1990s and towers of the 2000s, which were developed to meet the housing needs of

2. Many slow-growth advocates also objected to the 1978 Proposition 13, which standardized property taxation and financialized land use, shifting development planning criteria from traditional planning concerns (e.g., proximity to transportation) to the amount of capital a project would contribute to a municipal body. This exacerbated uneven job/housing equations, incentivizing long commutes (a prelude to the contemporary Bay Area commuting mess of today). Thus, opposition to Proposition 13 was a dissent to the upswing of neoliberalism into urban planning.

Silicon Valley venture capital, there have been different iterations of opposition that responded specifically to racialized uneven development (Smith 1982). The International Hotel eviction struggle challenged the mass eviction of Filipino seniors as well as forces of urban redevelopment and “monopoly capitalism” that sought to demolish low-income housing for downtown pro-growth interests (Habal 2005). Also, during the Dot Com Boom, housing activists successfully opposed the Planning Department’s decision to develop Trinity Plaza apartments, which would have led to the eviction of 360 rent-controlled tenants for the construction of 1400 market-rate condominiums (Corburn and Bhatia 2007, 329).

As the historic contours of anti- and slow-growth movements illuminate, while it is one thing to oppose all development, it is quite another to oppose the development of luxury housing for the rich, particularly when development induces or forecasts conditions of racialized gentrification. And this is precisely where the NIMBY/YIMBY dialectic falters. Housing justice advocates fighting to curb evictions and the construction of luxury development embrace not a NIMBY ethos, but rather one opposed to the reproduction and endurance of racial capitalism in housing contexts. YIMBY-ism constructs a NIMBY antagonist who equates public and affordable housing with luxury condos. But this enemy simply does not exist; it has never existed.

Beyond reliance on such enmity fictions, pro-growth supply and demand formulas fall short in their ameliorative attempts. Walker suggests that to understand contemporary drivers of the housing market, rather than buying into the Economics 101 myth of “build, baby, build,” we need to study three other influential conditions: “credit and capital, boom and bust cycles, and the spatial preferences of the elite” (2016). As he argues, housing often requires mortgages and the financial institutions. These incited the country’s most overheated mortgage markets during the housing bubble and have yet to be sufficiently reformed. Further, as much of the venture capital currently penetrating the Bay Area is tied to the global market, a transnational analytic is requisite. Additionally, the Bay Area housing market is dramatically distorted by “the wealthy for exclusive, leafy, space-eating suburbs from Palo Alto to Orinda,” which “reduce overall housing supply by using low-density zoning to block the high-rises and apartments that provide moderate priced homes (not to mention low-income public housing)” (2016). Not all suburbs are equal (Schafran 2013).

Today, while some suburbs have become the destination of those expelled from gentrifying metropolises, others are all too eager to maintain their gated communities and cultures of racialized exclusion.

While YIMBYs blame opponents of luxury development for increased gentrification, Walker argues that the actual “market distortions” fueling the crisis are factors such as speculation, financial excess, tax havens, and inequality. “The day when the runaway privileges of bankers, builders, speculators, wealthy suburbanites, and the rest are reined in,” he writes, “that’s the day the housing crisis will be over” (2016). As his arguments make clear, “build, baby, build” formulas do not remedy displacement and instead contribute to it. Thus, alternate solutions must be considered, from eviction protection to low-income housing construction to community land trust investment. After all, in San Francisco, it has been local community-driven organizing that has historically been most successful at thwarting evictions, not free-market applications.³ As such, YIMBYism reminds us that the violence of racial capitalism has always been obscured under the liberal banners of “progress,” sometimes coded as “renewal” or “redevelopment.” Not only does the discourse of the “housing crisis,” championed by city planners and YIMBY activists, fail to reckon with the centrality of dispossession required for growth, but also with the deep history of racialized liberalism.

ALGORITHMS OF DESIRE

In this section, we unravel the undergirding YIMBY tenets and turn to an analytic often ignored in planning conversations: desire. By desire, we refer to affective predilections that draw renters and owners towards particular neighborhoods and architectures—fantasies that defy traditional planning logics but that nevertheless feed into and co-constitute those of the free market. These structures of desire, we argue, are imbricated within settler culture. We argue that in order to understand current contexts of displacement, one must attend to racialized structures of settler desire and not only neoliberal economics. But first, some basic math to disinter several YIMBY racialized logics.

3. For literature on San Francisco’s long social movement history resisting gentrification and capitalist development see Beitel (2013), Brahinsky (2014), Browne et al. (2005), Carlsson (2004), Habal (2005), Hanhardt (2013), Lai (2012), Maharawal (2014), McElroy (2017), and Tracy (2014).

One of YIMBYism's primary arguments is that increased development, regardless of the type, will ameliorate the lack of Bay Area housing, and thus mitigate displacement pressures. This presumes that San Francisco has a housing shortage. To the contrary, US Census data shows that between 1960 and 2010 the city's population increased by 64,561 people. To meet this growing demand, 91,933 net housing units were built, totaling 1.4 new units per new resident (Welch 2017a). However, many of the units are unaffordable, making the problem less about quantity and more about housing type (Redmond 2017). Arguably, building 50% affordable housing will only ever keep the ratio of affordable to unaffordable what it currently is, and this presumes that affordable housing is not continually lost to evictions—which is not the case. For instance, between 2016 and 2017, 4,697 units were removed from protected affordable status due to condo conversion, evictions, buy-outs, and demolitions (San Francisco Planning Department 2017; Redmond 2017).

San Francisco's own General Plan calls for 60% affordable development to maintain an equitable housing climate, but on average, the city only builds 21% (Redmond 2017). According to the San Francisco Planning Department, by the third quarter of 2016, the City of San Francisco had approved 181% of projected market-rate housing for 2022 (San Francisco Planning Department 2017). Yet, the City only rubber stamped 16% of its low-income requirements (San Francisco Planning Department 2016). Even between 2007 and 2014, the City authorized 109% of requisite market-rate housing, yet only met 27% of its low-income requirements (Welch 2017a). In this way, new market-rate construction creates more of a demand for affordable housing than the market supplies, thereby worsening the crisis. While YIMBYs maintain that high-density development produces cheaper rents as more units can be built per acre, as of 2017, the city's neighborhoods with the highest rents are also the neighborhoods with the most high-rise, high-density buildings. Unlike YIMBYism's "all housing matters" rhetoric, the type of new construction does matter.

YIMBYs also purport that San Francisco progressives and NIMBYs alike have used local zoning and planning laws to keep new and necessary housing from being approved. Calvin Welch reminds us that 50,904 units were approved for development between 1996 and 2015 and 16,000 have been approved since 2010 (San Francisco Planning Department 2015; Welch 2017a). Housing development is clearly being passed. The problem however is that it can take years to build new units, and each year, only a

small percentage of total housing stock enters the bottlenecked market—a market that will likely bust, shattering overconfident construction and home prices.⁴ Therefore, developing new market-rate units hardly seems productive when, instead, we can make existing vacant units available to low-income tenants and fight displacement. Within free market geographies, the poor will always be outbid; supply and demand logic will continually fail to shelter them.

As research conducted by the University of California, Berkeley's Urban Displacement Project (UDP) has determined when analyzing impacts of market and subsidized housing developed in the 1990s on displacement during the 2000s, there is no evidence that market-rate development is effective mitigation (Zuk and Chappel 2016, 3). Further, the project found subsidized housing to be twice as effective as market-rate development regionally (2016, 10). Miriam Zuk and Karen Chappel of the UDP issued their report after California's Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) incorrectly used data from the UDP's website to argue for the effectiveness of market-rate development in combating displacement. Erroneously, the LAO presumed the effectiveness of filtering, or the process by which older market-rate units become affordable as new units are inserted into the housing market. While filtering may work in some cases, it takes generations. Zuk and Chappel argue, "units may not filter at a rate that meets needs at the market's peak, and the property may deteriorate too much to be habitable" (2016, 3). Filtering, as a stand-in for "trickle down," remains in Welch's words a "Reagan-era supply-side fiction" (2017b). Further, Zuk and Chappel offer, "in many strong-market cities, changes in housing preferences have increased the desirability of older, architecturally significant property, essentially disrupting the filtering process" (2016, 3).

And this brings us to our analytic of desire. We argue that wealthy renters and buyers alike make housing decisions not only based on availability, but also on aesthetic values. For instance, there are speculators such as Zephyr Real Estate's Bonie Spindler who accrue capital by "specializing" in particular architectures—in Spindler's case, Victorians.

4. For instance, in 2014, Calgary experienced an economic boom that excited developers. But the boom busted. As of 2017, 1,500 units were still vacant, 800 of them condos (CBC 2017). While the Bay Area market is not about to bust as Calgary's did, at least not yet, 2016 did witness some possible signs of slowdown (Gumima 2017).

The AEMP has uncovered nineteen no-fault evictions issued by Spindler, many of them Ellis Act evictions,⁵ largely in the Haight. Some of these evictions have displaced senior and disabled tenants. Making a living by “fixing and flipping” Victorians, Spindler caters to homebuyers who are not interested in new condos in South Beach and other areas of new high-density luxury, but rather to those who are interested in living in and capitalizing on Victorian architecture. As part of its crowdsourcing narrative project, a tenant wrote to the AEMP,

Bonnie Spindler may have Ellised 19 units of her own, but she has participated in Ellising hundreds more as a real estate agent at Zephyr. As an example, we were Ellised when she was hired as the agent to sell the building we lived in. She arranged for the fractional financing, sold each condo, and when one unit wouldn't sell because it was not optimal for an owner to live in, she even got her friend and “stager” to purchase the unit and then rent it out exactly two years after the eviction for four times what it was renting for before. She knows the Ellis Act inside out and profits on more than just her 19 units.

As this story of unregulated capitalism and eviction reveals, Spindler's business model is contingent upon a market driven by specialized desire and speculative eviction. Even if her units were adjacent to new luxury condos, the tenants in her buildings still would be evicted as part of her “accumulation by dispossession” strategy (Harvey 2004). Because Spindler's real estate apparatus is undoubtedly bolstered by the free market, the dispossessive techniques that it hinges on will never be thwarted on the market's accord.

Spindler and Zephyr are far from anomalies within San Francisco's speculative landscapes. Local cartographies are redesigned by realtors overnight to materialize topographies desirable to wealthy newcomers. For instance, in 2014 realtor Jennifer Rosdail rebranded Mission and Castro geographies as part of her new “meta-hood,” the “Quad” (2014). The Quad,

5. In San Francisco, evictions are codified as either “fault” or “no-fault.” Fault evictions imply lease-violation, legally giving the landlord cause to evict. No-fault evictions, on the other hand, transpire due to no fault of the tenant, allowing speculators to buy up rent-controlled buildings, evict tenants, flip the buildings, and sell them, as we have seen with numerous Ellis Act Evictions (Tenants Together and the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2014). Both fault and no-fault evictions disproportionately impact low-income tenants of color, and both are haunted by racial capitalism's wraiths.

she describes, is home to a new genre of residents, “Quadsters,” or those who “work very hard—mostly in high tech—and make a lot of money.” Further, she describes:

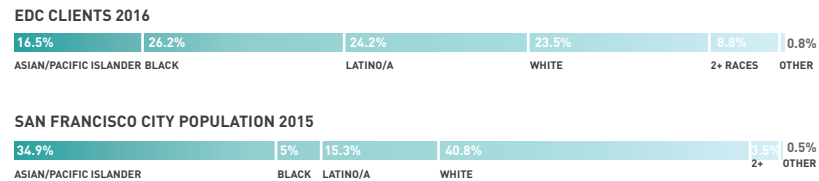
They value time greatly and want to be in a place where they can get to work quickly, meet up with their friends easily, and walk or bike instead of sitting in traffic. They take the Google Bus, the Apple Bus, or another of the reputedly less well [equipped] shuttles like the eBay Bus. They also like to eat really good food, but don't often have time to cook it. And since they work on “campuses,” and are the millennial version of the Cow Hollow “Triangle” dwellers of the 70s and 80s, the name “The Quad” seems a good fit.

By rebranding Mission and Castro geographies, Rosdail engages in toponymical erasure, spatially and intertextually erasing prior neighborhood histories and nomenclatural practices by overlaying new ones, per a growing neoliberal urban trend (Alderman 2008; Rose-Redwood 2008). In doing so, she installs an artificial marketing sieve, drawing the Quad upwards as the most desirous dwelling place for Quadsters, who, according to tech hiring statistics, are 70% male and 60% white on average (Molla and Lightner 2016). Realtors and developers alike speculate upon this demographic. Why would a Quadster live in a condo elsewhere if the Quad defines and meets its desires?

As collaborative work of the AEMP and Eviction Defense Collaborative (EDC) uncovered, Black and Latinx tenants have been overrepresented in the EDC's eviction clinic (which represents 90% of court evictions cases in San Francisco), while white tenants have been underrepresented (figure 2) (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative 2017, 3).⁶ And yet, YIMBYs are more invested in creating housing for, in Trauss's words, “newcomers who are renters who ended up being white” (Tran 2017). At the time of writing, Trauss is running for District 6 Supervisor – the district that the EDC represented most in 2016 (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative 2017, 4). This district also contains San Francisco's most economically and

6. In this study, Black tenants were overrepresented by 300% (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative 2017).

FIGURE 2
EDC CLIENTS BY RACE/ETHNICITY



By the AEMP and EDC [see http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/EDC_2016.pdf]

racially diverse neighborhoods, the Tenderloin and Treasure Island, both of which are under immense gentrification pressures. For instance, in upcoming years, the radioactive human-made Treasure Island will replace 675 households with 8,000 new ones as part of a greenwashed development plan, leading to the impending displacement and relocation of many who have long been suffering environmental racism on the island (Dillon 2017; Meronek 2015).⁷

Not only do Black and Latinx tenants face eviction pressures most, but they also must endure new forms of racialized appropriation that accompanies speculation. Essence Harden, a third-generation Black Oaklander who recently was displaced from the Bay Area after pouring in immense amounts of labor into refinishing her former home and creating a garden, poignantly critiques that gentrifiers see her creations and what them, but don't care who made them. Further, before leaving, she remembers, "My [new] neighbors would look at me like an alien. That's one of the worst feelings, especially as a Black person" (quoted in Tran 2017). Thus, not only is Harden displaced, but her labor is appropriated by those who alienate her. Appropriation has long been a settler tool, displacing and capitalizing upon space, people, and culture in the name of *terra nullius*, a boundless and promising frontier (Byrd 2011). The appropriation of Harden's work, like Rosdail's appropriation of the Mission, is embedded in settler histories that have long normalized the white inheritance of property.

7. For over a decade, Treasure Island has been a space in which the City of San Francisco sends people it does not know where to put elsewhere, from fire victims to evictees. For instance, in 2015, 100 people were evicted from Yerba Island city-owned housing for the development of 285 luxury units, and then given relocation options on Treasure Island. Many rejected the offer due to known toxicity there. Thus, it is ironic that now that the City is cleaning the island, people are being displaced from it.

While Quadsters desire Quad/Mission living, and while Spindler and her clients fantasize Victorians, there are others who do desire high density luxury condos. However, of these, not only fantasies of primary residency loom. As investigative research by Darwin BondGraham and Tim Redmond has revealed (see figure 3), 39% of 5,212 condos in 23 buildings primarily built after 2000 have been purchased by absentee owners (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2017a; Graham and Redmond 2015). In come condos, absentee ownership is over 60%, with primary residences concentrated in surrounding suburbs such as Los Altos Hills, Sausalito, and Lafayette. Further, new units were listed on Airbnb for as much as \$6,000 per night, clearly doing little to ameliorate gentrification. As BondGraham and Redmond conclude, "Rather than satisfy some demand for housing at the top of the market and alleviate the city's affordability crisis, San Francisco's luxury condos instead are being purchased by wealthy buyers who have a virtually bottomless appetite for super-exclusive real estate" (2015). And yet, high-end towers such as these are advocated for by YIMBYs as a means ameliorating gentrification.

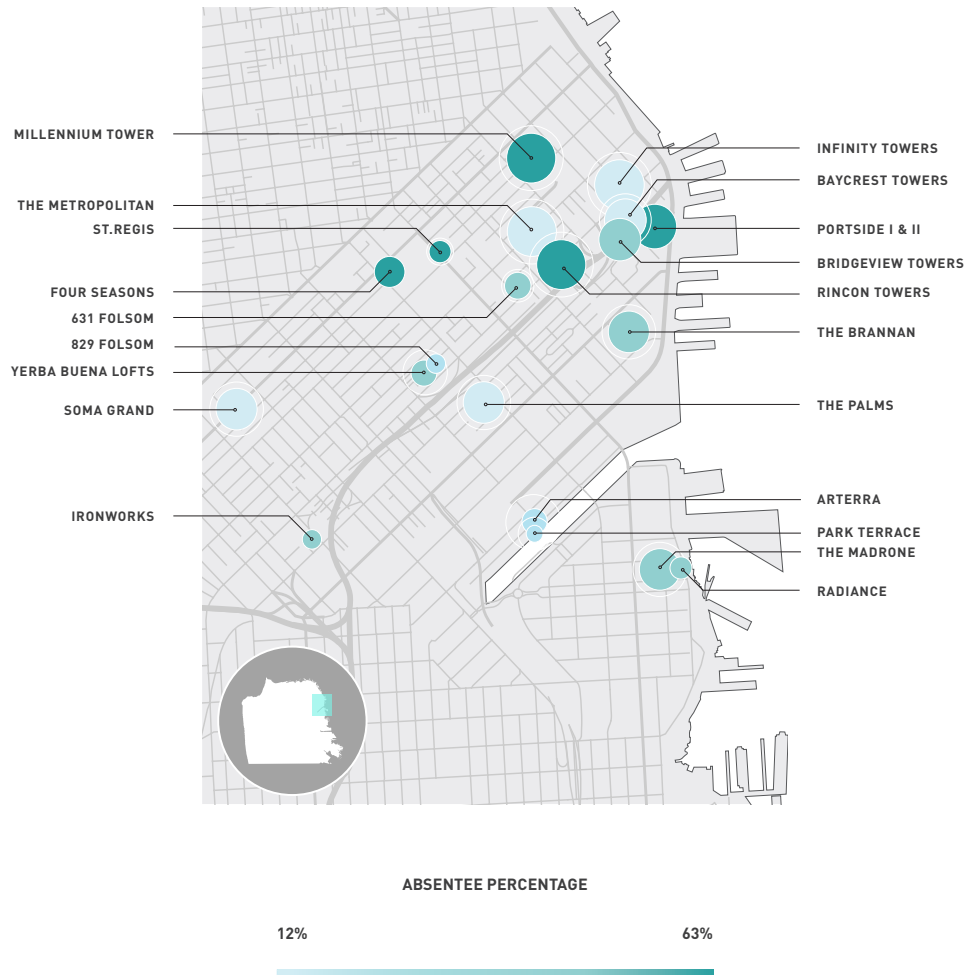
RACIAL GEOGRAPHIES OF THE NIMBY/YIMBY GAZE

The history of racism, segregation, and pathologization is central to any analysis around NIMBYism, and as we argue, also YIMBYism. Here we delineate NIMBY racialized histories, tracing their contours as they surface in YIMBY spatial/racial imaginaries. Focusing on modes of racialized surveillance that accompany gentrification, we argue that for YIMBYs to narrate their enemy as NIMBY obscures how NIMBYism lays the groundwork for YIMBY spatiality.

NIMBYism originated with mid-century white flight and suburban growth, a response to expanding urban migrations of Black communities where white homeowners began guarding suburban enclaves. In 1982, M. J. Dear and S. Martin Taylor wrote their formative "Not on Our Street," studying community stigmatization of a new mental health care facility. Their analytical scholarship on what then became popularized as NIMBYism reflects "how space inherits, and feeds into, the social production of opposition, conflict and the broader maintenance of socio-spatial exclusion" (DeVerteuil 2013, 599). Since then, NIMBYism has increasingly stood in for white suburban homeowner opposition to in-migrations of racialized poor communities (Hubbard 2009; Pulido 2000).

FIGURE 3

ABSENTEE LUXURY OWNERS IN SAN FRANCISCO



By the AEMP, in collaboration with Darwin BondGraham and Tim Redmond
 (see <http://antievictionmap.com/absentee-owners-san-francisco/>)

Central to our argument is that NIMBY racial logics ground those of YIMBYism, particularly in the context of luxury housing development advocacy. For instance, BARF has supported the developer Maximus’s market-rate construction of what would be the largest complex in San Francisco’s Mission District, notoriously referred to as the “Monster in the Mission.” Crucial to 16th Street Plaza development plan is the private contract with Clean Up the Plaza Coalition, intended to rid the plaza of “undesirables.” Led by Jack Davis, a man famous for supporting multiple mayors and development plans, the coalition has overtly characterized plaza occupants as pathogenic and criminal. According to Davis, “When you start mixing it all, then the criminal element can hide within this landscape of poverty. I’m not dissing homeless people, but when you have two to three hundred homeless people, plus the SROs, plus the urine and feces, plus gang violence, it’s unacceptable to me as a person” (quoted in Wong 2014).

In supporting Maximus’s development and efforts to rid poor communities from the area, YIMBYs in fact support NIMBY structures of racialization. That is, YIMBY pro-development requires a racist exclusionary strategy exemplified by NIMBYism. This strategy is tethered to what Christina Hanhardt describes as “two of global capital’s own ‘spatial fixes’: gentrification and mass imprisonment” (Hanhardt 2013, 14). As she writes, “in neighborhoods marked for cycles of disinvestment and then selective reinvestment,” prisons are “built to absorb surpluses of labor, land, and capital” (2013, 14). Poor communities surrounding the plaza become criminalized to make way for new luxury development.

While eviction and development are racialized technologies, so is policing. Broken windows theory, an alibi for police crackdowns on petty crime, is central to processes of urban devalorization and revalorization (Hanhardt 2016). As a New York University Furman Center study uncovered, decreases in “crime” in low-income and POC neighborhoods incentivize migration by high-income and college-educated households (Ellen, Reed, and Horn 2016). Thus, by ridding areas of “criminal activity,” they become more marketable. By analyzing EDC and San Francisco police data (see figures 4 and 5), the AEMP has found that neighborhoods experiencing the highest rates of eviction now are the same ones in which “Quality of Life” infractions have been issued over the last decade. These include absurd citations such as “Danger of Leading an Immoral Life,” disproportionately issued to youth of color.

FIGURE 4
DRUGS POLICE DISTRICT, 2016

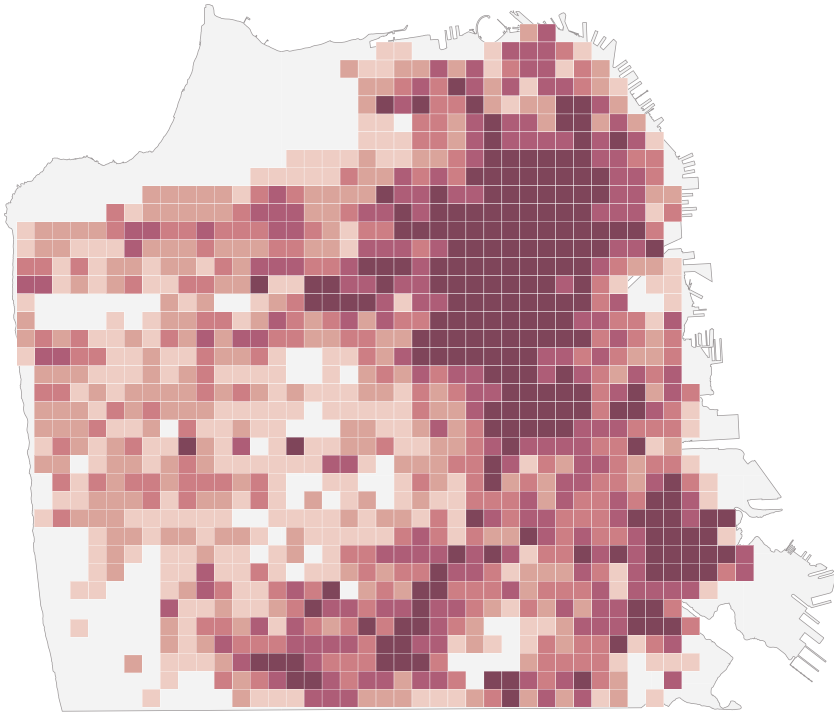


FIGURE 4
GRAFFITI POLICE DISTRICT, 2016

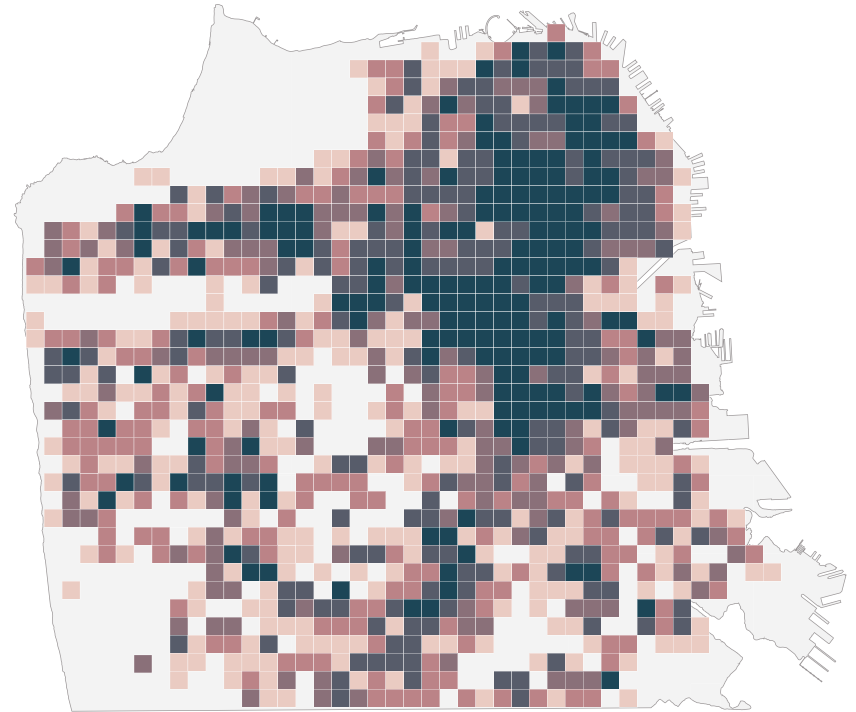
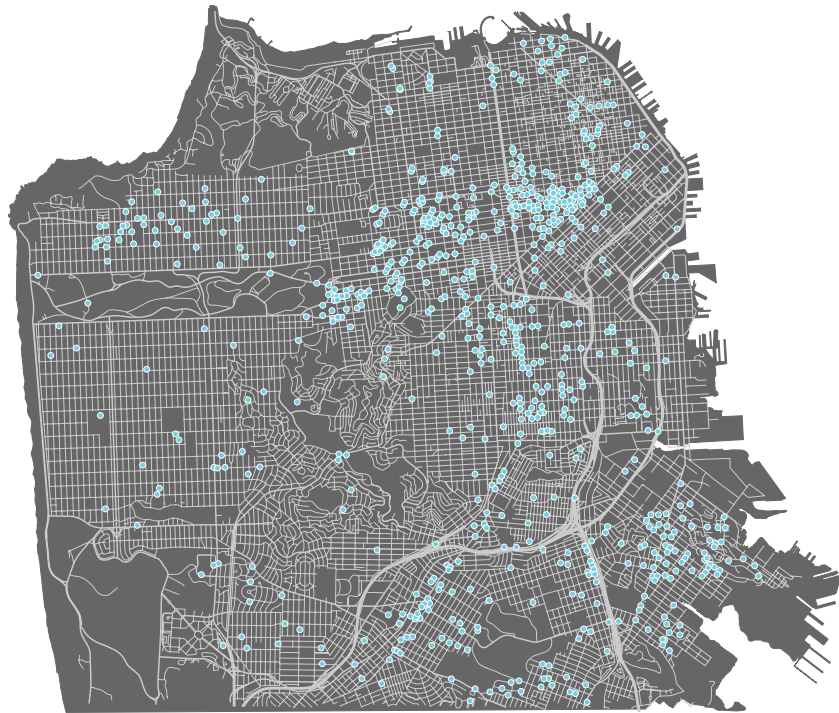
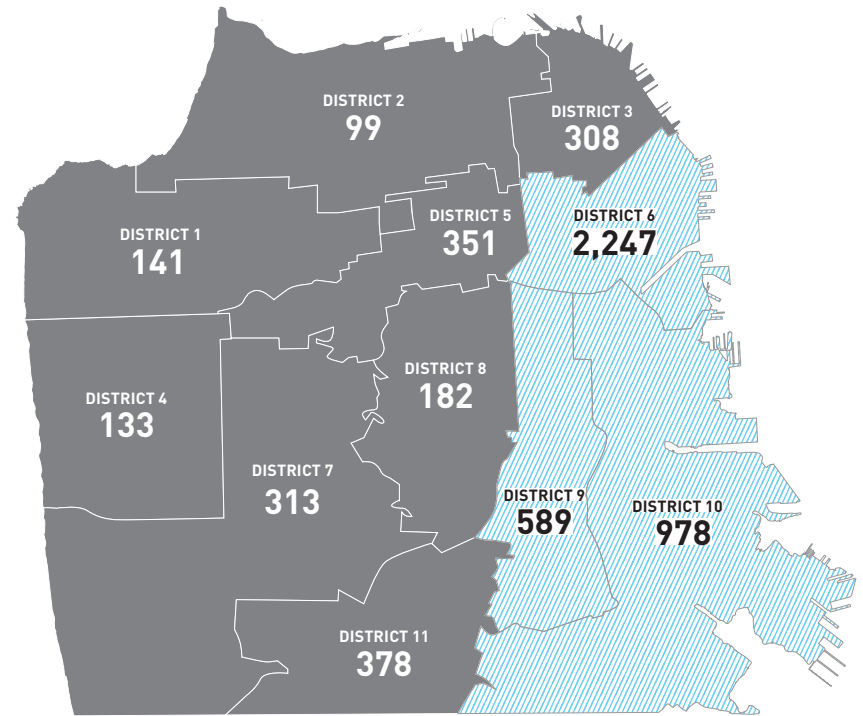


FIGURE 4
IMMORAL LIFE POLICE DISTRICT, 2016



By the AEMP
[see <http://antievictionmap.com/policing-race-and-gentrification>]

FIGURE 5
EDC CASES BY SUPERVISOR DISTRICT, 2016



By the AEMP and EDC
[see www.antievictionmappingproject.net/edc2016.html]

Frequently, in contexts of gentrification, police enact racial terror with outside informants. For instance, in 2014, a Latino Mission resident, Alex Nieto, was murdered by the San Francisco Police Department. The officers responded to one of several phone calls from multiple white men who had observed Alex on Bernal Hill during his work break—the place where he had regularly been taking breaks from the nightclub where he worked as a security guard. The first white man to observe him that March evening, Evan Snow, was a designer new to the neighborhood and racially profiled Alex as a dangerous gang member and tried to maintain distance. But Snow’s dog, Luna, decided that the chips Alex was eating should not be avoided and went after Alex. Alex, distressed by the dog, was then observed by two other white men who were also new to the neighborhood, and also funded by tech. One of them proceeded to call the police, who murdered him upon arrival. As an oral history that the AEMP conducted with Alex’s parents implies, Alex’s murder was a “death by gentrification.”⁸

As Alex’s death reveals, racial profiling is a necessary component of clearing up—out of the backyards of gentrifiers—land for capital accumulation. Thus, it is contradictory that pro-luxury development YIMBY supporters describe their opposition as NIMBY. NIMBYism is, in fact, constitutive of YIMBYism, installing white wealth into working-class neighborhoods of color. As we argue, “build, baby, build” premises fail to recognize that 1) both racialized and class-based violence are instigated by increased market and luxury development, and 2) hospitality to wealthy newcomers looks different than hospitality to poor and working-class racialized collectives. Craig Willse questions, “What does it mean to say that a house is a technology that makes live and lets die?” (Willse 2015, 23). We extend his question to ask, what does it mean that gentrification is a racial technology that makes live and lets die? The gentrifying terrain is not one of “All Lives Matter.”

8. For AEMP’s oral history of Alex Nieto’s parents, Elvira and Refugio, discussing their son’s life and death, listen here: <https://soundcloud.com/anti-evictionmappingproject/sets/elvira-y-refugio-nieto>. For more on the oral history project, see Maharawal and McElroy, 2017a. Also see Rebecca Solnit, 2016, for the phrase “death by gentrification.”

POST-RACIAL LIBERALISM

But how did it come to be that the NIMBY/YIMBY dialectic became popularly flipped on its head, particularly regarding class, race, and space? In analyzing prison construction politics, Anne Bonds argues that “[YIMBY] prison development initiatives are galvanized to maintain geographies of racialized privilege,” and that “like NIMBYism, YIMBYism is a particular form of racism” (2013, 1390). It is this form of racism, we argue, that must be unearthed to conceptualize the contradictions of San Francisco’s “liberal” housing politics.

San Francisco has long been hailed as a liberal paradise, home to a \$15 minimum wage, a sanctuary city policy, and the earliest iteration in the US of same-sex marriage, all relative consensus positions for the city’s residents. But liberal urbanism itself is not opposed to gentrification. On the contrary, urban liberalism worships Jane Jacobs, author of 1961 *Death and Life of Great American Cities* as its patron saint. Jacobs, an advocate of neighborhood charms, low-density, and “a livable, walkable city,” wrote against working-class spaces. As Sharon Zukin critiques, “What Jacobs valued—small blocks, cobblestone streets, mixed-uses, local character—have become the gentrifiers’ ideal. This is not the struggling city of working class and ethnic groups, but an idealized image that plays to middle-class tastes” (2011). As Zukin argues, Jacobs over-values aesthetics and undervalues working-class housing.

At first glance, YIMBYism aligns with Zukin’s critique. As Trauss herself proudly recounts, one of her earliest YIMBY actions was to advocate for the slashing of a tree that had been home to hummingbirds to raze room for the development of 97 apartment units (Hammill 2016). In doing so, she positions BARF as antithetical to Jacob’s liberal urbanism, and against NIMBYism and its hummingbird trees. However, both BARF and Jacobs coalesce in disregard for low-income housing. For instance, BARF’s Hanlon suggests that “if local policymakers seek to prevent displacement and permit in-migration of low-income people, they need to think more about the real estate market and less about publicly subsidized housing” (2017). He continues with a plea to not abandon market-rate housing. This overarching dismissal of public housing in the name of YIMBYism thus appears as NIMBY.

YIMBY narratives of NIMBYism have thus strategically mobilized a unique form of liberalism against housing rights activists' supposed NIMBY "conservatism." In other words, YIMBYs, who advocate for luxury and market-rate housing but not public housing, conflate housing activists' affordability campaigns with NIMBY preservationist battles. These false conflations and binaries, we argue, are best understood within a framework of racial capitalism.

Because private property and dispossession have historically been bound up in systems of racial capitalism, we can never mitigate racialized dispossession through the application of capitalism, as YIMBYs suggest. But racial capitalism has shifted since its first instantiation, a shift that we argue elucidates the violence of liberalism. After World War II, racial capitalism transitioned, in Grace Kyungwon Hong's words, "from managing its crises entirely through white supremacy to also managing its crises through white liberalism, that is, through the incorporation and affirmation of minoritized forms of difference" (2012, 90). While some forms of difference have been well incorporated, perhaps in San Francisco most epitomized by liberal same-sex marriage support, other forms of difference are necessarily rendered surplus and extinguishable. In studying the prison-industrial complex in California, Ruth Wilson Gilmore argues that speculative capitalism requires the growth of surplus populations to feed the bedrock of racial capitalism upon which speculation stands (2007). For instance, San Francisco's pro-development Democratic former supervisor and now openly gay State Assembly member Scott Wiener, proudly condemns Fox News as not "real news" and defends the rights of undocumented immigrants on national television. Yet at the same time, he politically enacts racist terror against the poor, trans/queer, and homeless—liberalism's excesses, or those that Hong describes as "existentially surplus" (2012). As she contextualizes, "To be 'surplus' in this moment is to be valueless, unprotectable, vulnerable, and dead" (2012, 92).

Alex Nieto was rendered as surplus, as are the many homeless people that liberal Jack Davis attempts to raze from the 16th Street Plaza. So are those who Wiener has supported the dispossession of. Repeatedly, he has introduced initiatives to criminalize homelessness, evict tent-dwellers, and displace homeless people's sources of income. Further, he has ignored that in San Francisco, as studies by the Coalition on Homelessness (COH) have revealed, eviction and rental increases lead to conditions of homelessness;

therefore, the best way to decrease homeless concentrations is to thwart evictions and unaffordable housing (2015). As the COH found, 35% of those homeless in San Francisco lost their homes through eviction. In a different study that the AEMP conducted with the EDC, analyzing where 500 people evicted in 2012 ended up post eviction (see figure 6), we found that 14 of those evicted were homeless in San Francisco, and that two people had passed away due to eviction (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project and Eviction Defense Collaborative 2016).

Cases of death by eviction abound. For instance, Jose Luis Góngora Pat, a Mayan immigrant made homeless due to eviction in the Mission, was murdered by the police in 2016 while lying in his tent. This death, also mapped by the AEMP (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2016b), transpired weeks after a wave of increased sweeps incited by the Mayor's call to "clean up" houseless people from downtown to make the city more presentable for the Super Bowl 50. This led to increased policing of tent dwellers throughout the city. In endorsing BARF and YIMBYism, both Wiener and the Mayor have made it a policy to weaponize liberalism for the primary benefit of developers, gentrifiers, and tourists. Under the auspices of liberalism, developers must be permitted free reign in San Francisco so that there is "room for everyone." But there is not enough room for everyone. Those positioned as surplus, whether by choice or not, often become geolocated, in Lisa Marie Cacho's words, in the land of the "devalued dead" (2011, 25).

Homelessness and eviction rates have only increased in San Francisco as rents have been raised, and rents are raised when new luxury development infrastructure is introduced via the speculative logic of gentrification. In San Francisco, as the Brookings Institute reported, income inequality is growing almost more rapidly than anywhere else in the county, largely due to the influx of wealth amongst the top 20% (Reidenbach 2016). With more millionaires per capita than any other US metro region (McNeill 2016; Walker 2016), it seems that the problem is trickle-up capitalism rather than trickle-down poverty. As American Community Survey data reveals, in San Francisco, median household income continues to grow for white households, while it vacillates at extremely lower rates for Black and Latinx ones. Further, as we have found, Section 8 housing has been steadily declining in recent years (see figure 7), as landlords capitalize on the rental market and raise rents past voucher eligibility lines, largely impacting tenants of

FIGURE 6

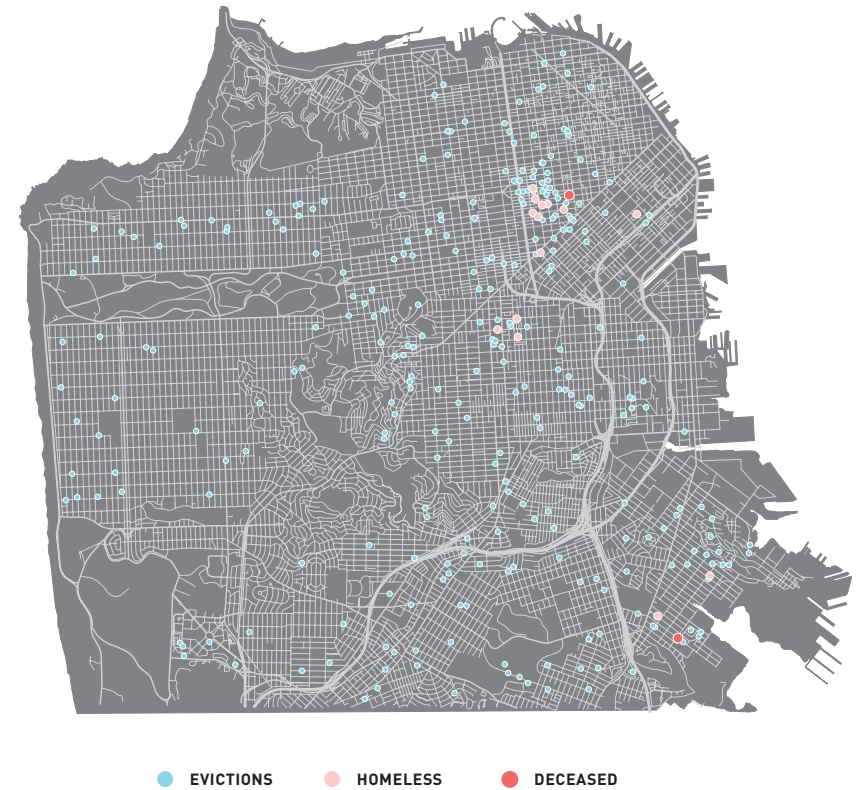
MAPPING RELOCATION AND HOMELESSNESS



By the AEMP
(see <http://arcg.is/24RDGat>)

FIGURE 6

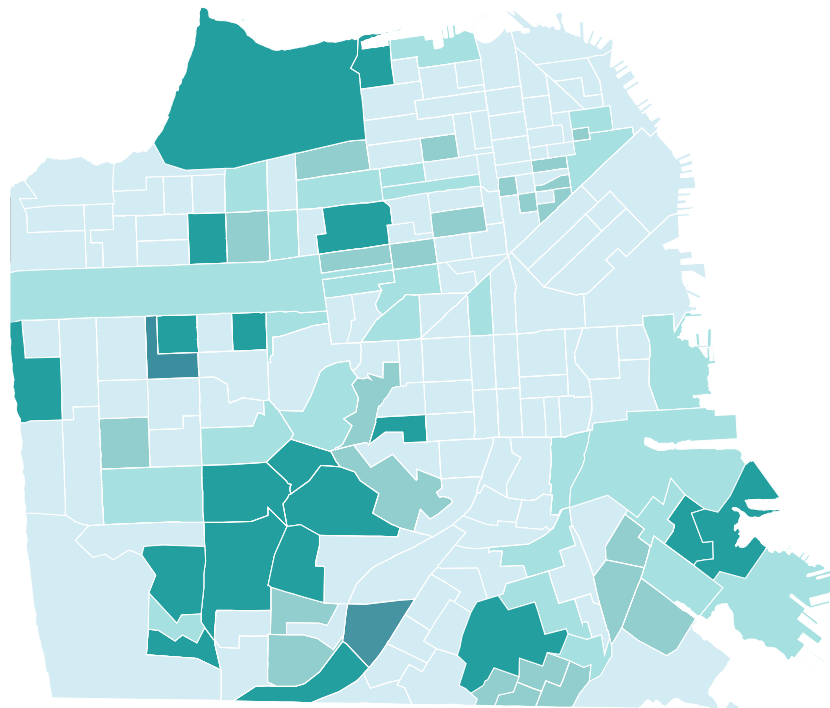
EVICTIIONS AND HOMELESSNESS, 2012



By the AEMP
(see <http://arcg.is/24RDGat>)

FIGURE 7

LOSS OF SECTION 8 HOUSING, SAN FRANCISCO, 2015



PERCENTAGE OF ELIGIBLE SECTION 8 VOUCHER

< 0%

> 0.5%

By the AEMP
[see <http://arcg.is/2rTWiP6>]

color (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project 2017b). As histories of racial capitalism have long made it more difficult for racialized residents to pay rents and own property, this is hardly surprising (Hern 2016; Lipsitz 2006; Maharawal and McElroy 2017b).

The necessity of centralizing gentrification’s racialized violence is concretized by the repeated attempts of YIMBYs to infiltrate the local Sierra Club chapter by boosting a slate of three women of color with pro-development agendas.⁹ Nevertheless, while communities of color are disproportionately being pushed into toxic sites such as Treasure Island, pro-density and pro-development projects come to stand in for environmental and racial justice. YIMBYism thus functions, we argue, through what Jodi Melamed describes as neoliberal multiculturalism (2011), or the instituting of new forms of racialized privilege (liberal, multicultural, global citizen) to negotiate value. As a post-World War II phenomenon, neoliberal multiculturalism obscures the ongoing violence of racial capitalism, and instead celebrates diversity. In doing so, it embraces the violence of assimilation; a violence that Lisa Lowe marks as intimately linked to the violence of racialized exclusion and modern liberalism. Race, she describes, is an “enduring remainder of the processes through which the human is universalized and freed by liberal forms, while the peoples who create the conditions of possibility for that freedom are assimilated or forgotten” (2017, 7). By embracing multiculturalism, YIMBYism obscures its neoliberal underpinnings with liberal forms.

To avoid this trap, we argue for the foregrounding of racial capitalism as analytic. In doing so, we can observe that anti-racist housing justice advocates rallying against new luxury condos are not, as YIMBYs likes to suggest, conservative NIMBY homeowners angered by increased height level allowances muddying their bucolic views; rather, these activists are opposed to the racialized dispossessions that luxury condo development inheres. Such projects install new concentrations of wealth into neighborhood pockets, inciting racialized and class-based effects, from augmented eviction rates to racialized surveillance and criminalization.

9. In San Francisco, BARF has become notorious for attempted “disruption” of the governing body not only of the Sierra Club, but also the SF Democratic County Central Committee, solely to approve new development projects. In 2014, the group went as far as to disseminate a slideshow detailing its annual goal to divide rent control from affordable housing advocates, disrupting a historical alliance (Bay Area Renters Federation 2014).

By failing to recognize these effects, the YIMBY movement solidifies a form of post-racial liberalism, suggesting that all people, along with all forms of housing, are the same. As Denise Ferreira da Silva observes, because the very construct of the human is predicated upon racialized exclusionary forms, we will never be post-racial; nor will we ever all be human (2007). Racial difference has always constituted the boundaries of the human, informing racialized histories continuously mapped onto the liberal contemporary (Lowe 2015, 7). Freeing the market will never lead to housing for all; racially dispossessive logics will always haunt the present. Pretending that gentrification will be solved by freeing the market relies upon a post-racial neoliberal imaginary, disavowing ongoing legacies of racialized dispossession.

As we argue, both NIMBYism and YIMBYism are entrenched within the same liberal tradition of racialized/spatialized expropriation and appropriation. By engaging in a YIMBY verses NIMBY understanding of San Francisco's geography, one ignores the racial histories that constitute both. This myopic approach forecloses possibilities of working towards housing justice. How might we refigure our understanding of what resistance to dispossession can look like without reifying systems of liberal violence constitutive of gentrification? How can we think about abolitionist approaches to private property, or about enlivening sites of restitution for those Indigenous peoples whose lands gentrification struggles sit upon? How can we think beyond the fictive NIMBY/YIMBY binary that racial capitalism and post-racial liberalism fuel?

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