WHO BELONGS AND WHO DOESN'T: GENTRIFICATION AND THE GOLDEN STATE WARRIORS

by

LAUREN YIWEN JIN

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Approved: __*Deb Morrison, Carolyn Silva Chambers Distinguished Professor of Advertising*
Primary Thesis Advisor

In recent National Basketball Association history there has been no team more dominant the Golden State Warriors. They won three championships in five years, during an incredible stretch from 2014 to 2019. Their style of play, free-flowing and three-point heavy, would change the league, but during that same time the look of the Warriors fandom was also changing. For those years, as was the case for the past few decades, the Warriors played at Oracle Arena in Oakland, California. In 2019 they moved across the San Francisco Bay to Chase Center, 11 miles from their previous home. It is this move that I argue is a broader shift in the Warriors team and fan identity. Can a fandom be gentrified? What is the relationship between gentrification in Oakland and the changing identity of the Golden State Warriors and their fans? How is place's identity tied to a team's identity and the identity of its fans? What role does communications play in this changing identity? These are the questions I look to answer as I explore what it means to be a fan, the history of Oakland, gentrification, and the rise and fall of the Warriors. Through a historical and textual analysis, I find that the feelings of "belonging and disbelonging," as coined by Werth and Marienthal (2016), produced by gentrification can similarly be found in narratives around the Warriors and their fandom.

Acknowledgements

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Of course, I would be remiss not to mention Blazers Twitter. Being a fan of the Portland Trail Blazers can be frustrating, but it is also one of my greatest sources of joy. The community I have found through my fandom in these online spaces is incredible: all of you are very funny and very smart! Special shout out to John, aka @pdxbrocialite.

To Rennie's, for hours spent but not wasted.

To my parents, I hope this all makes sense when you ask me to talk about it.

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Introduction

For a period of time starting in 2014, there was no escaping the Golden State Warriors. The sports world was saturated with Warriors content, whether it was talk over their 3-point happy playing style or their analytics-driven organizational philosophy. And how could they not talk? The Warriors went from being the one of the worst teams in the league, a franchise with a 39-year championship drought, to one of the most dominant teams the NBA has ever seen, one which would go on to win three championships in a mere four-year span. They broke the regular season win-loss record, previously held by Michael Jordan's Chicago Bulls, when they finished with 73-9 in the 2015-2016 season. They formed a super team to end all super teams when they added all-star Kevin Durant to an already stacked roster that included Stephen Curry, Klay Thompson and Draymond Green. The Warriors, for five years, seemed unstoppable.

Perhaps that explains why the hate and the jokes seemed particularly vicious when they lost to the Cleveland Cavaliers in the 2016 championship series. By an incredible twist of fate, the Warriors managed to choke a 3-1 lead and failed to cap off their historical run. A team that won 73 out of 82 games couldn't come up with four out of seven. Non-Warriors fans could not help but jump at the chance to deride the team that was the bane of the rest of the NBA. Throughout the memes that ran in that summer of 16', a particular character emerged: the clueless tech-bro Warriors fan. He was a bandwagoner who jumped on because it was convenient to root for the best team in the NBA. He did not really know anything about basketball, a casual fan at best. Perhaps he relied heavily on the language of analytics and statistics to justify his takes on why Stephen Curry was the greatest basketball player ever. And above all, he was white.

Figure 1. An image widely circulated on Twitter of a sign made by Warriors fans in the 2016 playoffs. Widely mocked for the use of superfluous quotation marks and dorky copy. (Stephan Bondy. 2016).

But how did this trope of the clueless white tech-bro come to be symbolic for an entire fanbase, and to a certain extent, an entire region? How did a team that played in Oakland, California, a historically black and brown city and a hotspot of black activism, turn into the de facto team of Silicon Valley?

On September 6, 2019, Chase Stadium officially opened, marking a new chapter of the NBA's Golden State Warriors. The opening marked a return to San Francisco after fifty years in Oakland, a move that carried them only 11 miles from where they previously played. A short distance travelled, but one that loomed large in

the hearts of Oakland fans. As Chris Rhoden (2019) noted in an article written for ESPN platform *The Undefeated*:

> For longtime Oakland residents, including [Oakland Mayor Libby Schaaf], the Warriors' move from East Oakland to downtown San Francisco seems yet another slap in the face to a city that has always seemed to live in the shadow of the City by the Bay. (para. 11)

So, what might appear to be an inconsequential change in locales to outsiders feels more akin to an insult or even a betrayal of Oakland and its residents for those who call The Town home. Damian Lillard, Portland Trail Blazers star and Oakland native, articulated as much in an interview where he commented that:

> There's a sense of pride in Oakland about everything that represents us and it's like the Warriors go over the bridge…it's almost like the money grab, the money moves is pushing the real love and what's really behind this organization to the side, which is understandable and also not understandable because I'm from Oakland. (NBC Sports Bay Area, 2019, para. 11)

I argue that this perceived shift away from Oakland is symbolic of the greater shift in Warriors fan and team identity. And that this shift exists in a broader narrative of gentrification in Oakland, a process where longtime residents, many of whom are black and brown, are displaced by the more affluent, white newcomers, partially driven by the same tech-boom that benefited the Warrior's venture capitalist owner, Joseph Lacob. Fandom and gentrification are both ultimately questions of identity, who belongs and who doesn't. My thesis aims to connect the two and reveal what we can learn about gentrification, identity, and sports.

Research Questions and Project Description

What is the relationship between gentrification in Oakland and the changing identity of the Golden State Warriors and their fans? How is a place's identity tied to a team's identity and the identity of its fans? What role does communications play in this changing identity? These are the questions my thesis will try to answer while using the Golden State Warriors and gentrification in Oakland as a case study. While it might seem odd to compare the two, as Bale (2002) notes, "…regions form a central feature of the organisation of sports; places are the means of identifying most sports teams; sport is affected by, and increasingly affects, the physical environment and landscape; sport is a world of territoriality and hierarchies" (p. 2). Far from being a marginal part of society, sports are a major factor in political, economic, and social life. They can act as mirrors that reflect broader narratives in society. For instance, one might look at the infamous 2004 "Malice at the Palace" fight between players and fans as a representation of race relations in America. In the same way, my thesis will use the Golden State Warriors as a lens to analyze the forces of gentrification in Oakland and gentrification as a lens understand the Golden State Warriors. I want my research to assert sports' relevance in conversations around social, cultural, economic and political issues. I would also like for my research to expand on how we understand gentrification.

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Research Strategy

My research aims to explore the relationship between place and team, by using the NBA's Golden State Warriors and gentrification in Oakland as my case study. I will approach this using historical analysis. A historical analysis attempts to construct the past as it actually was, to understand the relationship between events over time (Tosh, 2010). In my thesis, I will be using it to understand and contextualize the changing look of Oakland and the Warriors, looking at gentrification in Oakland and the Warriors team and fan identity from 2012 to 2019. I chose this period because Chase Stadium, the team's new arena in San Francisco, was first announced in 2012 and the move made final in 2019, a move I argue is symbolic of a larger shift in identity for both the team and the fandom. I believe a historical analysis is the most appropriate method for this study because writing about sports and fandom tends to fall into the realm of social memory, where the version of events and experiences presented is the group's shared interpretation of those events and experiences (Tosh, 2010, pp. 3-4). Even our recollection of the recent past is undoubtedly tinged by our knowledge in the present. To go from pure interpretation to a more complete view of what happened with the Warriors, then, requires a historical approach. Most importantly, this method situates concerns of basketball and sports fandom within the broader conflicts and history of the region. By comparing how gentrification is changing Oakland to the changing racial, cultural, and economic makeup of the Golden State Warrior's fanbase I hope to better understand how a place's identity affects team identity and fan identity.

For the gentrification piece of my research, I will use previous works that look at gentrification in Oakland and the greater Bay area and gentrification as a general

issue to guide my own analysis. This is not a research project solely on gentrification: rather gentrification is a factor that I wish to put in conversation with the Warriors' team and fan identity. As such, I am not looking to develop a completely new insight about gentrification in Oakland, but instead to develop a framework of how gentrification in Oakland works and define its effects by aggregating previous research about the subject. As such, I focus on secondary sources. Specifically, I will use McElroy and Werth (2019) and Werth and Marienthal (2016) to build my section on gentrification. Overall, my main goal is to come up with a working understanding of Oakland's gentrification that I can then use in my analysis of the Warrior's team and fanbase.

To look at the conception of the Warriors as a team and as a fanbase, I will be engaging in a textual analysis of the various media where the team and its fans are represented. This includes sources such as the official media accounts of the Golden State Warriors, unofficial media fan accounts, promotional materials, journalism coverage, etc. I will look to establish mix of sources that captures differences in perspective (national vs. local, fan vs. journalist, team vs. non-team, etc.) over the period of 2012-2019. In particular, I think it is important to distinguish mass media narratives from the attitudes of individual fans. Mass media tends to flatten or simplify issues for the sake of making a story more easily digestible (and more commercially viable). While it would be impossible to fully capture all the details of an issue, there is no doubt that the mass media privilege certain perspectives at the expense of others. Social media remedies this somewhat, opening the floor to anyone with an internet connection and an opinion. Another attribute of social media is that the spread and

scope of any given post is easily gauged, given the in-application measurements such as "likes," "retweets," "replies", etc. Other types of sources, such as stand-alone news articles, lack this immediate assessment of reception. However, I am not attempting to quantify sources as more or less valid. All the texts considered have their own value. As Fürsich (2009) states:

> …thorough textual analysis has the goal to explain which cultural sensibilities prevail that allow for such a text at this specific point in time. These cultural sensibilities can involve everything from seemingly calm states of agreed-upon dominant ideologies to active clashes between emerging new structures of feeling. (p. 247)

Each text offers a crucial window on what was happening in the world at the time of its creation, no matter where it originated. By including sources from both mass media and social media, I hope to produce a more nuanced and more complete view of the Warriors and their fans from 2012 to 2019.

Textual analysis is a broad, often loosely defined, methodology. It is generally understood as "a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text" (p. 240). There are several schools of thought when it comes to textual analysis, drawing from a diverse range of interpretive traditions such as linguistics, literary-critical, rhetorical, and semiotics. My concern is not so much trying to fit my research to a specific strategy, but rather finding a strategy that allows me to best achieve the goals of my research. That said, my main focus when analyzing a text are the narratives being constructed around the Warriors and/or their fans. What is it trying to communicate to the audience? Who does it consider to be its audience? And what does that tell us about

the text itself? By answering these questions, I hope to tease out the most relevant themes around the Warriors and examine how they relate to gentrification in Oakland.

What does it mean to be a fan?

To understand what it means to gentrify a team's fandom, we need to understand what fandom is first. Merriam-Webster simply defines it as "all the fans" and a fan as "an enthusiastic devotee (as of a sport or a performing art) usually as a spectator." While these dictionary definitions are technically correct, they fail to truly capture the depth of fandom. Fandom, at its core, is about identity. Far from simply choosing to support a sports team, to be a fan is to stake your conception of self around a team. It is the difference between "*my* team" and not "the team I like," never just "they won the game" but rather "*we* won the game." This bond between fan and team is positive: fans identify with a team because it gives them a boost to self-esteem and mood, a sense of belonging, an explanation for their behavior (Heere et al. 2007; Foster & Hyatt, 2007). Much as how an individual might recognize themselves as part of a community by race, class, or gender, fandom is yet another marker for understanding where one belongs in the world (Heere et al. 2007). Unlike race, class or gender, fandom is an identification an individual has complete choice over, at least theoretically. One is not literally born a fan, although some die-hards might disagree. However, the place you were born does play a significant role in determining one's fandom of *what* team.

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To that end, while there has been no research that I have seen done on the relationship of gentrification and sports, there has been a considerable amount of research exploring the relationship between place and team. Specifically, a conceptual study done by Heere and James (2007) expands on the idea of team identity, which is based on an individual's sense of belonging to a supporter group or connection with a sports team. They argue that team identity is a form of group identity and is symbolic of

other group identities such as ethnicity or geography, what they dub "external group identities". They also suggest that fans see themselves as members of the team organization, not just consumers: the fans are invested the team's success. When teams better align with the group identities they represent, they can increase fan loyalty. In other words, fan loyalty is strengthened the more a fan feels the sense of belonging to a team and the identities it symbolizes (such as a geographic location). Further research done by Heere et al. (2011) validates the preposition that external group identities influence team identity. Through a survey of college students, they looked at how university, city and state identities affected the team identity of the focal college football team. Heere et al. (2011) found that "team identity could be explained by the student's identification with the university and indirectly (mediated by university identity) by city and state identities". Empirically, they were able to prove that sports teams act as a source of multiple group identities for their fans[1]. Most importantly, Heere et al. (2011) suggest that any change to the associated group identities can have a direct or indirect effect on the identity fans have with a sports team. A force like gentrification that changes the character of a city, then, might also change the character of a team's or a fandom's identity.

Heere et al. use the term group identity to refer to social identity, a psychological theory commonly used in fandom studies. It is "a person's knowledge that [they] belong to a social group or category" and "the value and emotional significance attached to that membership (Stets & Burk, 2000 p. 225; Heere et al. 2007

[1] Heere et al. (2011) conducted a questionnaire of two different sample groups (n= 476, n= 197) and then performed a confirmatory factor analysis to look at standard factor loadings and average variance extracted.

p. 324). As mentioned before, social groups/categories can be consciously joined, such as becoming a fan of a sports team, or can be designated by uncontrollable factors like genetics and place of birth (Stets & Burk, 2000). These social categories are a part of a structured society and can only exist in contrast with other categories. For instance, being a Warriors fan is only made significant with the existence of the other 29 teams in the NBA. Regardless of how a person came to identify with a social group, that knowledge of belonging to a group forms an individual's sense of self. There are two important processes in group identity formation: self-categorization and social comparison. Self-categorization is where individuals compare themselves to the other members of society and categorize the self accordingly. Social comparison is where individuals measure themselves against other members of their perceived group. People similar to the self are categorized as part of the "in-group" and those different from the self as part of the "out-group". Individuals gain self-esteem when they judge the in-group positively and when they closely identify with the in-group (Stets & Burk, 2000, pp. 225-226). We seek to belong, and for many that sense of belonging is found in sports fandom.

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To put it another way, fandom is a way to feel at home. I mean that quite literally. Home, as we usually think of it, is the place we were born, the place grew up, the place we live in. But home is not just a physical space. As Kraszewski (2008) argues in his ethnographic study of a Pittsburgh Steelers fan club in Fort Worth, Texas, home can be a sports team. In this environment of late capitalism, traditional and stable ways of belonging to communities are weakened. Traditional sites like churches, family and voluntary organizations are replaced with more informal bonds (Putnam, 2000). People

are no longer bound by geography like they once were, as the processes of globalization drive displacement and migration. Faced with uncertainty, people tend to turn to what communities remain for solace. Sports fandom offers something solid, the types of social ties and local identities that are increasingly precious as they become rarer. It "resonates with the idea of permanence and geographic origins" for fans because "sports carry a regional language of identity" (Kranszewski, 2008 p. 155; p.141). In other words, sports fandom is a way for fans to reconnect with home. Most importantly, Kranszewski found that the reconnection was not to home as it really exists, which is a place full of unresolvable (and uncomfortable) social tensions, but rather home in a nostalgic, highly personalized sense. This is kind of simplification is compounded with the fact that sports media functions as place-images, which is a concept borrowed from sociologist Shields (1991). Place-images serve to flatten and simplify a region's identity into something clear and coherent, instead of a place where identity is something contested by multiple groups.

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Baker (2018) also looks at the relationship between diaspora, home, and sports fandom, specifically football (soccer, for Americans) fans who live in New Zealand but support a team from a different location. Like Kraszeweski (2008), Baker argues that sports fandom offers a way to construct a sense of home. Unlike Kraszeweski, Baker is more concerned with the emotional connections and home as something that stretches across multiple places and spaces, rather than a fixed geographic origin. For her, it is those embodied feelings that weave communities together across a distance and elevate these home stadiums into "spiritual homes." Some of the fans she interviews have no ties to the places their teams play: they were not born there, did not grow up in the

geographic location, family not from the location. But despite that, the sensation of travelling to these home stadiums is one of a return journey, back to their true homes. The emotional bonds between fan and team have a transformative power, one that can extend the feeling of belonging across thousands of miles. Even spaces not associated with the teams, such as other football stadiums and watch party locations, can act as "homes" which shows the flexibility of emotional connections. Through their football fandom, these fans in Baker's study found a diversity of places where they feel they belong.

So, home is associated with a specific region yet can be stretched to multiple places. Sports teams carry the flavor of regional identity, but also can take on a global tenor. The gaps between these representations and their paradoxical nature speaks to the mutability of sports fandom and its powerful ability to forge connections. A fan, by engaging in certain rituals and practices that make up "rooting" for a team, can remind themselves of "home" in terms of specific local identities but also can create a sense of "home" divorced from the regionality of a space. Kraszweski's Pittsburg transplants brought western Pennsylvania to a Fort Worth sports bar, whereas Baker's Kiwi football fans felt they were brought to their spiritual home when their feelings about football resonated with a space. Belonging is ultimately tied to identity and identity is something constructed, negotiated, ever shifting. Sports fandom can foster a sense of belonging, but to what exactly? Or to that matter, to where? Because the meaning of sports teams is so highly personalized, it can be hard to find an exact answer.

There are several different perspectives from the authors surveyed so far. As argued earlier by Heere et al. (2007), a team's identity represents external group

identities: to take an example of this from Kraszewski (2008), the Steelers were characterized as blue collar and Eastern European. This representation of the team is largely uncontested, even though the representation of the Western Pennsylvania region is highly contested. To belong to the Steelers fandom, then, is to belong to a very narrow and flattened idea of Western Pennsylvania and find solace in a proletarian sort of identity. Crucially, even though most of the fans observed by Kraszewski (2008) were NOT part of those group identities (blue collar, specific European ethnicities) they still identified with those aspects of the Steelers. Heere et al. (2007) posited that:

> External group identities will strengthen a team identity if fans perceive an opportunity to enhance a particular external group identity through the team. In other words, team identity must be perceived as a mechanism for enhancing a salient external group identity. (p. 331)

Following that reasoning, the Steelers function as a medium to enhance a fan's blue collar or European identities. *Except that does not seem to be the case here*. The Steeler fans place great significance on being Steeler fans because the Steelers are seen as representative of the home that they left. They do not identify with the team because those Steeler fans personally believe they are blue collar or Polish and want to heighten those aspects of their identity (though that might be true for some fans). Rather than viewing team identity as symbolic of external group identities, it might be more logical to view those external group identities as **internal** to team identity. In this case, the mythologies of a region have become so intrenched and made so synonymous with a team that it would be pointless to try to separate them out. To answer the question from earlier, sports fandom, in Kraszeweski's (2008) study, fosters a sense of belonging to home, a home which is a nostalgic memory of region.

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The subsumption of external group identities to team identity also seems to be at play in Baker (2018). Or to word it another way, team identity seemed to transcend external group identities. The football fans surveyed from New Zealand identified with their team and not necessarily with associations represented by their team, such as region. For most of them, they were not trying to reconnect with a faraway home through their fandom, rather a new connection to home was created by their fandom. Amidst the cheering crowds of their team's stadium, they felt that they truly belonged because of their emotional bond to fandom. It was "love of the game" that gave a common language or space for disparate individuals who had no other ties to each other. If the fans in Kraszweski (2008) looked to return to a home they knew intimately well by rooting for the Steelers, the fans in Baker (2018) returned to a home they never knew by rooting for their football teams. Sports fandom, here, means to belong to a team and find belonging wherever that connection feels strong.

The difference in the two examples is not really in the overall effect (creating a sense of belonging in disparate spaces) but rather in the individual meaning of fandom. This points to the argument made by Sandvoss (2003) that teams are polysemic. His hypothesis is that fandom is an extension of the self, which means a team can take on different meanings depending on the individual fan. Sandvoss's example of this is two Chelsea fans, one, more affluent, who sees the club as emblematic of success and the other, less so, who sees Chelsea as a club that comes close to success but always manages to do something wrong in the end. In his interviews, we see something similar to what Heere et al. (2007) suggest, where the fan's external group identities are represented by the team identity, making the association between fan and team stronger.

Only, it is not really about what the team actually represents but what the fan *wishes* them to represent. The team is seen less as a mechanism to enhance certain aspects of an individual's identity, which is what Heere et al. suggest, but more like a space of "reflection and projection" for the fan's identity. Denotation or "actual semiotic condition" of a team is less important than personal connotation.

But it would be remiss to assume that the meaning of a team is entirely arbitrary or individualized. While in many ways a team's identity functions as polysemic, I believe that there are some facets of it that are so widely believed (and widely disseminated) that they become held as definitive truths. The transplanted fans in Kraszeweski (2008) unquestioningly accepted the Steelers as a "common and simplified" symbol of Western Pennsylvania. As discussed earlier, the external group identities of the region, as blue collar and European, have been bound so tightly to the Pittsburg Steelers that they are undistinguishable from the team's identity. Unlike the Sandvoss (2003) examples, there was a consensus on what the team meant across fans. However, as his hypothesis suggests, fandom acted as an extension of the self for these Steeler fans: a proud expression of their Western Pennsylvania roots.

All this relies on the idea that a sports team is an uncontested and stable representation of a region, which is promoted heavily by the sports media. What if that representation starts to become unsettled? What if the place-image broadcast by the media starts to change? We might find those answers by studying the recent history of the Golden State Warriors. The processes of migration that uprooted those diasporic Steeler fans and caused them to seek community in a Fort Worth sports bar work the

other way as well. New transplants can force old residents out, disrupting the existing communities. Gentrification is in the business of complicating belonging.

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The Historical Roots of Gentrification in Oakland

What is gentrification, really? The popular understanding of it seems mostly concerned with the aesthetics. The new apartment buildings are blocky, modernist, and boring, sticking out like sore thumbs among the old housing stock that they replaced. The modernist flavor extends to address signage, where the font of choice is a sans-serif, vaguely pointing to sleekness and contemporary comfort. The people gentrifying are overwhelmingly stereotyped as white, yuppie types clumsily embracing their new identity as city dwellers.

Figure 2. A popular tweet showing an example of "gentrification font". Other Twitter users replied with their own versions or locales where this font might be found. (@jude_raw, 2020).

These are some of the most visible markers of gentrification in the cultural zeitgeist. At its most basic definition though, gentrification is the process of a more

affluent class relocating or moving into an urban community, which ends up displacing the low-income residents (Rérat et al, 2009, p. 336). This demographic shift also involves a physical rehabilitation of the area, both residential, public, and commercial (which gets to the aesthetics mentioned before). In practice this has looked like rising rents, forced evictions, new housing complexes and businesses. Popular understanding of gentrification might be narrow, but it points to a real insight: it gets at the idea that gentrification appears to follow a familiar pattern no matter the locale. In cities across America, a similar narrative seems to be playing out. The areas affected are low-income and working class. The actors tend to be young, unmarried, and childless professionals, the *New Middle Class* as referred to by Ley (1996). There are commonalities, at least on the surface. But to generalize too far would be a mistake. While gentrification is a global phenomenon, it is also inherently and intimately tied to its spatial context. The way gentrification works and feels depends on the place it is happening in. If we wish to understand how gentrification can affect fandom, we need to understand the specific look of that region's gentrification. We need to go to Oakland.

Oakland, Hills and Flatlands

If San Francisco is the jewel of the Bay, Oakland is more like a semi-precious stone: of equal beauty in many ways yet treated as a lesser counterpart. Oakland has been San Francisco's "little brother" from the start: where S.F. grew quickly into the Bay's economic and metropolitan center thanks to a flood of prospectors during the Gold Rush and its environmental advantage of a deep-water port (the population ballooned from 800 in 1848 to around 25,000 in 1850), Oakland was more like a small village or neighborhood of the city to its west (Rhomberg, 2004; Bagwell, 1982, pp. 37-

38). In fact, Oakland's first main industry was supplying timber for the construction of houses and hotels in San Francisco that were desperately needed because of the influx of settlers. Even as Oakland has become a commercial center in its own right and a major player in fields such as health, transportation and logistics, it has continued to suffer a certain image problem. As Rhomberg (2004) comments:

> The usual stereotype casts the East Bay hub as a gray, industrial Second City to San Francisco, hardworking but dull in comparison to its more glamorous, sophisticated (and European) neighbor on the western side of the bay. Other versions paint an even gloomier picture of the quintessential American urban wasteland, a desultory sprawl of congestion and decay, faceless and culturally vacant. A city with no there there, a nonplace where nothing ever really happens. (p. ix)

While this perception is largely unfair and inaccurate, it is true that the Town[2] is comparatively less well off than the City. In 2009, 9.6 percent of San Francisco-Oakland Metropolitan area residents were living in poverty: that number jumps to 17.5 percent when looking at Oakland alone. The median annual household income for Oakland was $49,695, whereas in San Francisco that number was $74,876. But these are broad averages that are being compared: within the city limits of Oakland alone there are large disparities of income, education and employment. The hills of Oakland, which lie towards the city's outskirts, overwhelmingly tend to be more well-off than the flatland areas, which sit next to the bay (Promes, 2011, pp. 32-39). But how did this geography of inequality come to exist? To answer that requires us to delve deeper into the history of Oakland.

[2] The Town is a nickname affectionally given to Oakland by its residents that distinguishes it from San Francisco, which is referred to as the City.

Blue-collar Town

Oakland is a city strongly shaped by the currents of industry. Perhaps the first major turning point after its founding in 1852 was the arrival of the railroads. Back in 1868 the Oakland Waterfront Company had sold, for a mere five dollars, five hundred acres of bay frontage and two strips of land for rights of way to Western Pacific Railroad, an affiliate of Central Pacific Railroad (whose president, Leland Stanford sat on the board of the Waterfront company). Oakland, which sits on the mainland side of the bay, was a favorable location for the west coast terminal of the railroad company's new transcontinental line (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 26). Those trains began Oakland's transformation into a genuine economic hub of the East Bay. New businesses sprung up around the rails to accommodate the new flocks of passengers and crates of freight that moved through the city. By 1911, Oakland was the western terminus for two more transcontinental rail lines, where as many as 1600 trains a day passed through the city. Automobile assembly plants, too, began popping up in the city in the 1920s with General Motors, Chevrolet, Willys, Fageol and Caterpillar Tractor all establishing factories in the East Bay: Oakland became known as the "Detroit of the West" (Bagwell, 1982, p. 196). Shipbuilding grew into a major industry for the city during World War I, but it was the city's role as a transportation hub that mainly supported its economy. Processing industries flourished as they helped to turn the large amounts of raw goods that flowed in from the rails into refined products that could be shipped across the world.

The transcontinental rails and the subsequent industries that grew around it required labor: migrants from the other parts of the country and the globe flowed into

Oakland to meet the need. Black people, mostly employed as Pullman car porters, settled around the rails in West Oakland. Chinese people, who had come in hopes of gold and built the railroads that led to Oakland's prosperity, settled in downtown. Their movement was restricted by discriminatory city ordinances and they could only live in designated districts (Bagwell, 1982, pp. 87-88). Among white settlers, the first wave was mostly Irish and German immigrants and later, Italian and Portuguese immigrants (Promes, 2011, p. 56). Another trigger of population growth was the 1906 earthquake and fire that devastated San Francisco, sending refugees to Oakland, where an estimated 65,000 stayed permanently (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 28).

These large gains of population required new infrastructure to support them. Miles of gas mains and electric wires were installed by the Oakland Gas, Light, and Heat Company. Land speculators were snapping up plots for residential development and bidding on streetcar rights-of-way. In fact, the two often grew in tandem as the land around streetcar lines was valuable real estate because of easy access to transportation routes. Francis Marion "Borax" Smith attempted to take advantage of this, and established Realty Syndicate along with a business partner. The company tried to buy as much land as they could, putting in transportation lines and utilities in an effort to gain a monopoly over the region. Realty Syndicate ultimately went under, but before that they managed to establish a central transit system by buying electric streetcars, electric trains, and ferryboats. This would be known as the Key System, in reference to the company's pier which resembled the teeth of an old-fashioned housekey (Bagwell, 1982, pp. 154-165).

The City of Oakland, in a bid to attract more industry to the city, positioned the area as an idyllic pastoral haven with a comfortable "Mediterranean" climate and ideal location close to the San Francisco Bay. Through pamphlets, Oakland's Chamber of Commerce praised the city's number of schools, paved roads, churches and other benefits. The Chamber of Commerce also made the argument that since the workforce was mainly made of homeowners, employees were less likely to engage in labor movements or political agitation (Promes, 2011, p. 58). But this urban characterization of Oakland was not spread equally throughout the city. West Oakland, a largely working-class neighborhood, saw little of the beautiful gardens and lawns extolled by the pamphlets. Indeed, that area was left to deteriorate, while most of the investment for public works, such as parks, was directed to new development in the foothills. The developers of these new neighborhoods also made great pains to retain a certain character through restrictions: white and well-off (Bagwell, 1982, pp. 201-206). Here, we can see the beginnings of the divide between the hills and flatlands in the fledgling city, a divide that would only grow larger in the coming years.

Though the city attracted industrialists with the promise of a docile workforce, it did not exactly deliver on it. The advent of industrialization brought workers, but with them, the labor and Socialism movements. The burgeoning unions showed their strength as early as 1894, when Oakland workers participated in the national Pullman strike in 1894 that was organized by Eugene Debs and the American Railway Union. American Federation of Labor (AFL) unions proliferated, thanks to favorable conditions such as small firm sizes and a relatively insulated economy. The unions even started their own newspaper in 1910, the *Tri-City Labor Review*. But as was the case for

unions across America at this time, their power was undermined by racism and sexism. Instead of building a wide labor coalition, union members were mainly native-born white men who worked in skilled jobs. That handicap probably prevented them from making many inroads into political institutions, although Socialist candidates, on the strength of union support and sympathetic European immigrants, managed to almost take control of the City Council in the 1911 elections. In response, the local elites passed several city charter reforms to weaken the voting power of working-class and ethnic members. They also installed a nonpartisan commission to run its government, which was ultimately a short-lived experiment. Power struggles continued within the ruling class of Oakland, and Joseph P. Knowland, publisher of the *Oakland Tribune*, pushed through a council-manager form of governance with help from a coalition of business elites in 1931 (Douzet, 2012, p. 27). This firmly gave control over Oakland to Knowland, who would consistently rule in favor for business interests and industrial expansion. The Town was a working-class city, but it was the bosses and owners who ran it, just as they ran the factories and railroads.

War-Boom

Commercial players bent politics to their benefit, but it was war, and federal dollars that came with it, that really fueled Oakland's growth. With the outbreak of World War I, Oakland saw huge increases in shipbuilding, heavy industry and logistics. One only had to look to the Moore Shipbuilding Company as an example of this transformation. In 1906 it employed only 250, which jumped to 13,000 in 1920 (Bagwell, 1982, p. 190). Its plant expanded from 15 acres to 40 acres in order to fulfill federal demands for warships. It is hard to understate how much the war boosted

Oakland's development. In just twenty years, the manufacturing working class that had accounted for 31 percent of the Oakland labor force increased to accounting for nearly 40 percent of the labor force (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 46). In the five years between 1914 and 1919, the overall manufacturing workforce over tripled its size. And with that increased workforce came an increased commitment to labor militancy. 1917 saw a strike from the Shipyard Laborer's Union, who shut down two shipyards for two weeks in order to win higher wages. Previously unorganized and unskilled workers also joined in the cause, with strikes carried out by railroad laborers, cannery employees, butchers, janitors, and telephone operators. The struggles continued to intensify after the war, and in October 1919, eleven hundred streetcar and ferry operators struck the Key System for ten days. Strikebreakers were called in by the company and in the ensuing violence, forty people were seriously injured, seven died in a trolley accident, and forty-eight were arrested on strike related offense (p. 48). Despite these efforts, the economic recession that followed would largely erase the gains made by the unions, as high unemployment gave employers the definite upper hand. Labor would have some moments in the following years, but it never would quite regain the same strength.

During the fallow years of the Depression, it was the federal government, once again, that propped up the economy. Large public works contracts were handed out, most notably to Henry J. Kaiser. Kaiser had cut his teeth working as part of the "Six Companies" who built Hoover Dam. His firm along with another "Six Companies" member, Bechtel, was awarded a $3.9 million contract to construct a tunnel that would connect new suburbs being built to the east of Oakland (Promes, 2011, p. 61). This project paled compared to the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, however. The bridge

had long been proposed but it was the infusion of federal cash, a loan of $62 million from the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, that finally made its construction possible. The bridge created thousands of jobs and brought in millions of dollars, $4.5 million of which was given to a Kaiser-Bechtel headed firm to build the substructure of the Bay Bridge, and additional sub-contracts awarded to Moore shipyard for a commission of caissons needed in the bridge piers. It was a boon to Oakland's economy: in 1935 the port experienced a 62 percent increase in maritime business mostly because shipments of materials due for the bridge construction.

Smaller demographic changes had been occurring during Oakland's population growth of this period, most significantly the growth of a white middle class borne out of nativist and economic concerns. The black population also grew during this time, doubling from 3,055 in 1910 to 7,503 in 1930: that made them the largest non-white population in Oakland (Rhomberg, 2004, 82). Still, they were limited to living mostly in West Oakland by discriminatory housing practices that were fundamentally embedded in the industry. These racial boundaries were only hardened by the rise of the white middle-class. While these conditions might have been bearable for a moment (if grossly unjust), they would quickly become untenable with the advent of World War II. Oakland's economy was due for another war boom, but this one would far out-shadow the one that occurred during the First World War. California experienced another "Gold Rush" as the war effort commenced in earnest to fight the enemy across the Pacific. Total federal expenditure for the fiscal year 1930 was less than $3 billion; between 1940-1946, $360 billion was spent, $35 billion of those federal dollars going to California (Bagwell, 1982, p. 234). Shipbuilding was Oakland's main contribution, led

by Kaiser's shipyards: in 1943, Oakland alone built 35.2 percent of the cargo ships coming from the West Coast (p. 234). Labor to supply the war machine was in great demand: workers were recruited from all walks of life and imported from all across the country, but the majority of migrants were Dust Bowlers from the Midwest and black people from the South.

Oakland experienced a massive population increase because of all this in-migration: from 1940 to 1945 the number of people living in the city grew from 302,163 to 400,935, or a little over 30 percent. A significant portion of that increase occurred in the black population, which more than tripled in size, going from just 3 percent of the population in 1940 to about 10 percent in 1945 (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 97). More than 65 percent of those black migrants came from the South, and they made up 85 percent of the shipyard's black workforce (Douzet, 2012, p. 31). These new workers were mainly limited to unskilled and low-paid jobs, and many were illiterate and destitute (Promes, 2011, p. 64). One commonality these newcomers held, along with their reason for coming to Oakland, was a need for somewhere to stay. Unfortunately, the city was ill prepared to handle such a sudden growth, especially with most of its resources being devoted to the war effort.

A housing shortage broke out, with many sleeping on the streets, in their cars, or with relatives. The situation was not helped by the fact that most of the migrants had come with their family, many married or with young children (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 98). And nowhere was the shortage more acutely felt than in the black population, forced to stay by de-facto segregation in neighborhoods that were already filled to the brim. This segregation followed them to the workplace, and to what housing that was built to

shelter the newcomers. Any hope for a political solution was dampened by the systemic disenfranchisement that had been the rule in Oakland governance for years.

Post-War Blues

The end of World War II marked the start of new prosperity in America. Prosperity for some, at least. The black community in Oakland saw their problems only intensify in the post-war years. Housing was still in short supply and the black population was only growing with the return of war veterans and continuing migration from the South. Even as the black neighborhoods of West Oakland were being packed, there was little relief to be found in the private real estate market, where discrimination was rampant. The black population was forced to turn to public housing instead: by the war's end, over half lived in temporary housing built for war workers. If there was any solution to be had in the public housing, that was quickly erased by the real estate industry, who successfully lobbied for the gutting of the program. After the temporary housing was torn down, there would be no new government-built developments to replace them. That was the case in the surrounding towns of Oakland, and in 1945 a new stream of black migrants came to West Oakland to seek refuge: by 1950, West Oakland would be home to 85 percent of the city's black population (Murch, 2010, p. 25). The hills, meanwhile, was where developers had been busy with residential construction all throughout the 1930s and by the war's end the area was a sprawling suburb ready to house the city's white, affluent communities. The division between the "flatlands" of the inner city and the "hills" of the periphery suburbs would only grow more entrenched, especially with veteran's loans that effectively helped fund this "white flight" (Douzet, 2012, p. 33).

And although the war brought the Great Depression to an unquestionable close for the country, Oakland went through a downturn in its economy as it adjusted to the new post-war climate. The war machine began to be disassembled, and that meant layoffs for thousands of workers. The first to be cut were the low-skill and low-wage jobs that had drawn so many laborers to Oakland in the first place, affecting the black and other minority populations especially hard. Businesses began to leave the East Bay for cheaper locales, and the shift of shipping to the interstate highways meant that the railroads, which were so crucial to Oakland's growth, were no longer so vital. Technology also played a part in the recession, as automation caused a decrease in manufacturing jobs and improvements in agriculture forced rural families to look for jobs in the cities (Promes, 2011, p. 67). Inflation was also high after the war, as federal decontrols went in place (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 102). All these factors contributed to a flagging economy in Oakland, spurring great unrest amongst its workers. That unrest culminated in the general strike of 1946 that lasted several weeks. Workers had made gains during World War II and were determined not to lose them, like they had after World War I. The strike involved 142 unions and an estimated 100,000 workers, across race, gender, and a multitude of industries (Douzet, 2012, p. 34). But the unions, pressured by the police and city leaders, backed down before achieving any demands. This working-class alliance would feature again in a bid to win a majority of the city council but would ultimately fail to attain meaningful reforms.

As the city's fortunes were continuing to run out, white people were leaving for the suburbs in droves. The government was pouring money into these peripheral neighborhoods, subsidizing the construction of residential homes and lending to white

borrowers through Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Administration mortgage underwriting programs. Upwardly mobile whites saw this as their chance to leave the poverty-stricken, minority-filled neighborhoods of Oakland proper to greener, more ethnically monolithic pastures. The benefits of FHA and VA programs were not obtainable by black people. They were effectively barred from getting housing in white neighborhoods and the black neighborhoods were redlined through the New Deal era Home Owners' Loan Corporation, making them exempt from the federally backed mortgages. White outmigration and black in-migration would continue, and the overall population would drop in Oakland. By 1980, black people would make up a majority of the city, 157,484 of Oakland's residents or 51 percent of the population (Murch, 2010, p. 16).

As the racial makeup of the population changed, so too did the racial makeup of the city's neighborhoods. While most of the black population still lived in West Oakland in the 1960s, the black community was starting to expand into other areas in North and East Oakland abandoned by affluent whites, driving concerns of racial conflict, particularly in the schools. Racial conflict was also pushed by violent policing that was rife in black neighborhoods (the "ghettos"), a veritable mode of social control by the city. Tensions in the black community were also running high in this era because of economic strife. Deindustrialization was dismantling traditional centers of employment in Oakland: many were without jobs, and many of those that had one were being underpaid (Murch, 2010, p. 38). However, that is not to say all black people were impoverished during this period of Oakland history. Places like Seventh Street, which was the historic black business center and referred to by residents as "Baby Harlem,"

exemplify a thriving black entrepreneurship even in an adverse environment (Murch, 2010, pp. 26-30). Indeed, the black middle class would be instrumental in leading the charge for black political mobilization.

Still, although some were well-off, the overall economic situation was grim in Oakland. In 1964, when President Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty, the city was one of a few to be designated a depressed area by the federal Area Redevelopment Act. The unemployment rate of the city was double the national rate at 8 percent, and it was even worse in certain flatland neighborhoods, standing as high as 14 percent (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 137). The new program targeted these areas (North Oakland, West Oakland, Fruitvale, East Oakland) that were majority poor, and also mostly home to black and brown families. The anti-poverty program, funded through the federal Economic Opportunity Act, was designed for job training and technical education. Though the program was for poor minorities, they had very little say in its design. Instead, the program was largely shaped by those from the professional class, including those of the black professional class. The results from the anti-poverty program were ultimately marginal at best: bureaucratic gestures did little to alleviate the vast systemic shackles placed on minorities and the poor. It was this stagnancy that was the catalyst for black radicalism, a tradition carried by the Black Panther Party.

The Black Panthers, unlike some previous black activist movements, were not concerned with concessions and compromise with the white ruling class. Instead, they espoused black power and community self-determination. Their founders, Huey Newton and Bobby Seale, were participants of Merritt College's Black Studies program, an Oakland community college, before they started the Black Panther Party

for Self Defense in 1966. The Black Panther Party agenda focused on providing basic needs to the community through the community and arming themselves for protection against the state. It was the latter point that most defined them in the popular imagination: young black men (and women) dressed in black leather and holding rifles. But it was the former that perhaps would be their most meaningful impact, grassroots programs like free breakfasts for schoolchildren, sickle cell anemia testing and grocery giveaways (Promes, 2011, p. 70). What the Black Panthers represented, black radicalism born of the campus combined with wide mobilization of the economically marginalized, frightened those in power. The FBI's director, J. Edgar Hoover led an aggressive campaign against the Black Panthers in order to destroy them. He would succeed, to an extent: the Party would fall apart in the end, fighting over its direction within its ranks and contesting with outside pressures from the state. But their legacy would live on, the words of its members inspiring new generations of activists to take up their anticolonial and community-based struggle.

Urban Renewal

Across America, cities were all suffering from a similar blight in a post-war era. Federal policy had led to a white exodus from the urban core to the suburban periphery. Those left living there were mostly the poor and minorities, and the housing stock was, on the whole, inadequate both in terms of units available and quality of construction. Jobs were also hard to come by, as industries followed their ideal workforce out of the city. Infrastructure was aged and crumbling, and the available funds to deal with these problems was diminished because of the shrinking tax base. In attempt to deal with these issues, the federal government made funding available to engage in "urban

renewal" with the passage of the Federal Housing Act of 1968 and the Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Act of 1968. The leaders and business elite of Oakland, wanting to bring lost economic glory and the middle class back to the city, formulated an ambitious plan to transform Oakland's urban landscape.

This strategy to gut and redevelop the city started early, in 1949. The city council designated West Oakland as blighted, marking large swaths of land for demolition. The intention behind the proposal was for public housing to be built in this area to replace the torn-down buildings (although residents believed some housing could instead be rehabilitated), but this Progressive-minded goal never came into fruition (Douzet, 2012, p. 33). Indeed, this designation became justification for a more conservative-bent urban renewal, one that would place commercial interests over the ones of residents.

The leaders of Oakland turned their focus on transportation, which was one of Oakland's strengths in the era of trains and ferries but had become less of an advantage with the advent of the automobile and long-haul trucking. The highway had replaced the rails and business elites were keen to lay out the miles of asphalt that would put Oakland in a better condition to grow. By the late 1950s, the Oakland City Council had approved for at least three interstate freeways through West Oakland, the historic transportation center. Then in 1956, legislation was passed to establish the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, which encompassed Alameda, Contra Costa and San Francisco counties (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 125). The BART system would replace the old Key system, linking Oakland with the rest of the Bay metropolitan area in the late 1970s. However, contrary to what the city's business leaders anticipated, the new

transportation system did not bring traffic and capital into Oakland. Instead, money flowed out, to the neighboring San Francisco. And West Oakland, already cut through with highways, was once again ran through with BART elevated tracks. The port facilities were also upgraded to keep up with the new focus on international commerce, but its profits would go towards maintenance and improvements within the port, with none contributing to the city's general fund (Promes, 2011, p. 73).

West Oakland was decimated by the process of building up this transportation network: Seventh Street, the once bustling business hub and entertainment zone of the area was destroyed by the BART construction. Freeways effectively cordoned the neighborhood on its north and east edge, and even split it, as was the case of the Grove Shafter. Not only did destruction come from the placing of new routes, significant parts of the historically black neighborhood were flattened for new housing, new housing that would fail to replace the units lost. Between 6,600 and 9,700 housing units were lost between 1960 and 1966, displacing over 10,000 people: a one-fifth net loss of the housing supply in the end (Douzet, 2012, p. 41; Promes, 2011, p. 73). Ventures like the Acorn Project and the Oak Center, implemented by the General Neighborhood Renewal Plan of 1959, made clear that urban renewal was not for the residents of these areas. A fifty-block area was entirely demolished for the Acorn Project, and middle-income housing built in its place, in hopes that those who moved in could revitalize the struggling downtown (Hayes, 1971, p. 108). Public housing or low-income housing was not profitable and thus it was not built, pricing the previous residents out. Money was instead spent building projects that had clear economic benefits, such as the Warrior's own Oracle Arena. This would be the pattern that would appear in the city's urban

renewal plans, as in other cities across America during this period: commercial interests consistently put at the forefront, and the poor and minority residents ignored.

Oakland, Today

In the end these ambitious proposals did little to help Oakland. As the economy continued to transition from manufacturing-based to service-based, workers who had traditionally benefitted from well-paying jobs found themselves forced into low-paying, insecure jobs or simply unemployed. Moreover, the good-paying service jobs that were created tended to go to the affluent and more educated workers who lived in the hills or in the suburbs outside of Oakland, and not the residents of the flatlands (Douzet, 2012, p. 67). Throughout the 1980s and the 1990s Oakland continued to decline, private capital unwilling to invest in an area deemed decaying despite millions spent by the city in order to please business interests. These impoverished conditions proved ripe for the epidemic of drugs and crime, which hit the flatland neighborhoods particularly hard (Promes, 2011, p. 76). Fortunes for the city took a turn with the election of Mayor Jerry Brown in 1998, who promised the construction of 10,000 new housing units. But like his predecessors, Brown was concerned with courting commercial players and bringing capital to Oakland: these units were to attract the young and well-to-do back to the inner city (Douzet, 2012, p. 75). The Bay Area's Dot-Com boom made Oakland attractive to developers, particularly as the cities surrounding it were already overbuilt. Brown's efforts made a difference: the 2000 census saw an increase in the city's white population, the first since 1950 (Rhomberg, 2004, p. 190). Today, Oakland no longer is a majority black city, but split evenly between white, black, Asian and Latino communities (US Census, 2019).

Gentrification as a Framework

With that history in mind, we can better understand gentrification's look in Oakland. In particular, we might pay special attention to the racial connotations of it, as the city that had failed to house its poor and minorities, particularly those from the black community, jumped to provide housing for the white and affluent. Discriminatory real estate practices and racist federal lending programs prevented black people from moving into better homes in the hills, making them homogenous enclaves for whites and the flatlands a homogenous enclave for black people. Then, as federal policy insured mortgages, real estate saw an opportunity to buy low-income housing for cheap and then sell them to buyers that had been traditionally excluded from homeownership (Taylor, 2018). Subprime loans were targeted towards these buyers, meaning black and Latino residents. Thus, the foreclosures of the 2008 subprime mortgage crisis disproportionately affected homes in West and East Oakland, neighborhoods that had been previously redlined (McElroy and Werth, 2019, p. 885). These foreclosures have played a significant role in the gentrification of Oakland, along with unlawful detainer evictions (stemming from a breach of lease). As McElroy and Werth (2019) argue, we cannot just transpose the San Francisco "Tech Boom 2.0" model of gentrification, we have to pay attention to the real, racialized history that underlies dispossession and displacement in Oakland.

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But we would be remiss to limit our conception of gentrification to built environment and geography alone. Indeed, Werth and Marienthal (2016) provide a framework on how gentrification can be used as a broader term to capture feelings of "belonging and disbelonging" (p. 720). Like the example of font choice from earlier, the

authors take note of how "talk of gentrification is ubiquitous" in areas not limited to the traditional definitions of urban studies. Rather than further refine and restrict the concept, Werth and Marienthal (2016) state:

> In our perspective, then, the ubiquitous and unruly use of the term is neither a conceptual problem nor a political failure. Instead, it is in itself a rich and meaningful subject of research on urban life. The irrepressible talk of gentrification points to the multiplicity of sites in which consequential formations of belonging and disbelonging are forged in practice. (p.720)

The authors introduce the idea of gentrification as a "grid of meaning": it structures the struggles of a diverse set of actors over who belongs, what they call the "deserving public". The deserving public is the legitimate political community who shape and organize the relations of rights and responsibilities of different actors and agencies, a community that is constantly being negotiated. Gentrification is not just a transformation of spaces by political and economic forces, but rather a way in which people experience and preform their relational identity and claims. It becomes clear how we might then apply the idea to sports fandom, which also finds itself concerned with questions over identity and belonging. It makes utter sense why the irrepressible talk of gentrification might also bleed into talk of fandom, which is a significant arena for individuals to perform and project their identity. So, while fandom may not be gentrified in the traditional sense of the word, it can certainly **feel** like it. The Warriors make a particularly rich case study, as their rise coincided with intensifying processes of gentrification in Oakland. We turn next, then, to an account of the Warriors' historic run.

The Rise and Fall of the Golden State Warriors

The Makings of a Dynasty

Winning an NBA championship is hard. A team must first win enough games to qualify for the post-season playoffs. Depending on the year (and the team), this first step might feel like a formality or an impossibility, although statistically a team should make the playoffs around half the time. Let us say your team does make the playoffs and even gets a good seeding position. In the NBA, this means being one of the top four teams in your conference (East or West), as the top eight teams make up the playoff field. Then, they must win four 7-game series against the best of the best. The format almost eliminates the randomness that inevitably factors into who wins, leaving only cold, hard meritocracy. Truly, only the best of the best can win an NBA championship. In the past twenty years, just nine different teams have won one. Four of those championships were won by teams led by LeBron James. The sad reality is that the vast majority of fans may never see their team hoist the Larry O'Brian trophy in their lifetime[3]. Winning several, in consecutive years? Well, you might get lucky.

The Warriors got lucky. Unlike so many other teams, they found the right players, at the right price, at the right time. Perhaps the most important element to the Warriors' success was finding talent where it was not always apparent. They managed to draft probably the best shooter in the history of basketball, a shooter who, while not the best in history, is one of the best in his generation and one of the smartest defensive

[3] As an avid fan of the long-suffering Portland Trail Blazers, this is unfortunately probably true. However, as any REAL fan knows, one must never resign yourself to that kind of pessimism. In the words of @pdxbrocalite, The Blazers Are Going to Win the Championship.

minds in the game today. For those who are not aware, this is extremely difficult to do. The NBA Draft, where teams get to choose from a bevy of skilled 20-somethings for their roster, is fittingly referred to as a lottery. No matter how advanced the analytics of a data-cruncher or keen the eyes of a scout, it is always a gamble to take a chance on unproven talent. The Warriors might have taken an even bigger gamble than usual by selecting players who were not highly lauded coming out of college. However, college play is not always an accurate prediction of NBA play. Plenty of teams have taken a player high in the draft because he destroyed the competition in the NCAA, only for him to be out of the league in a couple seasons. Injuries, attitude issues, just not being good enough: there is an unmeasurable number of variables that factor in to whether or not a player "makes it" in the NBA. For the Warriors to take those chances and be rewarded **that** handsomely is rare indeed.

The winning roster they assembled was also done on the cheap, thanks mostly to Curry's lingering ankle injuries[4]. In sports, there are very few things fans can come to a consensus on. Injuries being awful is one of them. It never feels good to watch a player go down, face twisted in pain and clutching at a limb. But in the Warrior's case, injuries are what allowed them to sign Curry to a much smaller contract than a player of his caliber would normally command. After an ankle surgery, Curry ended up agreeing to a four-year, $44 million extension in the 2012 offseason. To put that contract in perspective, All-Star point guard Damian Lillard signed a five-year, $140 million maximum extension with Portland as his initial rookie contract was set to expire. Of

[4] Curry first sprained his ankle in the preseason of 2010-2011, and would deal with more injuries to it, eventually getting surgery at the end of that season. His ankle issues would never quite resolve fully.

course, the circumstances were a bit different. Lillard was the 2012 Rookie of the Year and understood to be the future face of the Blazers, while Curry had been playing second option to Monta Ellis. Regardless, the contract was a bargain for Curry, who would transform into a once-in-a-generation type player. The money they saved with that deal was then used to secure savvy veterans and shore up deficiencies on the roster, all while staying under the salary cap. Lacob is not nearly as stingy as some owners in the NBA, but he and his partners do not have the billions to throw around like a Steve Ballmer, the ex-CEO of Microsoft who owns the Los Angeles Clippers. The NBA is an arms race, and the Warriors got a nuclear warhead at the price of an RPG.

While the rise of the Warriors was not necessarily pre-destined or obvious in the moment, it was timely. The league was in-between dynasties when they won their first championship in 2015: the San Antonio Spurs were aging out of relevancy, the Lakers seemed worse with every missed midrange jumper, the Heat no longer had the triumvirate of Lebron James, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh. It was a whole new world in the NBA, and the Warriors were the team best positioned to take advantage of the fact. That is hindsight speaking, of course. Vegas had the Cleveland Cavaliers as the favorites to win it all, while the Warriors sat seven spots back. Maybe the Cavs would have won it all, had their star players Kevin Love and Kyrie Irving not gone down because of injury. But it is pointless to argue over hypotheticals. The reality is the Warrior's style of play, one that valued a free-flowing, three-point heavy offense and position-less, switching defense would be the one to change the way the game is played. Before, teams relied on big, hulking centers to protect the basket. Now, every team is after long, stretchy wings that can slow the deluge of shooting from the arc. In a way,

the Warriors were the perfect representation of how basketball has evolved away from lumbering post play, to fast-paced jump shooting. Where once the most valuable player award was dominated by towering, physically imposing forwards and centers, could now be rewarded to a slight, baby-faced point guard standing a mere 6'2".

Joseph Lacob acquired the team in 2010, in what could only be considered a coup. Chris Cohan was looking to sell the team, after many disappointing seasons under his tenure, and most assumed the Warriors would be bought up by Oracle founder Larry Ellison. Despite the fact he was the highest bidder, the team was instead acquired by Lacob and his partner Peter Guber. Finance-wise, Lacob and Guber were at a clear disadvantage to Ellison. One was a multibillionaire, to the tune of $28 billion, while the other two were a Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers partner and a Hollywood executive. Rich, yes, but not wealthy enough to compete on capital alone. Instead, Lacob and Guber had to cut a deal outside the standard auction, promising Cohan $450 million for the team with a guaranteed $20 million up front. It was a record-breaking amount of money for an NBA team, but an investment that would pay in dividends. To onlookers it seemed ridiculous to pay $450 million for an irrelevant basketball team that hadn't won anything meaningful in the past 50 years. Of course, that once irrelevant team would go on to win three championships in the next six years. Today, the Warriors franchise worth is estimated around $2 billion (Strauss, 2020, pp. 9-23).

In an April 2016 *New York Times Magazine* profile, Lacob would make the statement that would go on to define the tenor of that Warriors team: "The Warriors were light-years ahead of probably every team in structure, in planning, in how we're going to go about things." To non-Warriors fans, this smacked of arrogance and the

typical technobabble of a Silicon Valley venture capitalist. To Warriors fans, it was an affirmation of the philosophy that created one of the best teams the NBA has ever seen. What makes for "light-years ahead" moves? For Lacob that meant bringing in newcomers to key roles: Bob Myers to be GM, a former agent who had never held the position before, Mark Jackson to be head coach, a T.V. commentator, and who was soon replaced by Steve Kerr, who had been the GM for the Phoenix Suns but never a coach. It meant tapping Jerry West, NBA logo and legendary executive, to serve as a consulting board member. It meant, in short, to treat the Warriors like any other company Lacob invested in. Instead of running the Warriors in a top-down, dogmatic fashion, Lacob preferred to sit back and let the best minds do the work. Decisions were made by coming to a common consensus, rather than given by one, final voice.

That does not mean the brains of the Warriors always made the best decisions. For one, they tried to trade Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson for nine-time All-NBA point guard Chris Paul. The deal made sense at the time. In 2011 there was no way of knowing how good Stephen Curry and Klay Thompson were going to be. Curry had spent much of his time in the NBA sharing the ball with Monta Ellis or sidelined with ankle injuries, and Thompson was a rookie who had been convicted for possession of marijuana. Chris Paul, on the other hand, was a known commodity. One of the best playmakers in the league, Paul was averaging almost 20 points and 10 assists for the New Orleans Hornets. The deal was close to going through, but Paul refused to commit to the Warriors beyond the end of his current contract. And why would he? The Warriors were one of the worst teams in the league and he wanted to win a championship. The trade fell through (and Paul would still not get the championship

ring he hoped for), but that was only one of many aborted deals involving Curry and Thompson. The Warriors, mostly due to luck, avoided giving away their two best players: hardly a demonstration of the "light-years" prescience the franchise projected. Even their head coaching hire of Kerr happened by chance: The Warriors front office first tried to get former Orlando Magic coach Stan Van Gundy. He ended up signing with the Detroit Pistons, leaving them with no choice but to turn to their second option, Steve Kerr. Even the smartest guys in the room came very close to ruining what would be the best team in basketball. Sometimes fate looks more like luck in the light.

2015, or the Beginning

The first fated, or lucky, championship came in 2015, the first year with head coach Steve Kerr, who replaced Mark Jackson. The firing of Jackson came as a surprise: under his guidance, the Warriors went from a 23-win, bottom-of-the-barrel team to a legitimate playoff contender. If success in the NBA is measured by wins, then Jackson was a successful coach and successful coaches are not usually sacked. But underneath his accomplishments was a coach not quite good enough to get his team to a championship. Jackson's responsibilities were split, as he continued work as a Los Angeles-area pastor even while coaching in Oakland. He refused to hire the best available assistant coaches, preferring instead men who would not question his authority. Jackson was not maximizing the talent given. A first round playoff exit after a 7-game series against the Los Angeles Clippers sealed his dismissal.

Enter Steve Kerr. A member of the legendary Jordan-led, Phil Jackson-coached Bulls team, Kerr had gone on to be a successful basketball commentator for TNT and a GM for the Phoenix Suns. But never a coach. What he lacked in experience, Kerr made

up with vision and support from his knowledgeable coaching staff. If Jackson helped the Warriors become good, Kerr made them great. The Warriors went from being just another playoff team jockeying for position into legitimate frontrunners. They won 67 games that year, 16 more than the previous year, and did so in a dominant fashion, beating teams by an average of ten points. That continued into the post-season, where they easily swept the New Orleans Pelicans, dispatched the Memphis Grizzlies in six, dropped only one game to the Houston Rockets and finally finished off a depleted, Lebron-led Cavaliers team. That championship was the first after 39 years of mostly irrelevancy and mediocracy and perhaps the last that would be fully appreciated by any non-Warriors NBA fan. For while the Warriors could enjoy the status of fresh-faced newcomers in 2015, they and their fans would quickly wear on the nerves of the rest of the league in the years to come.

2016, the Year of the Comeback

2016 was a historic year, as much as any year can be arbitrarily labeled "historic." Americans watched mostly in horror at the collapse of one projected winner and mostly in unabashed glee at the collapse of another. Of course, any parallels between Hillary Clinton's presidential run and the Golden State Warriors' championship run are tenuous at best. But it is true that much like Hillary was expected to easily win over her far inferior competition in Donald Trump, the Warriors were almost certain to steamroll the rest of the NBA in their quest for their second-straight championship ring. Where they were great in 2015, they were disgustingly so in 2016: out of 82 games, they lost only 9. The average winning margin in those 73 games: 10.7 points, which only begins to hint at the ease with which the Warriors beat every team in

the league. Pundits and regular Joes argued over if they were the greatest team the NBA has ever seen, debates which raged from radio waves to Twitter threads. The Warriors were certainly the winningest team the NBA has ever seen, at least in the regular season. But as they would be reminded again and again, the win-loss record is only significant as the hardware one gets at the end.

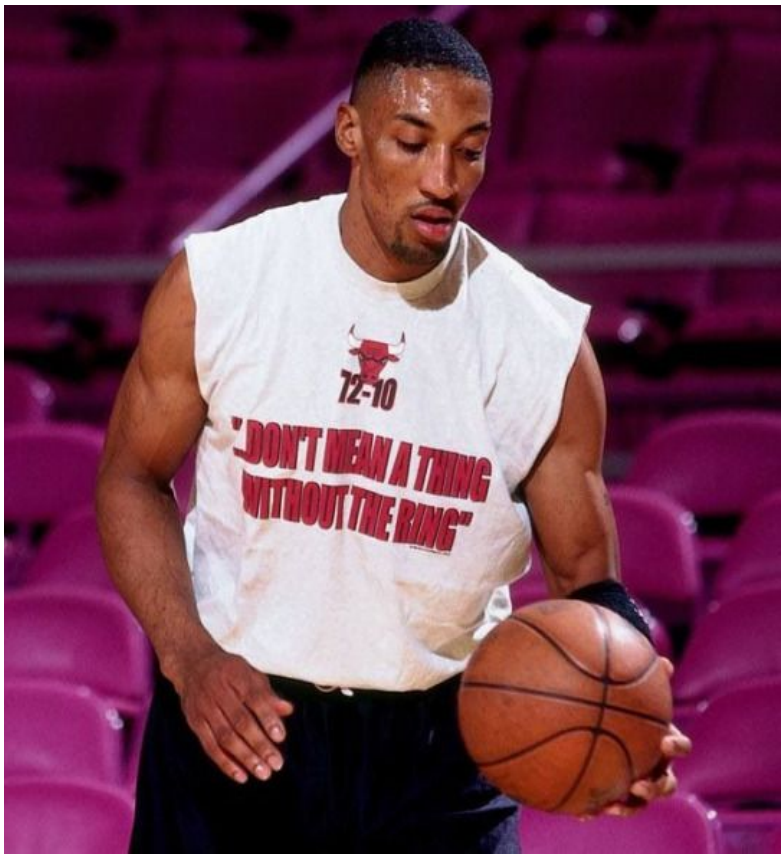

Figure 3. Chicago Bulls forward Scottie Pippen wearing a tank top with the phrase "72-10…Don't mean a thing without the ring". He and the 1995-1996 Bulls team set the previous regular season win-loss record when they went 72-10 and would go on to win the championship that year.

One could dismiss this argument as pure bitterness from Warriors haters who were tired of watching their team lose again and again to the team from the Bay. Yet for a certain subset of basketball fans, winning a championship is the only measure of success that matters. 73-9 as a record only has substance and meaning if the Warriors

got to hoist the Larry O'Brian again. As it turns out, the winningest team in NBA history would also be one to lose in the most spectacular and historic fashion.

The Warriors faced their first real test in the playoffs and summarily aced it in the first two rounds. They only dropped one game in each of their series against the Houston Rockets and the Portland Trail Blazers. The wins were not quite as dominant as their regular season ones and the Warriors had to work to come back from behind in several. Worst of all, Curry missed several games with injury. Still, it was never a question whether they would move on to the Western Conference Finals. It was there, in that contest against the Oklahoma City Thunder, a team that was practically unstoppable seemed to return to the mortal plane. After four games, the Thunder were up 3-1 in the series behind the excellent play of Kevin Durant and Russell Westbrook and it appeared that the Warriors had finally met their match. It was there, on the brink of defeat, that the Warriors regained their invincibility. They won Game 5 120-111 without too much drama, belied by the cheers of Oakland faithful. The next win was at the Thunder's home arena in Oklahoma City, and suddenly it was a tie series at 3-3. Only nine teams had ever come back from a 3-1 playoff deficit, and never in the Western Conference Finals. History was not on the Warriors' side, and indeed, they found themselves trailing for much of Game 7. Then, in the 3rd quarter, Curry did what he does best: hit a three, this one to tie the game at 54-54. The Warriors, inevitable, would win and move on to a much-anticipated championship rematch against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

The matchup felt different the second time around. For one, the Cavs weren't bogged down with injury problems, the floor-stretching forward Kevin Love and

acrobatic guard Kyrie Irving both able to play this time. Despite that, and the fact Lebron was formidable as ever, they still found themselves playing the role of underdog. And this Warriors team was a history-making favorite, having only lost 15 games total coming into the championship. After four games, the Warriors were ahead of the Cavs 3-1 in the series, a position reverse of where they were in the previous round. They blew out the Cavs in the first two games, lost in a one-sided 90-120 affair, and then pulled away in the second half to win Game 4. The Warriors were headed back to Oakland, where there was no doubt in anyone's minds that they would win their second-straight chip in front of their adoring home crowd to cap off an almost perfect year of basketball. After all, no one had ever blown a 3-1 lead in the championship finals.

If there was any doubt about the Warriors coming into Game 5, it was because Draymond Green, the team's defensive anchor and lynchpin, had gotten himself suspended. Green can best be described as a troublemaker, one who could not help but talk trash to referees, coaches, opposing players, fans on the sideline and whoever else might bother listening. This habit often got him into foul trouble, though not as much as one might expect. Green also had developed a habit of hitting opponents in the groin: thus, the one-game suspension. The Warriors lost Game 5 in a close contest, and then were thoroughly embarrassed from the start of Game 6, in which the Cavs outscored them by 20 in the first quarter alone. Curry was even ejected from the game. The Warriors had one last chance at home to win and prove their 73-9 season did indeed "mean a thing." The competition was tight for most of Game 7, neither team able to pull away. Entering the fourth quarter, the Warriors had only a one-point advantage over the

Cavs. Several minutes of tense back-and-forth action later, it was tied 89-89 at the 4:39 mark and it would stay tied for another three agonizing minutes. It was anyone's ball game, until it wasn't.

First was the Block. With just 1:50 left in regulation, Andre Iguodala grabs a rebound off a missed jumper and quickly runs it up the court. The Cavs are slow to get back, and the Warriors outnumber the Cavs 2-1 on the break. One pass later and Iguodala goes up for the layup. But as the ball leaves his hands, LeBron seems to fly in from out of the frame, pinning Iguodala's attempt to the backboard. Where it seemed like the Warriors were sure to take the lead, a split second later and the game remained tied. Next was the Shot. The Cavs got the switch they wanted, with Curry, the worst defender on court for the Warriors, guarding Kyrie Irving on the perimeter. Kyrie dances, dribbling the ball patiently into a step-back 3-pointer. Curry contests it, but his resistance is futile. The shot drops and the Cavs lead, 92-89, 53 seconds left to play. Time is running out for the Warriors. Their almost effortless ability to score seen over the course of the season has seemed to dry up in the final stretches of the game. Curry misses another three-pointer and, to make matters worse, Green fouls LeBron on a dunk attempt. Two free-throws later, and the Cavs lead by four points with only 11 seconds on the clock. The Warriors, barring a miracle, are going to lose. Still, the Warriors fans packing Oracle refuse to let their hope die. After all, was this season, the historic 73-9 finish, not a miracle in itself? They had suffered through years of irrelevancy and mediocracy to end up at this moment. They had already accomplished a miracle comeback against the Thunder, so what could be a more perfect conclusion than overcoming insurmountable odds, once again, to win it all?

The last possession after the timeout is a mess from the start. Green gets the ball in to Thompson, who ends up trapped on the sideline. In the flurry, the Cavs commit a foul, and the Warriors must inbound again. But at last, Curry ends up with the ball, 5 seconds left to play. If anyone can force this game to overtime, it would be him. No one in the history of the NBA has been a more accurate, more prolific, three-point shooter. A perfect season is on the line. Legends will be made in this moment. Curry goes into his signature side-step three, a shot that hangs for what seems like an eternity. It clanks off the rim unceremoniously. Iguodala rebounds it and puts up one last shot, but the game is over. The Cleveland Cavaliers have won the 2016 NBA Championships, after being down 1-3 in the series, and have done it on the Warriors' home court. The record-setting 73-9 season is quickly overshadowed by the Warriors inability to win a single game in the last three that they played. The dynasty must wait.

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2017, the Dynasty's Peak

Although they lost in the Finals, there is no denying that the 2015-2016 Warriors were one of the best teams ever seen in NBA history. That great team managed to get arguably better after the off-season, because they landed another MVP-winning, multiple-All-Star-and-All-NBA having, Olympic-gold-medal-owning type player. The Warriors signed free agent Kevin Durant. The dynasty was delayed but for a summer. The league and its fans were sent into an uproar. How was it fair for a stacked team to get even more stacked? Stars joining other stars to form "super teams" was not new, but what was new was the outright reek of opportunism that the move gave off. Especially since Durant had a huge opportunity to beat the Warriors in the Western Conference Finals but had choked away a 3-1 lead. He was painted a coward, and the Warriors the

super team to end all super teams. The 2016-2017 season that followed felt like it had a forgone conclusion. The Warriors strolled through their games in the regular season, and then the post-season, winning the Championships over the Cavs, 4-1. The next year was much of the same, not trying very hard and still winning games during the regular season and routing their competition in the playoffs. The only real threat happened in the Western Conference Finals. The 1-seeded Houston Rockets had a 3-2 edge over the Warriors, and Iguodala—who was a sizeable part of the team's success—had gotten injured. But Houston, who had built their success on three-point shooting, went historically cold, missing 27 attempts in a row during the last game. The Warriors survived and went on to sweep the inferior Cavaliers in a series that was never really close. In just four years, the Warriors had won three rings.

2018, the Closing Act

But the cracks were starting to show. Perhaps it was unsustainable to win so much in so little time. Maybe it was because no team could balance the egos of multiple NBA stars for more than a couple years. Or was it the impending free agency of Kevin Durant that cast too big of a shadow over the season? Whatever it was, the 2018-2019 Warriors were not nearly as great as the team that, just a couple years ago, went 73-9. They still got the one seed in the West, but the effort was lackluster throughout the season. The flowing, pass-heavy offense that had defined the look of the Warriors in the Kerr-era was more sluggish, the ball tending to stick because of the isolation-heavy sets they ran for Durant. For the first time since 2014, it felt like the Warriors were a team ultimately destined to lose. They struggled against the lesser talents of the Los Angeles Clippers in the first round, a matchup they should have dominated. They eventually

won in six games, but not in a way that felt convincing. The series against Houston was another slog: after four games the series was tied 2-2. It was a series that had potential to stretch out into the full seven games, especially with Durant leaving late into Game 5 with a calf strain and sitting out the next one. Instead they closed out the second round in straight wins, moving on to the WCF and sweeping the undermanned Blazers. Despite all the doubts swirling around the team, the Warriors were back into the Finals for the fifth year in a row, where they would face the Toronto Raptors.

It was here where luck finally ran out for the team from the Bay. Or rather, the bad luck came in droves. Durant missed the first four games dealing with his calf strain and Thompson was out for Game 4 because of a hamstring strain. The Raptors were able to take advantage of the Warriors depleted core, snatching a 3-1 lead over the defending champions. The Warriors needed to win Game 5 or else the series was over. And win they would, though it would come at a terrible cost. Early in the second quarter, with the Warriors up 39-35, Kevin Durant attempted to blow by Serge Ibaka: something gave, forcing Durant to hobble off the court and into the locker room. He tore his right Achilles, an injury that would effectively end his time as a Warrior. The next game would produce a tragedy of equal, if not greater, magnitude. Klay Thompson would tear his ACL in the third quarter on a dunk attempt. He stayed on court to hit the resulting free throws, but that was the last nail in the Warriors' coffin. The Raptors dealt with what remained of their opponent, and the Warriors and their fans, yet again, watched the visitors celebrate a championship win on the hardwood of Oracle Arena. It was the last Warriors game to be played in the Oakland institution, the last Warriors game of the dynasty.

In the summer that followed, Durant would sign with the Brooklyn Nets. Klay Thompson would sign a new contract with the Warriors and undergo surgery on his ACL, set for rehab with no timetable for his return. The front office would trade away former Finals MVP Iguodala and lose a good portion of the previous roster. The new look Warriors were younger but clearly not the title-contending favorites NBA fans had come to expect over the years. Indeed, the inaugural 2019-2020 season played at the glimmering new Chase Center resembled something much closer to those woeful years before the Warriors became the face of the NBA. For the first time in seven years, the Warriors failed to qualify for the playoffs. In fact, they were one of the worst teams in the NBA, managing to only win 15 games by the end of the season. For all Lacob's talk of the Warriors system being "light years" ahead, they were right back where they started: at the bottom. As of now, it is hard to say when the Warriors might be legitimate title contenders again. Certainly, it will be near impossible to achieve the same heights they reached during that five-year span, from 2014-2019. But perhaps that matters less than the real, undeniable legacy and influence those Warriors teams had. From style of play, to use of analytics, to front office management, they left their mark on how the NBA is run today.

Legacy alone might not sustain the hearts of fans, especially ones that are used to winning. In a way, this fallow period for the Warriors is a test of faith, one that will separate the true believers with those who only wanted to bask in reflected glory. Much sports fandom scholarship has focused on the effects of a winning record on fan behavior: understandably, the correlation between the two is positive. Winning increases the attendance at games and the number of fans that follow a team. If we are

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to follow that logic then, losing should cause the opposite. Really, the Warriors' terrible 2019-2020 season could have not come at a worst time if the goal was to fill seats at an expensive new stadium. Lacob, even with his "light-years" ahead thinking, could have never predicted this outcome back in 2012 when the plan to move to S.F. was announced. For the longtime Oakland fans this was perhaps the only true outcome that could come of moving the Warriors across the Bay. Poetic justice for the team to have a losing record right as they left Oakland, the city where they made their dynasty. The Warriors, unlike many other sports teams, ostensibly represent a region in name rather than a city. They play for "Golden State" rather than "Oakland" or "San Francisco." But as I have touched on before, it would be a mistake to take that to mean those two cities or the Bay can be thought of as a monolith. The history of the two cities has created a tension between the two, one that would play out in the realm of sports and fandom as we will see next.

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Textual Analysis of Media

We begin our look at the changing meaning of the Warriors and the identity of its fandom in 2012, when the move to San Francisco was first announced. This was the second year under Lacob, and the team was still struggling. We can get a sense of the look of the Warriors fandom and its relationship with the team's management at this time in an episode that occurred March 20, 2012. As a *SFGate* article titled "Honor for Mullin turns ugly with boos for Lacob" explains, the Warriors home crowd turned ugly when owner Joseph Lacob took the mic to speak at former Hall-of-Fame Warrior Chris Mullin's number retirement. As Simmons (2012) details, fans had been giving cheers and standing ovations for everyone else associated with the Warriors prior to Lacob. The chants of "Monta" during the booing made it clear the Warriors fans in attendance were expressing an anger held by the fandom at large over the deal that sent the guard to Milwaukee for Andrew Bogut. Adding to frustrations was the promise of playoff berth, which did not happen that season. As Strauss (2012) explains about the episode, "people are passionate in Oakland, and it's going to be visceral and unadulterated or it's not going to be" (para. 10). An article for SBNation fan site Golden State of Mind reiterates the sentiment, commenting "I think Warriors fans are great (I count myself among them obviously). We are loyal. We are passionate" (Zamir, 2012, para. 3). These two statements are telling of the Warriors fandom identity in 2012. To be a Warriors fan means you are passionate, to the point of booing the owner during a jersey retirement, and loyal, to the point where losing an above-average, undersized point guard upsets you enough to boo the owner. Really, one would have to be both in order to remain a Warriors fan after years of disappointment.

Beyond just basketball, the image of Warriors fans booing the owner also has a strong class connotation. The vast majority of fans at the game were working class, whereas Lacob is a millionaire venture capitalist. And in 2012 neither venture capitalists nor millionaires were particularly popular in America. After all, the woes of the Great Recession that many were still recovering from were caused, for the most part, by the investing activity of that corporate class. Frustrated with the actors and the system that had led to the recession in 2008, the Occupy Wall Street movement was born: one of its strongest and most outspoken chapters happened to be in Oakland. So yes, fans were booing Lacob because he traded away a favorite player and the team was bad, but a different read on the situation might be that this was frustration over yet another bourgeoise capitalist ruining something for the proletariat.

Another reading of this incident is that Lacob represents Silicon Valley, and more broadly, San Francisco. That is, after all, where he made his millions in the first place with an investment in a biotech company. In contrast to its neighbor across the bay, Oakland was never a huge hub for tech and certainly was not a city known for the demographic that the industry attracted. That was starting to change with gentrification: as Mahler (2012) noted about Oakland in the *New York Times Magazine,* "the tent poles of the new American city have already arrived — the urban bike shops, the restaurants with locally sourced fare, the cafes with fair-trade coffee, a Whole Foods." These yuppie intrusions perhaps felt even more offensive as many Oaklanders prided themselves on being the antithesis of San Francisco, a city that was consistently overvalued by "the media, tourists and capital" (McElroy and Werth, 2019). The Warriors ostensibly represent both cities and the whole Bay Area, but they had played

in Oakland for 47 years. Perhaps we might see, then, the booing of Lacob as a rejection of San Francisco and its Silicon Valley ethos by long-time Oakland residents.

We move then to May 22, 2012. The Warriors held a press conference where they announced that they were planning to move to a new stadium in San Francisco by the 2017 season. A photo gallery on the Warriors NBA.com website shows the Warriors front office and owner with Mayor Ed Lee sitting on a stage set on the bare concrete where the new stadium and entertainment center will lie, the Bay Bridge right in the background. Emphasis is put on the quality of these new facilities and its location close to many different transit options. Benefits of the move are mostly spoken about as benefits to the Bay Area as a region, as opposed to San Francisco as a city, besides the San Francisco Travel Association President and CEO who specifically talks about the arena as "something San Francisco needs" (NBA.com, 2012, slide 18). Hines (2012) points out that moving will increase the team's marketability, although the Warriors have always been able to sell seats (ranked 10th in attendance for the 2011-2012 season despite one of the worse records). The economics of the move are clear: The Warriors current arena is old, the surrounding area "uninteresting." The new location has more nightlife and is closer to a downtown location, which means more money. But more money for whom? The Warriors, certainly (although they had to finance the project privately and would have no help from the city). San Francisco, too, benefits from the tax revenue and increased tourism. What the leaders orchestrating the move are clearly avoiding in their speeches is the impact it will have on Oakland and the East Bay fans. Instead, they make appeals to a larger idea of "the Bay," as if a shared geographic

regional identity could overcome the disparate histories of individual communities. And they overestimate, perhaps, the unifying ability of sports.

While those accounts focused mainly on the positives of the move to San Francisco, others dealt with possible downsides. For instance, how might this affect the look of the Warriors fandom? That is the question that concerns Carillo (2012), and he gives several warnings: that the diehard Warrior fans might be priced out of the new arena, that the new SF fans are less likely to stick around for a losing team, that the SF fans are less interested in basketball, and that SF fans are "softer". Here, we see a clear difference presented in the identity of Oakland or East Bay fans, and the fans from San Francisco. Once again, the Oakland fans are characterized as loyal and passionate. SF fans, in contrast, are front-runners who only care about the social aspects of going to a basketball game. Carillo also gets to another aspect of Warriors fan identity that was hinted at briefly before: their toughness. He sees the Oakland Warriors fans as being "ruthless," "vicious," and having an "edge." Interestingly, Carillo characterizes San Francisco as a city (not just the fans) as being "soft." We can infer, then, that more than just speaking to the character of fans, Carillo is really thinking about the larger identities of Oakland and San Francisco.

Who belongs in the Warriors fandom between the two? For the author, the ones who truly belong, who truly are Warriors fans, are the fans from the East Bay. Unlike the Warriors press release about the move, Carillo implies that the Warriors represent Oakland, not the Bay Area as a whole. San Francisco may as well be a city in a whole other state from the way its fans are presented in the article. Carillo's conception of the two different fanbases is also strongly colored by the identities of the two cities. San

Francisco is seen as a wealthy, professional class city. Oakland is seen as more working-class, a city that has known struggles. We can see from these accounts of the move that the construction of the Warriors as the Bay Area's team is tenuous. Far from being a "common and simplified" symbol of the Bay like the team positions itself and how the Steelers were for Western Pennsylvania in Kraszeweski (2008), it seems evident in Carillo's (2012) perspective that the Warriors are instead Oakland's team and that the identity of its fandom is built around the city. Sports media, in this account, did not produce a flattened and clear place-image of a region but rather **reproduced** the conflicts within it.

The connection between Oakland and the Warriors also forms the basis of Thompson II (2015), in his article about the Warriors parade to celebrate their first championship of the dynasty. He makes the claim that the identity of the Warriors is tied intimately to Oakland. As Thompson (2015) states:

> These Warriors are flashy and stylish in presentation, the way they play on the court. Yet at their core, why they're successful, is because of their willingness to grind. Just like Oakland.
>
> These Warriors are underappreciated on a national scale, where mostly perception replaces reality. But by those who are around them, who've experienced them, they are unapologetically adored, flaws and all. Just like Oakland. (paras. 11-12)

The narrative and identity of team and city are intertwined here. The aspects of Oakland that are important to its identity (grind, underappreciated nationally, not seen for what it truly is) are projected onto the team. But this is more than just projection by a fan, for the team itself embraced The Town mentality explicitly, as statements made by players during the ceremony made clear. Sports teams are polysemic and symbols of multiple identities, but some carry with more strength. Like Kraszeweski's (2008) Steeler fans

showed, it is possible for a team's identity to be bound so tightly to an external group identity that it becomes indistinguishable. The Warriors, in this case, are made synonymous with Oakland itself. Thompson II is careful to acknowledge that the team represents the Bay Area and that its fans are from more than Oakland alone. But those areas play are secondary to "Oakland, its culture and passion and role in the Warriors becoming champions" (Thompson II, 2015). The Warriors, made symbol of Oakland, are seen as a vehicle to shift perceptions of Oakland nationally. As the AP (2015) bluntly put it "Oakland — a city that usually makes news for crime, corruption, protests and violence— shined in the national spotlight" (para 1). Oakland has constantly been cast in a negative light by the national media and has lived in San Francisco's shadow since its founding. For that reason, the Warriors championship win had a special significance for the long-time Oakland fans and why it was so important to emphasize The Town in the team's identity and its fandom's identity, especially for Thompson II who was writing for a local newspaper and audience.

But as he mentioned, the Warriors wins mattered for more than just Oakland, and increasingly so thanks to the bandwagon effect. When a team starts winning, they become more popular and gain more fans: across sports, this is the ironclad rule. The Warriors were no exception and many of the fans it picked up seemed to be from the "Silicon Valley techie crowd" as one article put it (Kim 2016). But that was no coincidence. For that demographic, the Warriors in particular held a special meaning. The owners of the Warriors, many coming from those same Silicon Valley crowds, were taking credit for the team's success and pinning it on the lessons they learned from working in tech and investment. That can be seen in pieces like Schoenfield (2016),

who profiled Lacob and other prominent figures in the Warriors front office for *New York Times Magazine*. More than basketball, the piece reads like a business report. The players and the game of basketball fade into the background as management style, analytics and planning take prominence. The place-image shown through sports media here had less in common with Oakland and more with Silicon Valley. Perhaps there was no better illustration of this shift in Warriors identity and fandom than the signs that were made for the 2016 Championship Finals.

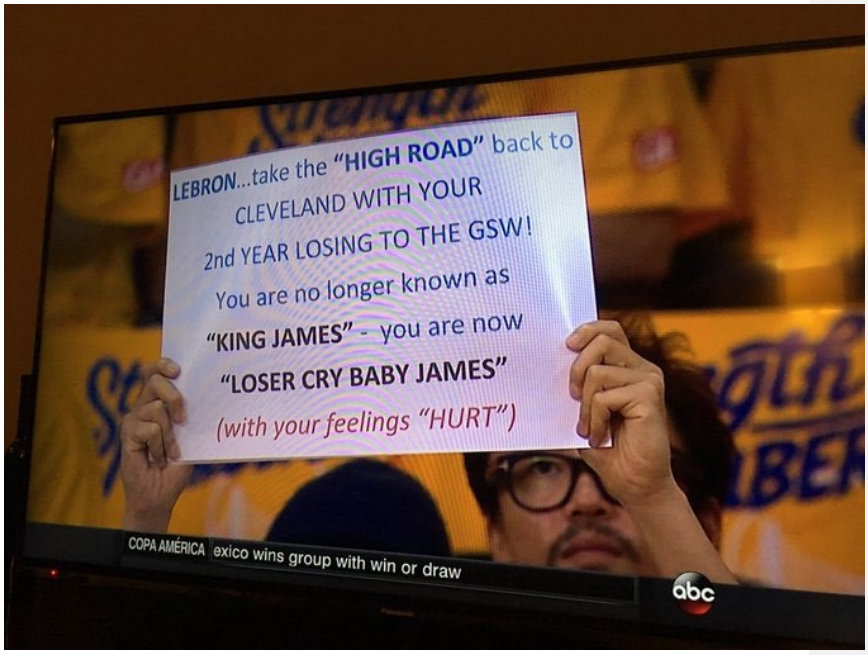

Figure 4. Sign made by a Warriors fan. (Skeets, 2016)

This sign, and others in a similar vein, were immediately mocked all over social media, the criticism particularly vicious in the writings of the ever-notorious NBA Twitter. First is the form: instead of a handwritten sign, someone has taken the time to

go to get the sign printed and laminated professionally. The choice of font (a sans-serif), too, speaks to a certain boring corporate sleekness associated with Silicon Valley. Then there is what is actually written. It is silted and awkward, with random phrases put in all-caps for emphasis. It is overwhelmingly dorky as well: there is no way to take "LOSER CRY BABY JAMES" as a serious insult. This single bad fan sign seemed to speak to the corniness of the white, Silicon Valley techie fans as a whole. As one Twitter user put it, "Bro this is literally the effects of gentrification. Dubs fans were like Raiders fans before. The crowd looking like Utah" (@Localsixsurfer 2016). In this Tweet, we can see what Werth and Marienthal (2016) meant by "the irrepressible talk" of gentrification. Not only is it a concept to discuss urban spaces, it is a way for individuals, such as @Localsixsurfer, to understand what is happening in social spaces as abstracted as sports fandom. The meaning of "Dubs fans were like Raider fans before" is that Warriors fans were perceived in the past as reflecting the historic residents of Oakland: more black and Latino, more working class, more tough. Now, the crowd looks "like Utah," meaning white dorks of a more affluent crowd. Gentrification is not just something that happens to neighborhoods here; rather it speaks to broader feelings of who belongs and who doesn't.

The characteristics of San Francisco fans given by Carillo (2012) seemed to only coalesce more in the team's identity with the addition of Kevin Durant. The team was no longer content to "grind" as Thompson II (2015) put it and they certainly were not underappreciated by those outside of Oakland anymore. Grit, too, was nowhere to be found in how they recruited Durant: a begging text sent right after a championship loss. The Warriors, instead, took on a frontrunner mentality: after winning 73 games in the

regular season, they felt the need to add another world-class player to the roster. As Rosenburg (2016) put it, this was a "competitive cop-out". The Warriors could win a title without Durant (as they did before) and Durant could win one on a different team. The fact that they decided to join forces speaks to a kind of pragmatism, or maybe cynicism, that winning is all that matters. The Warriors became the ideal team for the San Francisco fans outlined by Carillo (2012), i.e. the Silicon Valley types, and moved farther from the image of the underdog team from Oakland that we saw presented by other previous media accounts.

Not only did the team appear to abandon the Oakland ideals that made it into a winner, it physically abandoned the city when it finally moved, in 2019, to the new arena planned seven years before. Rhoden (2019) documented the reactions from Oakland residents when the Warriors left. Many pointed to the cultural differences between the Town and the City. Mayor Libby Schaaf said:

> San Francisco has always been sparkly and fancy, much wealthier, and Oakland has always had grit and grind and celebrates its diversity, authenticity and working-class culture…We all felt the Warriors embrace that. This idea that teams abandoned the communities that have linked their identity with the team for economic reasons always feels hurtful. (paras. 16-17)

The Warriors were the Bay Area's team in name, but the Bay Area is a region too diverse in identity to be united by a single team. The team's identity was connected most strongly to Oakland, especially for the long-time fans of the region, and we can see that from earlier place-images in the media analyzed. So, when they left it felt like a betrayal for those fans. Instead of remaining loyal to the black and brown, working-class city of Oakland, the Warriors moved for the whiter, more affluent city of San Francisco, much as capital had historically flowed out of Oakland to San Francisco.

And just as Oakland lost the Warriors to San Francisco and Silicon Valley, its residents were losing their homes to the same group (Allen-Price, 2017). Driven by the foreclosures of the recession and influx of tech money, gentrification was ravaging Oakland's neighborhoods: at a pace, in fact, that is the highest in the Bay Area (Maclay, 2017). A 2016 survey conducted by Coliseum College Prep, a public secondary school in East Oakland with help from the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project makes it abundantly evident that the residents of Oakland have felt this change first hand: out of 723 respondents, 60 percent saw a racial shift, 50 percent saw a loss of long-term residents, and 76 percent saw higher housing prices (AMEP, 2016). At the same time as this intensifying gentrification, long-time Oakland residents saw their hometown team, the Warriors, turn from underdogs into frontrunners and the fans packing the lower bowl of Oracle look more and more like the newcomers driving their rents up. The Warriors team and fandom belonged to The Town before: the same cannot be said today.

Conclusion

If a fandom can be gentrified, the case of the Golden State Warriors is the closest that comes to reproducing the same feelings of "belonging and disbelonging" that Werth and Marienthal (2016) saw, the same political, economic and social patterns we expect to see on city streets. All of this is rooted in Oakland's unique situation and history: an industrial city, one born of rails and ships, that grew at an enormous rate because of war. A city abandoned by the industries it once led, a city left to rot in the shadow of the glittering towers of San Francisco. A city that was and is a hotbed for black, brown and Asian activism, the birthplace of the Black Panthers. The Town and its residents were familiar with struggle and they saw that reflected in the Warriors. There was a sense of belonging to the team and its fandom, a sense that they belonged to Oakland.

As we saw, that sense of belonging was complicated by the team's move to the West Bay. But even before the new arena was completed and the move made official, the identity of the Warriors and its fandom was moving more towards San Francisco and Silicon Valley. The Warriors during this period did not act as a stable and uncontested representation of the Bay Area. Instead, it was a medium where the competing community claims of the region played out, most notably the rivalry between San Francisco and Oakland. The Warriors team and fandom identity reflected the conflicts of the region caused by gentrification. And this instability can be seen through the media accounts of the Warriors: in sports media, the place-image of the Bay Area presented shifted away from Oakland to San Francisco and Silicon Valley.

A team can feel like home, but what is home when the neighbors, businesses, buildings, streets all change? Perhaps the Warriors fandom was a way for the new transplants who came because of tech money to feel comfortable in their new place of residence, like how Baker's (2018) New Zealand fans found home through football fandom. But for the long-time fans, these newcomers might have seemed too similar to the people rendering their neighborhoods unrecognizable. Much focus is on the material ramifications of gentrification: we might look instead to how the consequences of gentrification spill into other dimensions of life.

Figure 5. Stephen Curry posing in the "Oakland Forever" City Edition jerseys. The design borrows element from the "We Believe" era Warriors (2006-2007). (Chazaro, 2021).

Perhaps if the Warriors management had understood clearly how gentrification impacted their fandom, they would have avoided the backlash that came with the

release of a new jersey. In 2020, the Warriors debuted “Oakland Forever” City Edition jerseys as a nod to the city that they left. Rather than mend the relationship between them and Oakland fans, the new jerseys instead provoked ire. A visual gimmick could not bridge the feelings of disbelonging that had been forged in the move to San Francisco. The longtime Oakland fans saw the jerseys not as a tribute, but as a reminder of all they and the region’s communities have been dispossessed of: first home, then their home team.

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