The Great Society and its Discontents:
The Story and Impact of "Community Action" in East Palo Alto, CA

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"the poor people are the least equipped to wage a war"

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Introduction

Moderates and conservatives alike have criticized entitlements such as welfare in recent years. Conventional wisdom considers "welfare as we know it" to have originated during the Great Society, the Johnson administration's set of new social programs. In reality, many of the programs passed during the Great Society resemble currently-proposed alternatives or supplements to entitlements.[1] Whereas entitlements consist of cash benefits, President Johnson and his staff intended programs such as compensatory education, the Job Corps, and Legal Services to provide the poor with services. For example, the "Community Action Program" provided for under the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, supported locally-designed antipoverty programs. As policy makers begin to formulate a spate of new social programs such as "welfare to work," it would behoove them and local officials to more closely examine the operations and lasting impacts of Great Society efforts such as "Community Action" in underprivileged communities.

Historians and social scientists have documented certain aspects of "Community Action" in great detail.[2] Taken together, their works delineate a Washington narrative of this and other "War on Poverty" programs.[3] The Great Society's inaugural piece of legislation, the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, has a complex intellectual and political history. Multiple framers harbored differing expectations of how the policies would play out. To complicate matters, Congress amended the act from year to year in response to financial constraints and political pressures arising from the local level. And administrators

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[1]Most entitlements originated during the New Deal and Nixon administration. Medicare and Medicaid, passed during the Johnson era, are important exceptions.

[2]Standard histories of the War on Poverty, from the federal perspective, include: Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land: The Great Black Migration and How it Changed America*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991); Allen J. Matusow, *The Unraveling of America: A History of Liberalism in the 1960s*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1984); Daniel P. Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, (New York: The Free Press, 1969); John G. Wofford, "The Politics of Local Responsibility: Administration of the Community Action Program--1964-1966," *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives From Experience*, Ed. James Sundquist, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969); Sar Levitan, *The Great Society's Poor Law*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969).

[3]Hereafter, I omit quotation marks around the terms "War on Poverty" and "Community Action," having now established that they are official program names. New program titles in subsequent pages will only be offset by quotations the first time.

at the Office of Economic Opportunity, the presidential office formed to coordinate War on Poverty programs, became increasingly conservative in their administration of local programs. Washington narratives conclude with the tragic denouement of this War on Poverty: Congress, forced to choose between guns and butter for the home front, chose guns for the Vietnam War.

The story and impact of Community Action at the local level has received far less attention than its national rise and fall. The classic study of the initiative, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's 1969 *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding*, relays a Washington-centered history similar to that above. Local programs only fit into his story to the extent that they compromised the national War on Poverty; he describes those programs that created stirs in Congress or the national press. Moynihan finds many common elements in these highly-publicized and controversial local programs. "Black militants" gained control of policy advisory boards, used these boards to direct campaigns against the political establishment, started few if any workable antipoverty programs, and mismanaged funds.[4] While these illustrations support Moynihan's argument—that the Economic Opportunity Act's openness to local initiative ensured its political demise—they are unrepresentative. The writings of historian Allen J. Matusow and several 1970's policy studies indicate that no standard local story exists.[5] Control over War on Poverty policy boards and program character varied from locality to locality. Their findings suggest that the most-publicized local programs described by Moynihan deviated significantly from most local experiences.

Moynihan's analysis might satisfy national policy-makers, undoubtedly concerned about programs' long-term political viability in Washington. It provides insufficient material, however, for anyone interested in how Community Action and other Great Society programs functioned at the ground level. In this new era of federalism, histories of

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[4]Moynihan devotes most of his attention to two examples: New York City and Syracuse programs. Moynihan, 132-136.

[5]Matusow briefly discusses Community Action Programs in Syracuse, Chicago, Atlanta, Philadelphia, Harlem and San Francisco. From Matusow, 248-262. See also studies published in *The Public Administration Review*, Vol. XXXII (Sept. 1972), Special Issue: "Citizen Action in Model Cities and CAP Programs: Case Studies and Evaluation."

these programs can illuminate the relative importance of national and local influences upon program operations and long-term impact.

Examining the local experience with Community Action is no easy task. Americans keep paltry, haphazard records of their social experiments. The British shires, which undertake the compilation of extensive, catalogued archives, far outperform United States counties and municipalities in the preservation of local documents. Historians, at least, are trained to unearth and interpret surviving relics of other eras, such as fading government documents, newspaper clippings, pamphlets, material artifacts and oral testimony. Such local research proceeds slowly; records tend to surface in garages and file cabinets as often as in a library or archive. There are almost as many unwritten stories of Community Action as there were local programs, and each merits study. A case study, however, provides feasible parameters for this project.

For a Stanford student, East Palo Alto is the most conveniently-located recipient of Johnson-era programs. Its scattered archives at least fall within reach. Stanford staff and students have recently collaborated with community members to create a seminal community archive.[6] The county historical association also maintains a quite comprehensive collection of East Palo Alto documents. Of ~~equal importance~~, a history of Community Action in East Palo Alto can speak to current, local debates about community improvement. Such an analysis can illuminate constraints upon and opportunities for federal programs specific to the community.

All local Community Action Programs operated within changing constraints set by Congress, the President, and their official coordinating agency, the Office of Economic Opportunity. The product of a long deliberative process, Community Action Programs

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[6]The East Palo Alto Project, undertaken by Stanford's Committee for Black Performing Arts and the Stanford University Libraries, consisted of two commissioned dramatic works about East Palo Alto, a videodocumentary of the history ~~of the town~~ entitled "Dreams of a City," and a small archive of oral histories and miscellaneous historical documents. The East Palo Alto Project Archives are currently housed in Harmony House, headquarters for the Committee for Black Performing Arts.

altered over time with changes in the Washington political climate. Program regulations at first provided for a significant degree of local autonomy, and federal officials forecasted high funding levels at the outset. Within a couple of years, however, federal leniency gave way to restrictiveness. Anticipated funds failed to materialize. Local officials found themselves administering a relatively short-term War on Poverty of ever-changing composition.

The Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Johnson's inaugural piece of the Great Society, was the product of multiple authors, harboring multiple intentions.[7] Many of the bill's features evolved during the Kennedy administration. At the prompting of his Aunt Eunice, President Kennedy set up a commission to address rising juvenile delinquency in American cities in May of 1961. Attorney General Robert Kennedy convinced his brother to place a long-time friend, David Hackett, at the head of the commission. Hackett canvassed extensively for approaches to delinquency, and turned up a small number of interesting efforts. Several social scientists and foundation administrators had recently rediscovered the issue of poverty, and based studies and experimental programs upon two fashionable sociological theories. These theories cited political participation as an important way of raising individuals and communities out of poverty.[8] From this theoretical perspective, the urban renewal programs of the 1950s—which autocratic mayors had used to gut out slums without consulting residents—exemplified how *not* to alleviate poverty. New programs based on the sociological theories, dubbed "community action" programs, incorporated program recipients in the planning and implementation process. Hackett took

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[7]The following description of Community Action draws upon the histories written by Moynihan, Matusow, and Lemann cited above.

[8]Structuralists argued that political participation would enable the poor to pressure institutions and elites, and consequently garner their fair share of social programs and welfare checks from the establishment. Cycle-of-poverty enthusiasts, on the other hand, believed that political involvement would change the attitudes and aspirations of the poor: it would acculturate them into the individualistic American economic system.

interest in the "community action" approach, and decided to support Ford Foundation and Columbia School of Social Work projects based upon the model.[9]

Concern for poverty among the liberal intelligentsia and civil rights activists prompted President Kennedy, in late 1962, to consider a national antipoverty initiative. Kennedy turned to his economic advisors for information about poverty, but found that David Hackett and others involved with the juvenile delinquency programs had a much better knowledge of the topic. Hackett offered the "community action" delinquency projects as field studies and potential templates for a broader federal effort. Kennedy died before mandating a national antipoverty program with such a design. Immediately following the assassination, however, Johnson appropriated the program. Johnson apparently felt that launching a national War on Poverty would enable him to gain equal or perhaps greater stature than Kennedy. Upon canvassing for program ideas, however, Johnson, like Kennedy, turned up little other than the "community action" programs. Johnson consequently pushed for locally-designed service programs in the "community action" vein, as a first in a series of efforts that would include Medicare, a compensatory education act, and subsidized housing.

Between Johnson's desk and the Senate floor, the War on Poverty transformed many more times. Johnson appointed Kennedy's ~~uncle~~, Sargent Shriver, to spearhead the effort. Shriver had qualms about the concept of "community action," but was ultimately forced to adopt it as the local administrative mechanism for War on Poverty programs. He added, however, a set of pre-designed "national emphasis" programs from which localities could choose. This list included programs such as Job Corps, Legal Assistance, and Head Start. These national emphasis programs, he felt, would produce more quantifiable and tangible results, making the program easier to sell and maintain support for in Congress. In order to get the bill through Congress, the White House had to make yet more changes.

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[9]There were two prominent experimental programs: Mobilization for Youth, undertaken by sociologists at the Columbia School of Social Work, and the Gray Areas Project in New Jersey, a Ford Foundation project.

The revised Economic Opportunity allowed counties in every congressional district to have a program. It also included rural programs, in order to give the bill broader appeal. By the time the Congress passed the Economic Opportunity Act in 1964, many individuals with differing intentions had contributed to the final product.

The Economic Opportunity Act, in its final form, provided for an arrangement of flexible programs and administrative structures. A new Office of Economic Opportunity (hereafter OEO), within the Executive Office of the President, would oversee the War on Poverty. The OEO, first of all, administered several national emphasis programs such as Job Corps and Head Start on its own and in conjunction with local communities. In some cases, the OEO directly supervised its own national emphasis programs; in other instances, it delegated them to other federal agencies. The OEO also supervised the local coordinating mechanisms for the War on Poverty: the Community Action Programs. At the local level, Community Action consisted of a policy oversight board and an administrative structure, the "Community Action Agency." The legislation stipulated that local policy boards include representatives from local government, private agencies already involved in poverty alleviation, and program recipients. The Economic Opportunity Act did not specify an exact percentage figure for the distribution of these groups on the board; it simply stated that programs should be "developed, conducted and administered with the maximum feasible participation of residents of the areas and members of the groups to be served." The act left the exact relationship of local Community Action Programs with local governments undefined. Framers refrained from constricting local programming as well. Local communities could apply for funding for whatever types of programs they wanted, including national emphasis programs. Field representatives at seven different regional offices would mediate between the Washington office and local programs, handling negotiations about agency and policy board structures, and individual program applications. The flexibility afforded to locals under this initial arrangement is striking.

Mounting racial tensions and escalating Vietnam War costs prompted legislators and OEO administrators to impose constraints upon local programs over time.[10] Though OEO administrators had originally intended to be quite lenient about the "maximum feasible participation" clause, civil rights leaders across the county pressured them to enforce it. The issue of participation kept plaguing OEO administrators, as prominent mayors began to complain that local programs had been taken over by African-American "radicals." In late 1966, Congress settled the issue with an amendment stipulating that representatives of the poor fill one-third of the seats on local Community Action policy boards. Meanwhile, reports that black power advocates had used federal funds to run community organizing programs in several cities made Sargent Shriver increasingly wary of locally-designed programs. He instituted lengthy program review procedures and more strongly promoted the predictable national emphasis programs. In addition, Congress began earmarking funds for ~~these~~ programs in the almost annual amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act. Rising military costs during 1966 and 1967 prompted Congress to appropriate ~~fewer and fewer~~ funds for the War on Poverty, further constraining local program operations.

From 1968 on, Republicans gradually dismantled the OEO. Nixon placed the office under a succession of "neutral," managerial Republicans while moving more successful national emphasis programs to other bureaucracies. Ford replaced the office with the Community Services Administration in 1975, and Congress let this new body's activities dwindle until it fell victim to Reagan era budget cuts. These amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act, increasingly restrictive OEO administrative decisions, and shrinking appropriations impinged upon local program flexibility. The OEO ~~was~~ essentially attempt~~ing~~ to exercise greater influence at ~~the local l~~evel while providing fewer resources.

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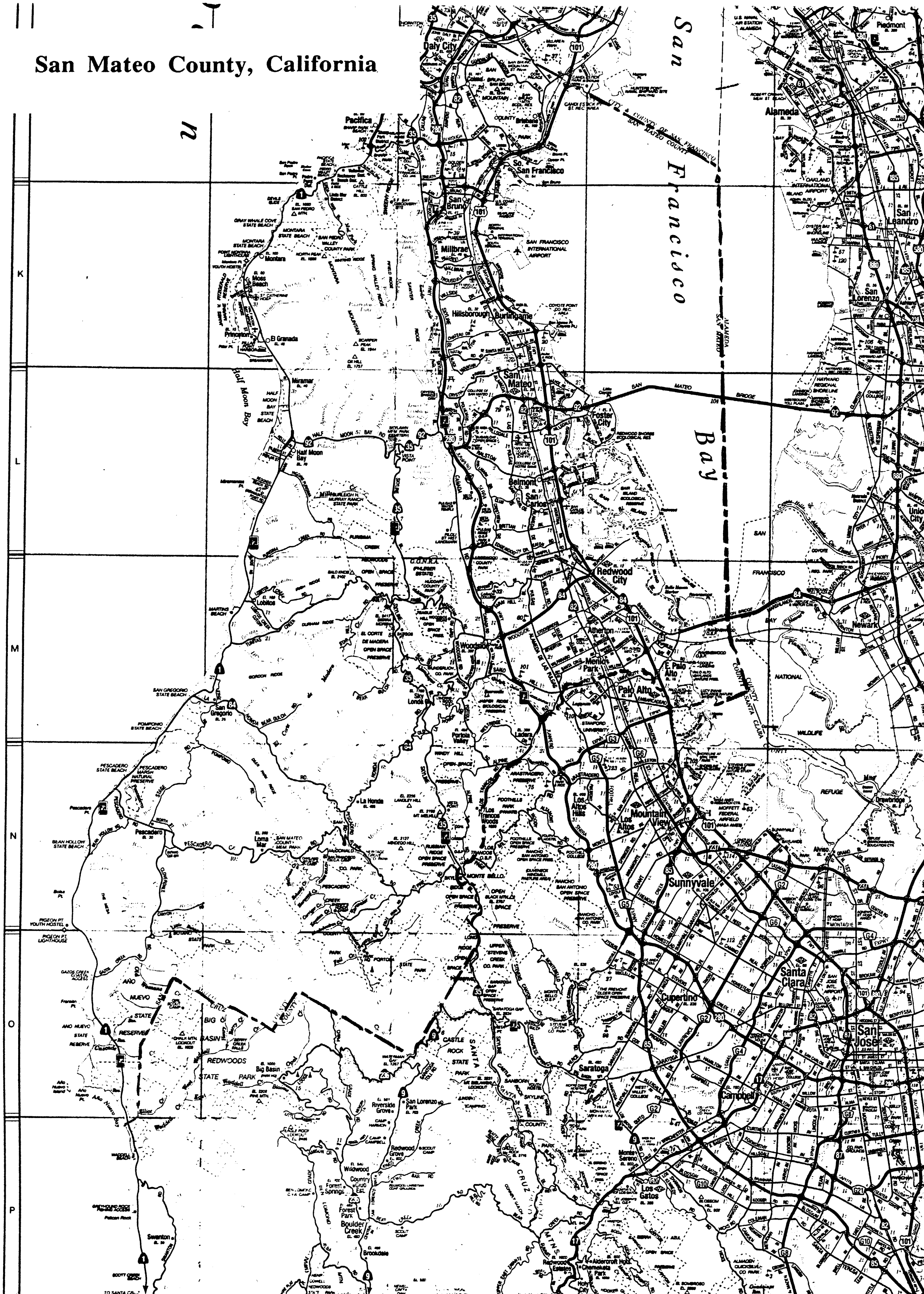
[10]John Wofford best chronicles important changes in OEO administration over time. Wofford, 79-100. For amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act, see: Congressional Research Service, Education and Public Welfare Division, *The Community Services Administration: Programs, History and Issues: 1964-1980,* By Karen Spar, Report No. 80-121-EPW, HB 601 B1, July 15, 1980, 13-26.

How did programs fare locally? And why did local programs differ? Turning to the San Mateo County Community Action Program, which targeted East Palo Alto along with several other "poverty pockets', one finds that the preceding federal provisions, administrative decisions, and appropriations provided a shifting framework for local programming. Within these federal parameters, East Palo Alto's changing relationship with the San Mateo County political establishment molded the community's experience with the War on Poverty. Residents managed to secure a large portion of the county's antipoverty funds because of its economical, geographic, political and racial marginalization. These characteristics not only made the community eligible for federal funds. They also made circumstances ripe for political mobilization. Racial solidarity helped dynamic leaders mobilize the community to an extent never achieved before the community's demographic transition, and to an extent never approached in other county "poverty pockets." Minority protests prompted federal and county officials to fund modest extensions to traditional as well as supplementary services to the underprivileged communities in the county. As riots flared across the country, county residents grew wary of this "ghetto," prompting the supervisors to make a series of concessions to East Palo Alto political autonomy and participation within the county and federal system. Since funding dwindled so shortly after the program began, these political changes constitute the most important legacy of the Great Society in East Palo Alto. The San Mateo County story, one can see at the outset, deviates from Moynihan's "standard" story.

San Mateo County, California



From California State Automobile Association, *San Francisco Bay Region*, 1997.

I. *From White and Blue to Black*

East Palo Alto lies on marginal land: fertile yet flood-prone baylands that turn vibrant green with winter rains. It adjoins the San Francisco Bay at the southeastern tip of San Mateo County. Menlo Park, Palo Alto, and the Bayshore Freeway frame its other three sides. In the early sixties, fading single-family homes with fenced windows dominated the East Palo Alto landscape. Many streets seemed more pothole than road. The area housed many of the Peninsula poor, as well as a disproportionate fraction of the county's racial minorities. A few small businesses thrived along the main thoroughfares. Yet few large stores or industries anchored the community economy. In light of these characteristics, residents and outsiders alike labeled the community a "ghetto." Early sixties East Palo Alto, however, was the product of a different set of historical forces than the archetypal urban ghetto.

Between 1945 and 1965, East Palo Alto experienced a dramatic transformation along with the rest of the San Francisco Peninsula. A postwar economic boom, new highway construction, and popularization of the suburban ideal triggered a wave of new industrial and residential development south of South Francisco. Though the San Mateo County government imposed few regulations on new construction, developers did not build in a vacuum. Earlier settlers had established a set of political jurisdictions and taxation practices which, in combination with a trend toward homeownership, significantly shaped postwar development of the Peninsula. These forces weighed against the political and economic health of East Palo Alto, a farming community turned cluster of 1950s blue-collar housing tracts. By the time African-Americans migrated to East Palo Alto from San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond during the early sixties, the stage was already set for community marginalization.

Earlier waves of settlement in San Mateo County had created a mottled landscape of municipal and county jurisdictions. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, the Peninsula became a country retreat from the fog and urban ills of San Francisco. It was

conceptualized as both frontier and countryside. In the rhetoric of the time, a *Palo Alto Times* article extolled the settlement of the Peninsula: "It is made the manifest destiny of the peninsula to become the great residence place for San Francisco people—not only those who are engaged in mercantile and professional pursuits, but also the greater army needed to care of the vast volume of commerce that centers in San Francisco."[1] Commuters and shop proprietors bought homes in towns along the Southern Pacific's San Francisco-San Jose route: Atherton, Palo Alto, and other towns boasted substantial commuter populations.[2]

This settlement coincided with the Progressive Era's Municipal Reform Movement. Inspired by newspaper muckraking, Peninsula newcomers regularly lambasted the inefficiencies, graft, and filth plaguing San Francisco. Legally incorporating their communities as cities, it was felt, would allow them to avert a similar fate. Incorporation gave cities the power to tax property within their borders. These revenues could in turn be used to finance municipal services such as police protection and public utilities—services that could ensure the cleanliness and relative tranquillity in new communities. In San Mateo County, upstart communities tended to press for incorporation once attaining a critical mass of residents, taxable property, common desire for municipal services, and civic identity. The rest of the county, however, remained unincorporated. The county provided services such as policing and road maintenance to the more diffusely-settled farming and ranching areas through "special districts." Overall, rural communities needed and received fewer services, as rapid population growth was not yet placing difficult demands upon the environment in these areas. One might belong to several different

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[1]"Year's Progress on Peninsula," *The Daily Palo Alto Times,* 2 January, 1908, 1.

[2]This extrapolated from *Daily Palo Alto Times* coverage of debate over a new charter in 1909. Charter proponents tried to include representatives of a number of constituencies on their charter-framing committee. One individual was nominated to represent the "commuters." "President of Board of trade Names Committee of Fifty," *The Daily Palo Alto Times,* 3 February 1908, 1. For mention of the construction of suburban tracts in Palo Alto, see "The Year in Palo Alto," *The Daily Palo Alto Times,* 3 January 1908, 6.

overlapping districts, each providing for different services. East Palo Alto, home to a few farms at the turn of the century, remained unincorporated, like much of the county.

A second wave of settlement during the 1920s further ingrained this pattern of densely populated, incorporated towns distinct from the more open, unincorporated areas. The automobile and the construction of Peninsula highways, including the Bayshore Expressway in 1924, paved the way for more rapid suburbanization. Between 1920 and 1950, the county population mushroomed from 36,000 to 200,000 inhabitants.[3] During the 1920s alone, every Peninsula bayside community grew by at least 50%; most doubled in size.[4] Already-incorporated towns tended to annex the new, fairly dense suburban tracts. New towns, however, sprouted during this period as well; more towns incorporated during the 1920s than at the turn of the century.[5] For the most part, this new development was commercial and residential, and fairly upscale at that. Few could afford to commute by car or train at that time. Redwood City and South San Francisco were the Peninsula's sole pre-war industrial centers. These two communities alone housed a heterogenous population. By the early forties, a substantial number of densely-packed, relatively affluent cities lined the Peninsula.

East Palo Alto remained a small, unincorporated agricultural community throughout this whole period, framed by the municipalities of Palo Alto and Menlo Park.[6] During the teens and twenties, "Runnymede," a Utopian chicken-farming colony, co-existed with more traditional family farming. Immigrant flower growers succeeded the chicken farmers during the following decades. Only a small strip of liquor stores and restaurants on the community's edge detracted from this rural character. East Palo Alto, before World War

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[3]Alan Hynding, *From Frontier to Suburb: a History of the San Mateo Peninsula.*, 1980, San Mateo County Historical Association, 149.
[4]Hynding, 149.
[5]Hynding, 152.
[6]In 1940, the county only assessed forty buildings in the area. San Mateo County, Assessor's Standard Division. Listings for the East Palo Alto unincorporated area, circa 1940. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

II, fitted neatly within a set of town and country jurisdictions—jurisdictions that for the most part satisfied those they were meant to serve.

A new period of suburban development after World War II, however, strained this county system in unanticipated ways. Incorporated cities' reliance on property taxes and mass enthrallment with a suburban ideal together ensured that East Palo Alto would remain unincorporated in spite of rapid urbanization. New highways and cars inspired rapid development on the Peninsula following World War II. Executives and factory workers alike filtered down from the cities to the Peninsula. To meet this demand, private developers—for the most unregulated by the county—began to construct winding suburban tracts and spacious industrial parks throughout the unincorporated areas. Builders tended to construct more expensive dwellings in the hills, and concentrate more moderate homes near the existing cities. They then crowded the cheapest tracts on the other side of the 1924 Bayshore Expressway, near the bay.

In the space of a few years, East Palo Alto was transformed into one of the few working-class suburbs of San Mateo County. East Palo Alto farmers began to find it more profitable to sell off acreage to developers than continue to cultivate. This land—the less attractive, flood-prone flats—was cheap enough that developers could build shoddier versions of the middle-class suburban tract home.[7] This was a place where the working class could literally buy into the middle-class ideal of homeownership, albeit in a geographically distinct area. One construction firm broke ground on the "Palo Alto Gardens" subdivision in 1947, and built 281 homes over the following six years.[8] In 1951, another developer began "University Village," a 600 home tract. The "Palo Alto Park" and "Flood Park" estates soon followed. Industrial and commercial development did not lag far behind. East Palo Alto's proximity to the Bayshore Highway, the Dumbarton

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[7]The San Mateo County Engineer pronounced lands under the Palo Alto Gardens subdivision in East Palo Alto "marginal" in 1950, citing problems with flooding. He then order a halt to construction on a further extension of the development. "Subdivision on Low Land Meets Snag," *The Palo Alto Times*, 20 May, 1950.

[8]"East Palo Alto Became 'Citified' in Postwar Boom," *The Palo Alto Times*, September, 1958.

Bridge, and a railroad spur track attracted industries such as Hiller Helicopter, Borrman Steel Company, and McGammon-Wunderlich, a contracting outfit. All in all, the area's population skyrocketed from 1500 in 1947, to 6000 in 1952 and 12,000 in 1953.[9]

Rapid demographic change left a quite different social environment in its wake: Robert Lowe, another student of East Palo Alto history, argues that the area was increasingly inhabited by those who worked in the new industrial parks; he cites changes in occupation names, as listed in the Palo Alto Directory. In 1919, a majority of residents identified themselves as poultrymen, carpenters, or even teamsters, while thirty years later, the list included machinists, mechanics, draftsmen, and other blue-collar occupations.[10] The post-war trend towards the decentralization of housing and industry transformed a diffuse farming community into a working class suburb.

Existing municipalities responded to this rapid development by annexing selected properties. Since the official purpose of incorporated cities was to provide cheap and efficient services, none desired to increase its tax burden through the annexation of low-income areas. It made much more sense to annex industrial land or new suburban tracts which would increase the city's property tax base, or open space on which to construct sewer plants or airports. San Jose, for example, waged a particularly aggressive annexation campaign in response to decentralized development. These economic imperatives motivated Peninsula towns to annex on a smaller scale as well. During the late forties and fifties, Menlo Park and Palo Alto annexed several of the most valuable pieces of land in the East Palo Alto unincorporated area.[11] The implications of annexations varied by

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[9]Robert Lowe, *Ravenswood High School and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Sequoia Union High School District* , (PhD. Diss., Stanford University, School of Education, 1989), 27. *Palo Alto Times.* 8 September, 1958.

[10]Lowe, 27.

[11]Lowe describes Palo Alto and Menlo Park's annexations of portions of East Palo Alto in pages 29-33 of his dissertation. It is my contention, however, that he attributes too malevolent of motives to these municipalities. East Palo Alto was not a self-identified community at that point in time. Menlo Park and Palo Alto acted no differently than San Jose, for instance, during the same time period. It is more important to understand the political and economic constraints influencing their decisions. For descriptions of other annexation campaigns, see California State Assembly Interim Committee on Municipal and County Government, Transcript of Proceedings, San Jose, CA, 8 August, 1958, 18-43. Property of Thomas Kavenaugh.

area. For wealthier suburbs, annexation by a larger city brought commercial encroachment and lowered property values. For East Palo Alto, selective annexation meant that cities snatched the more valuable portions of the nascent "community," leaving new residents dependent upon the antiquated "special district" system for services such as flood abatement and street lighting.

City annexation campaigns elicited strong responses among new suburbanites in the county's unincorporated areas. Residents of East Palo Alto and wealthier communities alike attempted to incorporate on their own, with varying degrees of success, in order to prevent future "land-grabbing." Testimony from a set of 1958 state senate hearings illuminates this tie between annexation, incorporation, and city services.[12] Appearing before the committee, the mayor of Woodside testified that town residents had incorporated in 1956 in order to avoid piecemeal annexations to the east and prevent commercial encroachments.[13] The Mayor of Saratoga was even more explicit about his town's motive for incorporation:

> First is the fallacy that a city is by definition a place modeled on New York or Chicago. The word 'city' brings to the average mind the image of large numbers of people jammed tightly in a relatively small area. It evokes the mental pictures of asphalt, concrete, bright lights, congestion, traffic jams, stores, factories, tall buildings, people in a hurry, faceless and nameless masses of humanity scurrying like ants in and out of concrete canyons. It evokes pictures of cliff dweller apartments and houses jammed together on lots so small your neighbor scratches when you itch. This is a true image, but it is not a true definition. Such places, although they obviously exist, have neither a legal nor practical monopoly on the name of 'city.' A city is a legally recognized municipal corporation called into existence by those who live in it in order to enable them to arrange their lives in their own way. . . . Many cities want to stay small, and for excellent reasons. They like their way of life and they do not want to change it for one they definitely do not like. . . . My contention is that small cities can exist for reasons other than providing sewers.[14]

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[12]During the 1950s, residents of many higher-income, postwar California suburbs began to incorporate in response to annexations by the larger, more established cities. The phenomenon was so common across the state that the State Assembly formed an interim committee to investigate its causes, In Los Angeles County, there were 17 municipalities incorporated between 1954 and 1958; in San Mateo County, settled earlier, there had been two incorporations during the same time period. California State Assembly Interim Committee on Municipal and County Government, Transcript of Proceedings, San Jose, CA, 8 August, 1958. Property of Thomas Kavenaugh.

[13]California State Assembly Interim Committee, Transcript, 4.

[14]California State Assembly Interim Committee, Transcript, 78, 90.

The subtext was clear: residents of these wealthier suburban communities incorporated in order to maintain homogeneity. Their ideal community was a low-overhead suburb. Repelled by urban stereotypes, they wanted to differentiate themselves—associationally, geographically, and economically—from the growing and relatively diverse cities around them. Incorporation gave these communities the power to control future development.

While most of these wealthier communities successfully incorporated, East Palo Altans found it more difficult to control their own fate. A diversity of property uses and a low potential property tax base together ensured that East Palo Alto would not incorporate during the fifties. Frustrated with the county "special district" system, residents of several subdivisions founded neighborhood improvement organizations, designed to provide flood relief and other services.[15] Such private initiatives, however, did not satisfy many residents. Localized efforts proved insufficient remedies for a host of emerging community problems including unemployment, transiency, and crime. Some saw incorporation as a way to begin to grapple with these phenomena. In 1953, improvement organizations and other groups launched an incorporation drive. The effort splintered, however, when disagreements arose over tax rate and budget estimates.[16] In 1957, an alliance of improvement organizations and interracial groups mounted a more serious initiative.[17] Donald Barr, who spearheaded the "Committee for Incorporation," gave the following rationale for incorporation:

> "Basically, we are faced with the disadvantages of a city now, such as a high density of population. We are not rural—most of use live on 5,000 square foot lots—and our population density per square mile is greater than that of many existing cities on the peninsula. We have police problems aggravated by a transient population, unemployment, and again, high density of population. We have an overabundance of special districts. . . We have a lack of representation . . We have lack of good traffic circulation . . . We have a lack of basic improvements. . . . Why do these disadvantages exist? Mainly because we exist within a county jurisdiction set up to administer on a rural level."[18]

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[15]Lowe, 28.
[16]"To Incorporate Or Not? That's East Palo Alto's Question," *The Palo Alto Times*, 9 September, 1958.
[17]"To Incorporate Or Not? That's East Palo Alto's Question"; Lowe, 63.
[18]California State Assembly Interim Committee, Transcript, 115.

Tom Kavenaugh, a member of an area farming family, brought up the crucial problem with incorporation at the same meeting. This area—on marginal land to begin with, and covered by relatively cheap dwellings—did not have enough assessed valuation for an adequate city tax base.[19] If East Palo Alto remained unincorporated, tax rates would remain manageable. In the end, a majority of the area's diverse population—composed of farmers, blue-collar homeowners, industrialists, whites, and a small but growing number of African-Americans—chose not to sanction the movement.[20]

A quite inequitable economic and political landscape had developed on the Peninsula. As a result of the postwar homebuying spree, suburbanites of different economic strata had bought into relatively homogenous communities: large villas spanned the hills, while apartments and smaller dwellings clustered by the bay. Class lines tended to overlap with distinct political jurisdictions, resulting in an inequitable system. These trends in suburbanization and municipal governance ensured that East Palo Alto would neither be annexed by surrounding towns, nor retain enough valuable land to incorporate and fund its own city services. Those with the greatest need for city services were the least likely to receive them.

East Palo Altans were unable to provide essential, supplementary services for themselves. At the same time, the community exerted too little political power to secure special treatment. As the area's population skyrocketed after the war, the county Board of Supervisors decided to place it in the second supervisorial district.[21] East Palo Altans, under this arrangement, elected a common representative with residents of Burlingame, Foster City, and Hillsborough. This arrangement separated the East Palo Alto vote from that of Menlo Park and Redwood City, adjacent cities which at least boasted substantial low-income populations. Even voting as a bloc, East Palo Altans would not have been able

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[19]California State Assembly Interim Committee, Transcript, 121-3.

[20]Kavenaugh's coalition of landowners, industrialists, and suburbanites living west of the Bayshore highway constituted enough of an opposition to prevent the initiative. Robert Lowe, "History of East Palo Alto, Part V," *The East Palo Alto Progress*, January, 1984, East Palo Alto Project Archives.

[21]For towns making up each supervisorial district, see yearly copies of the San Mateo County Roster of Elected Officials. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

to affect significantly county election outcomes.[22] It is unsurprising that, with so little influence, East Palo Altans occupied few posts on county boards or commissions. After the unsuccessful 1958 incorporation drive, the Board of Supervisors created a representative body for East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park, "The Alto Park Council." They intended for the council to serve as a liaison between the community and the county government.[23] This board, however, was simply advisory, and did not significantly influence county policy-making. Consequently, county agencies had little presence in East Palo Alto. The county only operated a branch library and a couple of Department of Public Health and Welfare divisions in the area.[24] More importantly, residents wielded little influence over county and regional planning decisions directly affecting the community. When the Bayshore Expressway (Highway 101) was widened, residents were unable to prevent a rerouting straight through the community's University Avenue business district. The highway widening had enormous repercussions in East Palo Alto.[25] Bulldozers knocked down fifty local businesses. Several lanes of traffic and a concrete overpass came to isolate East Palo Alto from Palo Alto as well. Pre-war jurisdictions and taxation practices had set the stage for community marginalization. By 1960, the drama was well underway.

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Market forces had shaped an economically-segregated landscape in San Mateo County. During the early sixties, market forces ushered in racial segregation as well. This

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[22]According to sociologist Kenneth Fox, American working-class suburbanites tended to think of themselves as middle class, and as fellow aspirants of the American dream. This "false consciousness" prevented them from recognizing problems they faced as a group. From this perspective, East Palo Altans might never have voted as a bloc, even if they might have wielded influence by doing so. Kenneth Fox, *Metropolitan America: Urban Life and Urban Policy in the United States, 1940-1980,* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1984).

[23]"'Alto Park' is Favored for Council Name," *Ravenswood Post,* March 17, 1960.

[24]*Inter-Agency Committee: East Palo Alto--East Menlo Park.* Directory compiled by the San Mateo County Community Council, April 1, 1965. East Palo Alto Municipal Library, History Binders.

[25]Michael Levin, et.al., *Dreams of a City: Creating East Palo Alto,* Videodocumentary, Academic Software Development and the Center for Black Performing Arts, Stanford University, 1997.

population shift had its origins in the domestic production for World War II. As the southern sharecropping economy grew increasingly mechanized, war production attracted a large number of rural African-Americans to the Bay Area.[26] As result of these new employment opportunities, the Bay Area population grew from four to five million during the war years alone.[27] African-American migrants tended to cluster in racially-demarcated central city communities such as San Francisco's Hunter's Point and Western Addition. At the end of the war, however, African-Americans proved to be the last hired and first fired. Some of the recent migrants left the cities almost immediately after war. San Mateo County and other suburban domains were destinations for those African-Americans who considered themselves upwardly mobile—those for whom the middle-class ideal of a single-family home and car commute were particularly attractive.

The earliest African-American migrants were given few choices of where to settle in San Mateo County. Real estate agents generally restricted minority sales to low-income areas, a practice known as "redlining." The postwar wave of suburbanization had been predicated upon the ideal of homeownership. In order to secure their own roof, yard, picket fence, and two-car garage, families had had to invest their life-savings in their homes. Selling to African-Americans or "Orientals," it was believed, tended to lower neighborhood property values. As a result, developers felt it economic suicide to sell to minorities in new developments, arguing that they would be unable to sell other houses.[28] Realtors, aiming to maintain good images in more prosperous communities, generally restricted minority sales to low-income areas. A 1958 survey by the western regional

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[26] The Kaiser Shipbuilding Company, Moore Shipbuilding, Bethlehem Steel, the Army Port of Embarkation, and the Quartermaster Supply Deport all employed migrants. Lowe, 36. He draws his information from NAACP files; for confirmation, see also Beth Bagwell, *Oakland: The Story of a City*. Oakland Heritage Alliance, Oakland, 1982, 234-6; Nicholas Lemann writes that in 1940, 77% of the county's African-Americans still lived in the South, and 49% in the rural South. In 1970, only 50% lived in the south, and less than 24% in the rural South. "The black migration," he writes, "was one of the largest and most rapid mass internal movements of people in history—perhaps *the* greatest not caused by the immediate threat of execution or starvation." Nicholas Lemann, *The Promised Land*, 6.

[27] Bagwell, 237.

[28] "E.P.A. Row Over Negro Homebuyer is Sample of Local Racial Problems," *The Palo Alto Times*, 2 December, 1954.

counsel of the NAACP found that 19 of the 20 area realtors practiced discrimination with such justification.[29] Because of these restrictive sales practices, African-Americans were effectively relegated to the older sections of East Palo Alto, East Menlo Park, and South Palo Alto.[30] Several interracial groups worked against discriminatory practices, but with only moderate success.[31] African-Americans only succeeded in purchasing in the "wrong" areas in a few instances, and these instances elicited considerably controversy.[32] For the most part, East Palo Alto remained majority-white and working class as late as 1960; African-Americans clustered in just two "districts."[33]

A much larger number of African-Americans began migrating southward to East Palo Alto during the early 1960s. Since the war, central cities had declined considerably; industrial employment became increasingly difficult to find, unemployment among minorities rose, and blight set in. In addition, federally-subsidized, downtown redevelopment projects gutted out "slum" neighborhoods in order to pave the way for corporate city centers as well. Cities provided little if any relocation assistance. And while the new corporate downtowns provided a pool of service sectors jobs downtown, African-Americans with manufacturing and agricultural skills were only eligible for a small number of menial positions. By the early sixties, the dearth of employment opportunities and housing shortages together inspired thousands of African-Americans to leave the central

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[29] This report by Franklin Williams. Lowe, p. 44. He cites a *Palo Alto Times* article.

[30]This fact based upon testimony from realtors. From, "E.P.A. Row Over Negro Homebuyer is Sample of Local Racial Problems."

[31]The Redwood City and Palo Alto branches of the NAACP, the Palo Alto Fair Play Council, the South Palo Alto Democratic Club, and the First Methodist Church all militated against discriminatory housing practices.The Redwood City and Palo Alto branches of the NAACP, the Palo Alto Fair Play Council, the South Palo Alto Democratic Club, and the First Methodist Church all militated against discriminatory housing practices. From Lowe, 41.

[32]In 1954 the William Baileys, an African-American family, purchased a home in the post-war Palo Alto Gardens subdivision. Members of the subdivision's "Improvement Association" attempted to raise funds in order to buy out the family. But, with the encouragement of the Palo Alto Fair Play Council, the family decided to stay. From "Negro Family Apparently Changes Mind; Decides Not to Sell East Palo Alto Home," *The Palo Alto Times*, 2 December, 1954, 2.

[33]From the 1960 Census of Population, General Characteristics of the Population by tract: in 1960, the white population in East Palo Alto tracts stood at 10,744, or 77% of the population. African-Americans were concentrated in one tract, in the older section of town. Also, Tom Kavenaugh describes the residential segregation within East Palo Alto in his testimony to the California State Assembly Interim Committee, Transcript, 121.

cities. Many followed the white working-class to the new industrial parks of the Peninsula.

Realtors manipulated these migrants for private gain through an intensive "blockbusting" campaign during 1962, 1963, and 1964.[34] In the process, they spurred a rapid racial transition in East Palo Alto. Through housecalls and mailings in targeted neighborhoods, realtors instilled and capitalized upon a fear that property values would soon plummet because of an African-American in-migration.[35] Whites, scared of losing their life savings, sold their homes at reduced values. Realtors then proceeded to sell the houses to African-Americans for up to twice as much. A contemporary *Stanford Daily* writer alleged that realtors employed another, less subtle tactic. Realtors, he wrote in a 1964 article, sent advertisements to African-Americans in the Fillmore district of San Francisco—one of the city's few all-black areas—extolling the virtues of the East Palo Alto area. In addition, "Free bus rides were arranged for the Negroes from San Francisco to East Palo Alto, and then the buses would drive up and down the streets showing East Palo Alto to the occupants of the buses and showing the occupants of the buses to the residents of East Palo Alto."[36]

A number of community groups tried to stem the population turnover.[37] The Alto Park Community Council, for example, attempted to hold meetings between realtors and residents who had been subjected to their scare tactics.[38] Another resident group launched an "I'm Not Moving" flyer campaign.[39] The argument about minority in-migration lowering property values, however, proved to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Realtors had

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[34]A realty card delivered to Mr. and Mrs. C. Tator, postmarked 9/30/63, gives an indication of the time frame and scale of this effort. Since opening its East Palo Alto office in 1962, the card reads, Werder Realty had sold over 250 homes. In other words, one realty company alone had convinced approximately 250 families, or 1,000 individuals, to move in a little over a year. William Werder and Associates, Realty Card, East Palo Alto Project Archives.

[35]Michael Levin, "Dreams of a City." Most of the long-time East Palo Alto residents interviewed for the film recall the blockbusting campaign with amazing clarity. Local newspapers also publicized the process.

[36]"East Palo Alto Lots Once Sold for 'Independence,'" *Stanford Daily Supplement*, 31 January, 1964.

[37]Lowe, 41.

[38]"Alto Park Council May Examine 'Scare' Selling," *Menlo Park Recorder*, 13 September, 1963.

[39]Flyer, San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

engineered the movement of several thousand whites and several thousand African-Americans. Between 1960 and 1970, the white percentage of the population plummeted from 77% to 20% .[40] East Palo Alto had become racially, as well as physically, politically, and economically marginalized.

[40]From the 1960 and 1970 Population Census, General Characteristics of the Population by Tract: In 1960, there were 2,291 African-Americans in the census tracts making up the East Palo Alto area, mainly concentrated in tract 0084, in contrast with 10,744 whites and 14,019 total. In 1970, there were 10,846 blacks and 3,555 whites in the same tracts, with a population total of 17,837. San Mateo County's 1968 Model Cities application reports that 65% of the East Palo Alto population originated in the South. E.R. Stallings, *Model Cities Grant Application*, Submitted for East Palo Alto-East Menlo Park, 9 April, 1968, Part III.A., App. A, p. 7. Stanford University Libraries.

II. *Local Control*

President Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act into law in August of 1964. The act stipulated that county or city policy boards oversee local "Community Action Agencies," which would in turn coordinate antipoverty programming. Target area residents were entitled to "maximum feasible participation" in program planning and administration. The act left the exact framework of these boards and agencies, however, open for local definition. Before antipoverty programs could get off the ground across the country, Office of Opportunity (hereafter OEO) officials needed to approve blueprints for these local program structures.

In San Mateo County, the Economic Opportunity Act's ambiguity about program structure elicited considerable controversy. It ensured that the county government and the newly-arrived minorities of South County would debate their relationship with one another in the context of the War on Poverty planning. OEO attempts to force the county to make concessions to these target area residents stymied program development for over a year.

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The immediate spark for the San Mateo County debate came from the independent sector. The San Mateo County Community Council, a county-wide organization concerned with the coordination and efficiency of welfare services, pressured for a local program almost immediately after passage of the federal law.[1] Formed in 1960, this coalition of independent service organizations and public agency representatives strategized about how to compensate for "service gaps" in the county's newly-emerging poverty areas. They viewed the East Bayshore area with particular concern, and had already formed an "Interagency Committee" of county agency and independent organization representatives to address problems there.[2] Their roster lists a wide range of collaborators, from the county

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[1]Such councils were common throughout the country, and typically more concerned with coordination and efficiency than with innovation or structural deficiencies in the community human-service institutions. Sanford Kravitz, "The Community Action Program--Past, Present, and Its Future?" *On Fighting Poverty: Perspectives From Experience*, Ed. James Sundquist, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1969), 54.

[2]East Menlo Park-East Palo Alto Interagency Committee of the San Mateo County Community Council, Minutes, 3 August, 1964, San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

Department of Health and Welfare and the Girl Scouts to the more unconventional Mid-Peninsula Christian Ministry, involved in community organizing as well as literacy work. The Economic Opportunity Act's emphasis on service coordination seemed, in light of the group's efforts, to be a sanction of its self-defined mission. With little thought as to whether minority communities wanted assistance, the Community Council submitted a "Community Action" project proposal to the county government eight days after the bill's passage.[3] Unsurprisingly, the Council proposed to attack poverty and illiteracy in the East Palo Alto area by distributing federal funds to its affiliate county agencies and independent services organizations.

The Community Council proposal provoked both the county government and East Bayshore civil rights groups. Before the Council's proposal, the Board of Supervisors had made no move to launch "Community Action" on its own initiative. The Council's enthusiasm for the federal program, however, made inaction politically infeasible. Hoping to contain the genie before things got out of control, the supervisors announced their intention to control any "war on poverty" carried out in the county.[4] The supervisors would themselves compose the representative policy board, and the "Community Action Agency" could function as another arm of the county government.[5]

The Community Council application and county government response angered East Palo Alto civil rights groups, which envisioned a quite different county War on Poverty. The Economic Opportunity Act's ambiguity also allowed East Palo Alto civil rights leaders to interpret the bill as a validation of their own agenda: race advancement. While "poverty pockets" existed in several areas interspersed throughout the county, race coincided with poverty most significantly in the East Palo Alto unincorporated area. As thousands of African-Americans moved to the area, new residents quickly grew aware of East Palo

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[3]"U.S. Funds Sought for E. Palo Alto 'War on Poverty,'"*The Palo Alto Times*, 28 August, 1964.
[4]"Antipoverty Meeting Urged for SC County Supervisors," *The Palo Alto Times*, 16 September, 1964.
[5]Reference to this first application was made in the context of the county's second application. San Mateo County Human Resources Commission, Application for Grant Under Title II-A. October, 1966. From OEO Inspection Reports, *Evaluating Community Action Programs*, 1964-67, Box 8 130/68/45/5 for East Palo Alto, CA. National Archives, College Park, MD.

Alto's political, geographic, and economic marginalization. The recent racial transition of the area ensured that these disadvantages would be interpreted in terms of race. This minority enclave had quickly become animated by the political consciousness of the Civil Rights movement, with its emphasis on political dignity for African-Americans. Within this context, aspirations for "community improvement" took on more force than they had for East Palo Alto's fading neighborhood improvement organizations.[6] "Community improvement" could, by the mid-sixties, be conceptualized in terms of "us" versus "them." From this perspective, East Palo Alto's lot could be improved through the eradication of systematic racial discrimination on a number of fronts: the Peninsula housing market, the local economy, and most importantly, the county political system. Even before passage of the Economic Opportunity Act, several civil rights groups targeted local discrimination.[7] When "Community Action" appeared on the local scene, East Palo Alto civil rights advocates embraced it as a more effective way of combating systemic discrimination.

Before they could even attempt to use "Community Action" for their own purposes, however, East Palo Altans needed to gain a degree of control over the program. They needed to garner seats on the Community Action policy board, or better yet, control the board themselves. Otherwise, civil rights leaders knew from experience, a county-level War on Poverty would fail to address their grievances. East Palo Altans, because of their small numbers and placement in a North County supervisorial district, exercised little political power at the county level at that time. Feeling no political pressure from the new

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[6]Kenneth Fox's point that working-class suburbanites were loathe to organize on their own, because they identified themselves with the more affluent whites of surrounding communities, has explanatory power in this context. Before the racial transition, community mobilization had proved difficult. Afterwards, it appears to have been more successful. It is difficult to ascertain, in retrospect, what percentage of the new African-American East Palo Alto residents considered themselves politically active. Kenneth Fox, *Metropolitan America: Urban Life and Policy in the United States, 1940-1980.* The local Civil Rights leadership, however, was strong and visible. Pastors, lawyers, former servicemen, and relatively uneducated homemakers alike contributed to the cause.

[7]For example, the South San Mateo County NAACP, founded in 1952, both petitioned the City of Menlo Park to establish a Human Relations Commission and raised funds for a de facto segregation suit against the Sequoia Union High School District. A local CORE chapter and group called "The Frontiersman" also worked against discrimination on the local scene. From South San Mateo County NAACP, Letter to the Mayor and Councilmen of Menlo Park, August 20, 1963; NAACP announcement, October 26, 1963, East Palo Alto Project Archives.

African-American population, county officials had barely acknowledged the growing problems in East Bayshore. Civil rights advocates consequently attacked the Community Council application. East Palo Alto leaders, banding together as "the Committee of the Poor" in the fall of 1964, argued that the supervisors did not deserve to control completely the local War on Poverty. The "maximum feasible participation" clause entitled East Palo Altans—the most obvious program recipients—to inclusion in War on Poverty planning and administration. Later that fall, the "Committee of the Poor" submitted a petition and its own proposal to the federal Office of Economic Opportunity, asking to be designated the county's Community Action Agency, as well as setting forth program proposals.[8] Civil rights activists also criticized the Community Council's reliance upon existing agencies and organizations as inappropriate. Paternalistic, philanthropic organizations and remote county agencies were inappropriate vehicles for "Community Action." East Palo Alto religious figures such as Reverend Branch and civil rights advocates such as Attorney Harry Bremond claimed that neither the Council's proposal nor the Council itself was representative of the area or its needs.[9] Like the Community Council, civil rights activists capitalized upon the openness of the bill in order to validate their cause.

Admittedly, the Committee of the Poor campaign to secure War on Poverty funds for East Palo Alto failed to win the support of all of the residents of the unincorporated area. Scared of dropping property values, whites had been steadily fleeing the area. A significant number, however, still remained in 1964.[10] The Alto Park Community Council, East Palo Alto's locally-elected, official liaison body with the County Board of Supervisors, argued that the unincorporated area was not poverty-stricken to begin with. This body—still, apparently, white and dominated by members of the community's fading civic improvement organizations—stated that East Palo Alto was not 'poor' in the sense

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[8]"Negro Leaders Rap Program to Curb Poverty," *The Palo Alto Times*, September 23, 1964. See also OEO Inspection Files.

[9]"Negro Leaders Rap Program to Curb Poverty," *The Palo Alto Times*, September 23, 1964.

[10]Unfortunately, census figures are only available for 1960 and 1970, making it impossible to know exactly what proportion of the community was white in 1964. Newspaper articles place the fraction at about one-third.

that the federal legislation required. Following through with such a program, they argued, would only give the community a worse reputation and further lower property values.[11] East Palo Altans, then, while united in their rejection of the Community Council's application, disagreed about whether or not the community had problems to ameliorate—especially problems that to address required publicity and characterizing their community in somewhat pejorative language.

In the end, however, the Committee of the Poor and county supporters drowned out Alto Park Council protests. Two contradictory proposals for a county War on Poverty program—made possible by the ambiguity of the Economic Opportunity Act and its stipulation for the "maximum feasible participation" of program recipients—dominated the headlines. County officials and members of the San Mateo County Community Council argued that the Board of Supervisors was in the best position to formulate Community Action policy. And the county government, in their eyes, could best coordinate actual agency operations by delegating programming to existing service organizations. Members of the Committee of the Poor, on the other hand, argued that East Palo Altans were entitled to control or at least participate in program planning and implementation.

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If the matter had been settled right away, the Office of Economic Opportunity might have let the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors have their way immediately. According to former OEO administrator John Wofford, the office was at the outset happy to work directly with local political establishments. As long as mayor's committees—or, in San Mateo County's case, the supervisor-appointed commission—made a pretense of involving the poor, the OEO acquiesed.[12] But changes in the Washington political climate militated against a simple solution in San Mateo County. Nineteen sixty-four had been a hallmark year for civil rights in the capitol. Congress had recently passed the Civil Rights

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[11]"'Poverty War' Program Rapped," *The Palo Alto Times*, 8 October, 1964.
[12]John G. Wofford, "The Politics of Local Responsibility: Administration of the Community Action Program--1964-1966," 80.

Act, setting a precedent of federal intervention on behalf of fairness in local politics. The OEO climate shifted into alignment with this mood just a few months later. Wofford describes how, "in about November 1964, an avalanche of telegrams of protest began. They would arrive, often on the day a grant was signed, addressed to Mr. Shriver, to the congressman to the district, to senators, to the President, protesting the alleged failure of the 'mayor's committee' to consult the residents of the area."[13] Usually, Wofford wrote, these protests meant that the local branches of the Urban League or NAACP had not been consulted. These complaints assumed great significance, given the national mood; civil rights, as an abstract concept, was very popular nationally. The OEO felt pressured to honor at least partially the "maximum feasible participation" clause. Civil rights groups may not have exercised much power locally. But together they could influence national policy.

During the first half of 1965, the OEO attempted to force local political elites to make concessions to clamoring minority groups. Administrators simply assumed that local government officials would rather include representatives of the "poor" than forego antipoverty funds. In the San Mateo County case, however, the local political establishment proved to be more concerned about maintaining status quo power relations than with antipoverty programming. County officials resolved that a local antipoverty program would be implemented on their own terms, if at all. As a result, OEO pressure regarding minority representation only succeeded in delaying the San Mateo County program.

By March of 1965, San Mateo County officials had revised and settled on a proposal for establishment control of Community Action. That month, they reiterated their intention to control any War on Poverty program executed in the county, but with an important modification. Frustrated with Committee of the Poor complaints over Community Action, the supervisors decided that it would be politically expedient to address

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[13]Ibid., 80.

at least the issue of race relations at the county level. They proposed to tackle the issue through the War on Poverty, but not in the sense that OEO officials or civil rights groups desired. Instead, county antipoverty programs would be controlled by a public commission composed of supervisor appointees.[14] The Human Relations Commission, an already-existent commission charged with investigating and advising the Board of Supervisors on racial disturbances and discrimination issues, would oversee the county Community Action Program. This body would serve as a liaison between the OEO and the county at-large; it would have the power to pick and choose among grant requests to forward to Washington. By tackling race relations and antipoverty programming at once, the supervisors hoped, the Human Relations Commission could use antipoverty funds to douse hot spots. Federal funds would be spent locally in as politically-expedient a fashion as possible.

County officials were aware that their plan failed to meet either OEO or Committee of the Poor criteria with regard to participation. While the supervisors had made titular acknowledgment of the race issue, the plan failed to concede any political power to minorities. South County civil rights groups were to receive few, if any, seats on the commission. Aware that the Committee of the Poor had been communicating with the OEO, the San Mateo County Manager presented the county case in several letters during March of 1965.[15] Manager E.R. Stallings requested that OEO officials not recognize county groups other than the official government. Organizations such as the Committee of the Poor, he argued, were "small" and unrepresentative of the county as a whole.[16] Control or even representation by such a fringe group, he argued, would impinge upon county efforts to coordinate centrally antipoverty programs. Working outside of extant political jurisdictions, he implied, would only induce conflict and unfairness. His

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[14]"Supervisors to Retain Control of War on Poverty Funds," *The Palo Alto Times*, 3 March, 1965.
[15]E.R. Stallings, letter to Paul O'Rourke, 10 March 1965, OEO Inspection Reports; E.R. Stallings, letter to Senator Murphy, Kuchel, and Congressman Younger, 18 March 1965, OEO Inspection Reports; E.R. Stallings, letter to Paul O'Rourke, 26 March, 1965, OEO Inspection Reports.
[16]E.R. Stallings, letter to Paul O'Rourke, 26 March, 1965, OEO Inspection Reports.

argument, of course, glossed over deficiencies in the county political system—deficiencies disproportionately borne by East Palo Alto. But it is unsurprising that he painted the county case in as favorable a light as possible. After announcing and explaining their revised local program plan, county officials dug their heels in the dirt.

OEO administrators blithely continued to pressure the county manager up until the June application deadline for fiscal year 1965-1966. Apparently, they were confident that the county would sooner make concessions to "community" participation than forego antipoverty funding. The OEO's San Francisco field representative, Melvin Mogulof, responded to Stallings' March letters by stating that if the county was to be in charge of Community Action, the public commission membership would have to be "representative."[17] Members of "the Negro community of East Palo Alto" would have to be named to the commission. To reinforce his point, Mogulof sent along a Community Action Program Guide and statement of program criteria. He also threatened that if federal standards were not met, the county would have to forego a million in funds earmarked for them that year.

Mogulof and others at the OEO, however, failed to see the writing on the wall. Contrary to their expectations, Stallings and the supervisors altered their plan little in response to his directive and threat. Appointing East Palo Altans to a representative policy board, it became apparent, was the last thing that the county wanted to do. Stallings responded to Mogulof by sending a membership list for the Human Relations Commission, the public commission the county desired to place at the helm of "Community Action." He argued that the commission set forth "a rather broad representation." An expanded version of this group, he wrote, would include geographic representation, representation from local public jurisdictions, representatives from the county Superintendent of Schools, poor school districts, the county welfare department and state employment services, representatives from minority organizations, representatives from most impoverished areas,

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[17]Melvin Mogulof, letter to E.R. Stallings, 7 April 1965, OEO Inspection Reports.

and a potential program recipient.[18] When the supervisors finally appointed members to the Commission in May, county government intentions became clearer. Commissioners hailed from the school districts, public agencies, business community, and unions for the most part, although one San Mateo NAACP affiliate continued to serve.[19] The supervisors had failed to concede any political power to the Committee of the Poor and East Palo Alto, in spite of OEO pressure.[20] The county decided that it would rather forswear an antipoverty program than perturb the local political equilibrium.

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June 1st passed, and the county had made no concessions to the Committee of the Poor; the OEO had no choice other than to carry through with its threat to take away earmarked funds. Federal pressure on behalf of civil rights had only succeeded in stalling, as opposed to modifying, local programming. The local media had a field day with the funding debacle. Some articles blamed the OEO for red tape and waste, while another accused Stallings of deliberately dragging his feet.[21] These public criticisms set up new bargaining positions between the Committee of the Poor, the county Board of Supervisors, and the OEO.

Members of the Committee of the Poor capitalized upon local press support for the War on Poverty, and quickly exacted some of the long-desired political concessions to minority participation. Harry Bremond, Co-Chair of the Committee of the Poor, put the county on the hot seat. He once again protested that the Supervisors had not appointed a member of the Committee of the Poor to the Commission, this time making his point with

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[18]E.R. Stallings, letter to Melvin B. Mogulof, 23 April 1965, OEO Inspection Reports.

[19]"Board OK'd for Human Relations." *The Palo Alto Times*. 12 May, 1965; "10 Human Resources Directors Appointed." *The Palo Alto Times*. 14 May, 1965.

[20]Committee of the Poor Co-Chair Harry Bremond, whom had received a carbon copy of Mogulof's original letter to Stallings, was obviously dismayed by the appointments. Three days before Mogulof's June 1 deadline, he publicly expressed concern that no member of the Committee of the Poor had been appointed to the Human Relations Commission. "SM County Poverty Plan Hit," *The Palo Alto Times*, 28 May, 1965. For "cc: Committee of the Poor," see bottom of Melvin Mogulof, letter to E.R. Stallings, 7 April 1965.

[21]*Redwood City Tribune*. 12 June, 1965; "Is Mr. Stallings Stalling the Poor?" *The Palo Alto Times*, 11 June, 1965.

more universalistic and nationalistic rhetoric. "The people," he warned, "are not willing to accept another colonial welfare program."[22] He described a mounting resentment among "the minority elements" toward the county government as well. In response to these stinging attacks, the Supervisors acceded to the appointment of Bremond's Co-Chair, Reverend Branch, along with several "poor" representatives from other target areas.[23] Local public opinion, in this case, proved to be a more effective influence upon the political establishment than federal enticement or threats.

Office of Economic Opportunity officials, on the other hand, felt as if Community Action had been politically compromised by the negative press coverage. Their attempts to placate civil rights groups had prevented them from launching a timely and successful local program, at least for the time being. If the OEO continued to amass such a track record, it would undoubtedly fare poorly in Congress. Concerned employees of the OEO Inspection Division collected the San Mateo County editorials and circulated them around the office for commentary; OEO administrators needed to clear the office of blame at least within their own circles.[24]

Wary after this incident, the OEO approved a San Mateo County program application with few modifications.[25] The outline of this program closely resembled the plan they had been quibbling over in May. The county Human Relations Commission would be renamed the Human Resources Commission. This body would oversee the coordination of services and programs in at least five target areas. By treating East Palo Alto as one among five target areas, the county structurally minimized the area's influence.[26] Admittedly, Reverend Branch of the Committee of the Poor occupied a seat

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[22]"Poverty War Plan Announced," *The Burlingame Advance Star*, 11 June, 1965.
[23]"East Palo Altan Named to SM County Board," *The Palo Alto Times*, 16 June, 1965.
[24]Bill Haddad, memo to Sargent Shriver et. al, 12 July, 1965, OEO Inspection Reports.
[25]One official remarked that the lack of target area pressure might belie a lack of need. Regarding objections: Bob Anthony, memo to Jack Gonzales, 1 November, 1965 and note attached to OEO copy of actual application regarding Dick Fullmer commentary, OEO Inspection Files. Regarding approval: Sargent Shriver, public announcement regarding San Mateo County Community Action Program, 2 December, 1965.
[26]It is clear that the county aimed to minimize the East Palo Alto influence, because no constituencies pressured for programs in these other "target areas." The county application even requested funds for

on the commission. But his voice would be one among many. And the Board of Supervisors still retained the right to appoint all commission members. The OEO had, after months of posturing, given in to the local political establishment.

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The Economic Opportunity Act's ambiguity about local program structure and stipulation for the "maximum feasible participation" of target area residents catalyzed a San Mateo County debate between East Palo Alto civil rights activists and the county government. African-Americans living in the unincorporated area highlighted their new home's political, physical, economic, and racial marginalization in the context of debate. County officials, on the other hand, made it obvious that they were happy with the status quo.

OEO attempts to force the county to make concessions to the Committee of the Poor proved ineffective. The county was not sufficiently interested in the antipoverty funds offered as enticements. After the county missed a program application deadline, OEO officials realized that their pressure regarding representation had jeopardized plans for an antipoverty program in the county. In the end, the supervisors' plans prevailed. They wanted to use antipoverty funds to tackle county race relations problems, and that is what they accomplished. Local program structure proved to be a function of local, as opposed to intergovernmental, public opinion and power relations.

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community organizing in these areas, in light of their complete passivity. The supervisors obviously included these areas of their own volition.

III. *Appeasement Becomes Problematic*

The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors had charged the county's Human Resources Commission with two difficult tasks: overseeing the county War on Poverty and easing local racial tensions. The Economic Opportunity Act's original openness regarding program content underpinned this county strategy. Provided that the commission retained the freedom to select programs, it would have sufficient maneuverability to placate unhappy minorities with OEO antipoverty funds. The county could thereby improve its relations with the African-American population of South County, without relinquishing any of its customary political power.[1]

Mollifying disgruntled minorities with War on Poverty funds, however, quickly became an impossible task. As the national Civil Rights movement splintered over plans for race and community improvement, East Palo Altans began to push for different and sometimes contradictory local War on Poverty programs. The Human Resources Commission found itself fielding complaints and demands from across a widening ideological spectrum, and its more traditional social service programs became embroiled in controversy. Increasing OEO restrictiveness during 1967 further complicated the commission's situation. Unpopular in Congress, the office was compelled to slash grants and impose restrictions on local programming. These federal moves impinged upon the commission's flexibility. As a result, the San Mateo County War on Poverty became mired in politics.

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For a brief period at the beginning of 1966, Human Resources Commissioners, independent service providers, and East Palo Altans harbored compatible visions for a local War on Poverty. Programs would in some cases address deficiencies in traditional services

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[1]While my argument arises from documents concerning the San Mateo County case, Rufus Browning and his co-authors found this to be a common strategy in Bay Area cities during the Great Society. Especially in cities where the dominant coalition opposed or cared little about minority interests, mayors used the programs to placate and redirect protesters. Rufus Browning, et al., *Protest is Not Enough: The Struggle of Blacks and Hispanics for Equality in Urban Politics*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 213.

in the poorer, unincorporated areas. In other cases, programs would have more of an acculturative thrust: supplementary services such as job training or free legal counsel would help the new, poorer minorities survive in the Peninsula's emerging service economy. Even before commissioners made concrete decisions about War on Poverty expenditures, independent organizations forayed into these areas.

In 1965 and 1966, a modest number of white and African-American, as well as outside and community-run programs, peacefully co-existed in the East Palo Alto area. The Community Council's East Palo Alto-East Menlo Park Interagency Committee continued in its efforts to coordinate services provided by existing government agencies and independent organizations.[2] And the South County Presbyterian community's Mid-Peninsula Christian Ministry sponsored interracial community organizing efforts.[3] The San Mateo County Bar Association also provided free legal services through its Legal-Aid Society, but had not yet opened an East Bayshore office.[4] New efforts sprouted as well during late 1964 and 1965. A number of governmental and independent groups began to grapple with minority unemployment. The nonprofit Bayshore Employment Service, formed in August of 1964 as a collaboration between the Palo Alto Chamber of Commerce and local firms, found jobs for an average of 25 people a month.[5] The State Office of Employment launched a job training program at roughly the same time.[6] Finally, Father John Sweeney of East Bayshore's St. Francis Church spearheaded Opportunities Industrialization Center West (hereafter OICW), an independent job training facility modeled on a Philadelphia effort. Sweeney organized the center in consultation with area industries in the fall of 1965. These programs, initiated by whites and outsiders, attempted to address community problems through supplementary services. Program initiators

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[2]East Menlo Park-East Palo Alto Interagency Committee, San Mateo County Community Council, Membership list. 1 April, 1965, San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.
[3]Ibid.
[4]"Scale of Justice Sometimes a Tilt," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 July, 1965.
[5]E.R.Stallings, *Model Cities Application*, Part V.B., p.5.
[6] Located in Palo Alto, the facility trained individuals--mainly East Palo Altans--in basic skills, clerk-typist, nurses' aid, and hospital orderly programs. San Mateo County, *Model Cities Application*, Part V.B, p. 6a.

reasoned that the poor, in many cases, could not afford certain services such as legal consultation in the private sector. In other cases, essential services such as job training simply did not exist.

The most prominent community-based effort, at that time, addressed inadequacies in a traditional service. During 1965, a group of African-American newcomers launched a crusade against the local public high school system. Former Louisianan Gertrude Wilks, appalled when her eldest son graduated from the community's Ravenswood High School unable to read and write, began to mobilize women of the St. John's Baptist community to pursue educational issues.[7] Her group, the "Mothers for Equal Education," at first limited themselves to registering complaints with the district school board. They expressed dissatisfaction with the disproportionate number of vocational and remedial classes offered at Ravenswood High School. They also pressed for district-wide desegregation. By the fall of 1965, frustrated with school board's unresponsiveness, Wilks started a "Sneak Out" program. This Mothers for Equal Education effort placed East Palo Alto students in nearby majority-white and, supposedly, academically-superior schools.[8] These program initiators—African-American and white, community-members and outsiders—apparently felt it more important to supplement inadequate services than to compete with one another.

If East Palo Altans cared most about service gaps east of Bayshore, as Wilks' efforts seemed to indicate, the Human Resources Commission had a fairly straightforward task. Commissioners needed to use federal antipoverty funds to expand supplementary services already underway in the area. By encouraging independent groups to apply to administer self-designed or "national emphasis" antipoverty programs, they could minimize grievances with local institutions. During the first six months of 1966, the commission refused to approve federal funds for already-existing county programs—even those specifically targeting the poor. The commission, for example, voted against funding a

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[7]Reverend Branch, Co-Chair of the Committee of the Poor, served as the pastor of St. John's.
[8]Day School People, *Day School, E.P.A.*, (East Palo Alto, CA: The Mothers for Equal Education Bookstore, 1970), 11-13. East Palo Alto Project Archives.

$440,000 expansion of the county's welfare-to-work training program.[9] The commission instead, with a few exceptions, favored proposals from white independent organizations. The OICW training center, for example, obtained funding when the county program had not.[10] Several local organizations successfully applied to administer "national emphasis" programs: the Redwood City Mothers' Club and San Mateo Community Play Center received funds for Head Start programs, and the County Bar Association's Legal Aid Society received a grant to extend its operations.[11] Admittedly, there were exceptions. The commission also approved a Sequoia Union High School District application to run a Neighborhood Youth Corps summer employment program for its minority students, funds for the expansion of a park in the city of San Mateo, a Committee of the Poor summer camp program, and a grant to pay elderly poor to spread the word about new Medicare laws.[12] Despite variation among delegate organizations, the approved programs aimed to provide special services for poorer county residents. The Human Resources Commission assumed that minorities either needed or desired special services and saw previous independent efforts as model ways to fill "service gaps."

East Palo Alto representatives on the Human Resources Commissions seem to have approved of these early programs. They were not mollified, however, as county officials had hoped. Reverend Branch and a second representative from East Palo Alto—Gertrude Wilks, elected as a representative from the target area by a new "Community Action Council"—tended to offer very limited commentary on program applications.[13] While

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[9]"SM County Poverty Fund Plea Turned Down," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 January, 1966.
[10]"Retraining, Legal Aid, Win Council Backing," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 5 March, 1966; "East Palo Alto to Get Job Training," *The Palo Alto Times*, 27 June, 1966.
[11]"SM County Poverty Fund Plea Turned Down," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 January, 1966; "Retraining, Legal Aid Win Council Backing," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 5 March, 1966.
[12]"SM County Poverty Fund Plea Turned Down," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 January, 1966. "Elderly Poor to be hired to explain Medicare Law," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 5 March, 1966; "Summer Camp Funds Provided by Government," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 31 May, 1966.
[13]This is the impression one gains from newspaper reports of the meetings. When the Legal Aid proposal came up for discussion, for example, Wilks informed other commissioners that most East Palo Altans needed assistance with criminal cases, while the Legal Aid Society mainly aided in civil cases. (Legal Aid did not want to overlap with court-appointed attorneys, given their membership.) *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 March, 1966. Regarding the CAC election, see: "East Palo Alto Council Meet Set for Tonight," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 8 February, 1966.

relatively quiescent about antipoverty programming, Wilks and Branch proved difficult to please on other fronts. They repeatedly used the well-publicized commission meetings as a forum in which to lambast racial discrimination in the county. Wilks and Branch argued that county police in the unincorporated area treated residents with flagrant disrespect, policing official community and church meetings wearing helmets, accompanied by police dogs.[14] Wilks also [complained] that commissioners themselves treated East Palo Altans callously: "You can't reach back into the ghetto and bring someone up to your table expecting them to behave exactly like some of the doctors on the commission."[15] In this emphasis upon respect for African-Americans at the institutional and interpersonal level, their comments echoed the themes of the Civil Rights movement in the South. Wilks and Branch were, for the time being, more concerned with eliminating or mitigating outward signs of racial discrimination than with planning for community economic improvement. The Human Resources Commission tried to address their grievances; it even used meeting time to bring Wilks and Branch face to face with the county sheriff. As a government effort to improve race relations, the War on Poverty placation policy was problematic from the outset. Commissioners ended up performing double duties.

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The county Board of Supervisors had envisioned fielding East Palo Alto grievances in the manageable context of the commission's formal meetings. Over the next year, however, debate over War on Poverty programming spilled outside the confines of the commission format. As the civil rights movement evolved nationally, East Palo Altans began to debate vehemently alternative strategies for community improvement amongst themselves. The concept of race was providing insufficient glue for the movement. The Economic Opportunity Act's openness regarding local antipoverty program content provided African-American groups with a context in which to reconceptualize race

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[14]"Anti-Police Picketing Planned in EPA," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 March, 1966; "Sheriff Answers Critics of East Palo Alto," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 8 April, 1966.
[15]"'Give My People a Chance,' Negro Leader Says," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 31 May, 1966.

advancement and community improvement. East Palo Altans came to take positions ranging from a racially-charged vision of "community control" to impassioned support for existing War on Poverty programs.

In San Mateo County, "community control" advocates quickly emerged as a dominant political force. Through demonstrations at county commission meetings and manipulation of the area's antipoverty policy board, the East Palo Alto Community Action Council (hereafter CAC), they embroiled existing antipoverty programs in controversy and advanced a political reform program. Members pressured the Human Resources Commission to approve a wider variety of programs and a greater South County focus. But in making these concessions, the Human Resources Commission spread itself thin and opened itself up to criticism from the right. And when the OEO began restricting the type and number of local programs funded, county race relations further deteriorated. The county's plan to use War on Poverty funds to placate minorities was already backfiring.

Commissioners Wilks and Branch had, during the preceding months, focused on the ways in which county agencies racially discriminated against East Palo Alto. They treated the commission as a long-desired forum for grievances and made few suggestions as to how antipoverty programs could address their complaints. By the summer of 1966, however, a vanguard of vocal East Palo Altans began to see ways in which War on Poverty programs could alleviate community problems they perceived. Inspired by the increasingly popular black power philosophy and the community's history of incorporation drives, they began instead to see the War on Poverty as a way of avoiding racial discrimination through "community control."[16] The Citizens for Self-Government, a new East Palo Alto group spearheaded by attorney and Committee of the Poor Co-Chair Harry Bremond, submitted

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[16]Robert Hoover, a key player in this emerging black power movement, presented himself as a follower of Stokely Carmichael. Admittedly, Hoover must also have drawn much of his philosophy from Saul Alinsky. He was, at that point, employed by the Mid-Peninsula Christian Ministry as a community organizer. Reverend Carl Smith, Director of the Ministry's "Community House" in East Palo Alto, had been trained by Alinsky and was reputed to promote his philosophies. On Hoover, see: East Palo Alto Group Discussion Set on $75,000 Proposal," *The Peninsula Times Tribune* , 7 June, 1966; "Community Action Proposed for E. Palo Alto," *The Peninsula Times Tribune* , 15 July, 1966.

the first proposal in this vein. Members requested funds for community organizing and a financial feasibility study for the incorporation of East Palo Alto.[17] Through community organizing, supporter Bob Hoover argued, the unincorporated area could gain political consciousness and clout. Leaders could thereby obtain a better sense of the community's needs and secure more county and federal support for street repair, drainage, child care, police review boards, and African-American teachers.[18] Eventually, proponents hoped, these efforts would provide a sufficient foundation for incorporation and "community control" of all local services. Community improvement, in this suburban context, had become synonymous with incorporation, no matter how financially infeasible.[19]

The Citizens for Self-Government advanced their vision for "community control" with political pressure tactics that spurred county officials to introspect about the Human Resources Commission's role. Two-hundred East Palo Altans attended an August commission meeting, and clamored loudly for approval of the plan.[20] This informal political pressure overwhelmed the commissioners. They endorsed the proposal, "subject to funding," before leaving that night. Commissioners also approved a Committee of the Poor application to run a community Information Center, which would serve as a referral service to existing agencies as well as a barometer of community needs.[21] Through informal political pressure, these groups were shifting the War on Poverty focus to South County.

Commissioners had, in this instance, used antipoverty funds to placate county minorities. The incident, however, unsettled county officials and commissioners alike;

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[17]"Human Resources Official Urges Close Look at Plans," *The San Mateo Times*, 3 October, 1966; "Committee of Poor Gets $55,399 Grant," *The Peninsula Times Tribune* , 11 August, 1966.
[18]"Black Power Could Ease EPA Distress," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 11 August, 1966.
[19]Ira Katznelson makes an analogous argument in his 1981 *City Trenches: Urban Politics and the Patterning of Class in the United States*. He found that, in urban areas, black nationalists came to conceptualize "community control" within the framework of the existing political system. African-Americans aspired to gain control at the ward or precinct level and run their own political machines. Ira Katznelson, *City Trenches*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981).
[20]"Human Resources Official Urges Close Look at Plans," *The San Mateo Times*. 3 October, 1966; "Committee of Poor Gets $55,399 Grant," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 11 August, 1966.
[21]"Committee of the Poor Gets $55,399 Grant," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 11 August, 1966; "East Palo Altans Demand Bigger 'Political Voice,'" *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 12 August, 1966.

both began to rethink the county War on Poverty. Human Resources Commissioners asked the supervisors to clarify their role several weeks after the meeting.[22] The group also resolved to begin defining county poverty problems as opposed to simply discussing applications.[23] The supervisors, on the other hand, hired the recently-retired Community Action Agency director to help them better handle the county relations with East Palo Alto and other "poverty pockets."[24] They also appointed white East Palo Altan John Partenan—who had, that summer, publicly criticized the incorporation plan as inappropriately political—to fill one of the commission seats vacated by Branch and Wilks in August.[25] County commissioners and officials, it seemed, felt uncomfortable with the anti-institutional thrust and political tactics of the new East Palo Alto program. In the meantime, race relations kept worsening. Both the Alto Park Council and the Committee of the Poor protested that they had not been consulted about the Partenan appointment.[26] Robert Hoover, a Citizen for Self-Government supporter, argued that commissioners should first consider community residents for positions.[27] East Palo Altans on the commission pressed for more expenditures in South County as well.[28] To make matters

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[22]"Board Asks for Outline of Its Job," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 9 September, 1966. In a newspaper interview, Hine neither blamed federal red tape nor recent political trends. Robert Hine, executive director of the SMC agency, resigned at the beginning of September. The timing, however, seems far from coincidental. "Head of Human Resources Board Resigns," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 8 September, 1966.

[23]"Opposing Views Aired: Human Rights Group Asks Consultant," *The Peninsula Times Tribune* , 14 October, 1966.

[24]"Consultant to Advise Board on Human Relations," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 26 October, 1966; see also, *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 11 November, 1966.

[25]"E. Palo Alto Group Protests Poverty Board Appointment," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 6 October, 1966; "Community Action Proposed for E. Palo Alto," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 July, 1966.

[26] In the wake of these protests, the Supervisors kept Partenan. They did, however, appoint the Committee of the Poor's candidate, the Reverend's wife Mrs. Branch, to fill the other slot. The Alto Park Council was, by this time, African-American. Its membership seemed to be slightly more conservative, however, than that of the Committee of the Poor. "E. Palo Alto Group Protests Poverty Board Appointment," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*. 6 October, 1966; see also: *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 12 October, 1966.

[27]Upset that a Neighborhood Youth Corps community volunteer had not been hired for a permanent position, Hoover argued that community blacks ought to be hired before outsiders. "Probe of Youth Corps Urged," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 17 November, 1966.

[28]Mrs. Branch and several other commissioners began to pressure for allocating a greater percentage of funds for South County programs, such as Head Start. "Head Start Tiff in SM County," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 10 December, 1966.

worse, a riot erupted on the College of San Mateo campus in December.[29] Minority demands were continuing to escalate, rendering the supervisors' original antipoverty plan quite unwieldy.

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The county War on Poverty program became a magnet of yet more intense controversy during 1967, as "community control" advocates began targeting already-existing antipoverty programs. Members of the East Palo Alto Community Action Council, the community's advisory board to the Human Resources Commission, shifted War on Poverty politics away from the county seat and into the community. Realizing that funds for community-initiated projects would materialize slowly if at all, this group aimed in the meantime to gain control of federally-funded programs in their area. "Community control" of policy-making and administration, in their eyes, could ensure that antipoverty services met East Palo Alto needs. They made these arguments during their own "town hall" meetings as well as in their interactions with individual East Palo Alto antipoverty programs.

The Community Action Council first targeted Opportunities Industrialization Center West (hereafter OICW), a job training facility located on the border of East Palo Alto and East Menlo Park. The incident illustrates the "community control" program and the types of reactions it provoked. Leaders of the East Bayshore Catholic community had started OICW in 1965, in consultation with area industries. OICW recruited a majority of its trainees from the East Bayshore area. A majority were African-American, and a majority female. During both day and evening shifts, recruits first enrolled in a basic skills "feeder" class, and then divided off into specialized training programs in fields such as electronics assembly and armed security.[30] An OICW status report for Winter, 1997, reported that 512 students were currently enrolled, while 316 graduates had found work.[31] The center

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[29]"HRC to Probe CSM Unrest," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 26 December, 1966.
[30]OEO Inspection Reports.
[31]OEO Inspection Reports.

began receiving OEO and Department of Labor funding in the fall of 1966. Federal regulations had required the program's head, Father John Sweeney, to adopt a community advisory board at that time. At Sweeney's request, several African-American professionals had joined white Catholics on the board. In its aim, administrative arrangments, community participation mechanism, and clientele, OICW embodied a representative antipoverty program.

The winter of 1967, the Community Action Council, East Palo Alto's community advisory board to the Human Resources Commission, began to target OICW.[32] In public meetings and a formal letter of complaint to Washington, the group argued that the "community" exercised no control over hiring practices or administration.[33] Without "community" involvement, the group argued, training and job placement suffered. Trainees often failed to retain jobs because of "incompleteness of training." In addition, OICW offered little follow-up support for program graduates. And the curriculum, they argued, only prepared enrollees for dead-end careers. OICW, they alleged, also failed to address related and pressing community concerns, including union discrimination and low demand for unskilled and semi-skilled labor. The CAC brought their complaints directly to OICW leaders before contacting the Human Resources Commission; Community Action Agency employees could do little as the CAC proceeded to embroil OICW in negative publicity and conflict.

It quickly became evident that the East Palo Alto Community Action Council, though a supposedly representative body elected at "town hall meetings," did not speak for all members of "the community." The CAC's campaign against OICW upset East Palo Altans who had become involved or impressed with the center during its first year of operation. Two East Palo Alto professionals—one African-American and one white—sent letters to Washington and the county seat shortly after the CAC did. Charles Thrower, an

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[32]Since resigning from the Human Resources Commission, Wilks had involved herself with this body as well as educational projects. She apparently presided over the CAC's increasingly radical agenda.
[33]Reverend R.C. Sanders, et. al, letter to Sargent Shriver, 8 February 1967. OEO Inspection Reports.

African-American publisher and member of the OICW's community advisory board, became extremely frustrated with the Community Action Council's presumption to speak for the community. In his letter, he countered their "community control" allegations with a fervent and moralistic patriotism.[34] Thrower portrayed the CAC as a radical faction which, in its push for "community control," undermined existing efforts to address problems such as unemployment. By helping disadvantaged individuals, the OICW leadership and staff helped the total community move forward. Yes, he acknowledged, a portion of the OICW leadership was white and lived on the other side of the freeway. But these individuals, through persistent effort, had made the center a reality. When CAC members alleged that they had a *right* to control the project, they perpetuated a destructive "you owe it to us" attitude—an attitude that could only handicap individuals or a race in the American economy. Individual OICW graduates, he argued, were to blame if they lost jobs quickly after training. Thrower's letter concludes with extremely vituperative statements about the CAC membership and mission.[35] He describes them as threats to traditional American, Christian values and African-American chances at success.

> History has proven that there were people, even as now, who are anti-Christ. There are still these people today, even masquerading as members of the clergy. They have infiltrated for the purpose of confusing every organization in America. Whatever is good for the people as a whole they are against. Their slogans are: What can we rub raw? What confusion can we create to keep the people stirred up against each other? What can we do to embarrass the Government? What can we do to dissipate the energies of those who are working for the good of many?

And as if this criticism was not itself damning enough, Thrower cast the CAC's prime mover, Gertrude Wilks, as a, "leading exponent of Black Power, who speaks of Negro

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[34]Charles Thrower, letter to Sargent Shriver, 21 February, 1967. OEO Inspection Reports.

[35]A number of prominent East Palo Alto civil rights activists and clergy signed the CAC letter to Sargent Shriver: Everlyn Wallace, Chairman of the East Palo Alto-East Menlo Park CAC; Robert Hoover, community organizer for Mid-Peninsula Christian Ministry; Rev. T.C. Sanders, President of the South San Mateo County NAACP; Rev. Bernel Virdure, Chairman of the Executive Committee for Community Organization; Gertrude Wilks and Luann Bradford of the Mothers for Equal Education; Henry Organ, Chairman of the local CORE branch; Dr. Bernardine Allen, a Stanford psychologist; Syrtiller Kabat, an OICW counselor; and Annette Latorre, President of the Mid-peninsula Catholic Interracial Council.

males but castrates them."[36] The language and content of his letter reveal how significant a rift had developed among East Palo Altans, and East Palo Alto African-Americans in particular. Views on the War on Poverty derived from contradictory strategies for race advancement. For Thrower, African-Americans needed to assimilate individually as opposed to separate collectively.

John Partenan, an East Palo Alto white and Human Resources Commissioner, also wrote Washington in support of OICW's mission and management.[37] He emphasized that OICW satisfied federal criteria for Community Action programs as he understood them. The center had a local advisory board and employed community members. And, as an antipoverty program, he found it to be:

> the one program in San Mateo County that is fulfilling the promise of the War on Poverty. It is providing an economic opportunity to hundreds of persons who would otherwise find job training extremely difficult. OICW has involved itself with local Industry to find the areas where skills are needed. Industry has responded with equipment, money, counseling, and instructors.[38]

In other words, OICW was a true "community" effort within the Peninsula, as opposed to East Palo Alto, context. Admittedly, OICW had faced setbacks. But these were inevitable, he argued, in the administration of any new program. Like Thrower, Partenan felt that War on Poverty programs should involve collaboration across class and race lines. Partenan also assumed, like Thrower, that antipoverty programs should prepare the poor for a

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[36]EPA Civil Rights activists tended, until that time, to be male. This quote indicates that Wilks' assertiveness caused at least some controversy. Wilks was conscious that her gender could become a divisive issue. During the early seventies, she reflected on that dilemma: "I remember confronting the public school district Board of Trustees, and not being able to find a man to present our community statements. Black women have long had to abide with frustration. I decided to stand up without any man beside me because somebody had to address the Board. I risked being accused of castrating our men." Gertrude Wilks, *Recipe for Building a School.*, (East Palo Alto: Mother for Equal Education Bookstore, Inc. 1971), 3. East Palo Alto Project Archives. Not surprisingly, she justified her visible entree into the political sphere with a rhetoric emphasizing the feminine nature of her education crusade. Her group, "Mothers for Equal Education," raised funds through bake sales and published a book entitled "Recipe for a School." Her language recalls the phraseology employed by leaders of the women's suffrage movement. OEO Inspection Reports.

[37]John Partenan, letter to Sargent Shriver, 23 February, 1967. OEO Inspection Reports.

[38]John Partenan, letter to Sargent Shriver, 23 February, 1967. OEO Inspection Reports.

broader culture and economy. The emergence of a "community control" movement had splintered the East Palo Alto voice.

This flurry of letters and allegations in South County put the county government and Human Resources Commission in an awkward position. East Palo Altans had begun to support vehemently different strategies for community improvement.[39] Attempting to please simultaneously these different groups, it became obvious, was a lost cause. The "community control" program, once extended to the arena of local program administration, came into direct conflict with already-existing antipoverty programs. Thrower had been astute, when concluding his letter, to write that government would have to choose between two ideological positions.[40] To further complicate matters, the OICW conflict had assumed the form of letters and communications back and forth between groups at the community level. CAC members had not consulted with Community Action Agency director George Riley before making their allegations. Under these circumstances, county officials were ill-positioned to minimize conflict. The placation policy was proving utterly unworkable. The Human Resources Commission chose to wait out the storm in the OICW case. The commission and the OEO Regional Office renewed funding for the center in April of 1967, two months after the worst had passed.[41] But the OICW incident constituted just the first of a series of conflicts between proponents of "community control" and supporters of more traditional programming--conflicts that escalated with a growing OEO restrictiveness.

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During 1967, the OEO began to constrain the Human Resources Commission's range of programming choices. In doing so, it limited the commission's ability to mitigate racial problems through program approval. Community Action had, since late 1964, fared

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[39]It is impossible to ascertain from the remaining sources the positions of every East Palo Alto regarding OICW. The supervisors and HRC, however, mainly had to manage the extremes presented above.
[40]Charles Thrower, letter to Sargent Shriver, 21 February, 1967. OEO Inspection Reports.
[41]"HRC Grants Million to Run OICW for Next Fiscal Year," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 14 April, 1967.

poorly in Washington. As the Civil Rights movement shifted north, African-American activists had tried to involve themselves with the antipoverty programs. Although they had more success in some counties than others, news coverage and congressional testimony managed to give Community Action the reputation of a black radical program.[42] By the fall of 1965 prominent mayors protested to Johnson that the antipoverty programs had fueled attacks on local political establishments.[43] To compound matters, local programs generated few success stories, because they tended to produce unquantifiable or intangible results.[44] Top OEO officials, including Shriver, had never anticipated such turmoil.[45] In response, Shriver began to place less emphasis upon the "maximum feasible participation" clause; in San Mateo County, this move allowed the county to gain control of the program.[46] By 1966, Johnson grew increasingly disenchanted, only half-heartedly arguing against cuts in the program as Vietnam costs escalated.[47] Congress made a number of modifications to the program in this inauspicious climate. It earmarked funds for the less controversial "national emphasis" programs, established more specific criteria for management procedures and significantly reduced overall appropriations.[48] The OEO, in an effort to create good publicity, also launched expensive national "demonstration" projects in which Office staff would closely supervise project planning. With this set of changes, the OEO had moved to play a greater role in local Community Action programming while scaling back its financial commitment.

Commissioners and East Palo Alto residents both began to chafe under these restrictions in the spring of 1967.[49] Fading OEO receptivity to community-initiated

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[42]Lemann, 167.
[43]Lemann, 165.
[44]Moynihan, 168.
[45]Moynihan, 144.
[46]Matusow, 252.
[47]Moynihan, 153.
[48]Congressional Research Service, Education and Public Welfare Division, *The Community Services Administration: Programs, History and Issues: 1964-1980,* By Karen Spar, Report No. 80-121-EPW. HB 601 B1. July 15, 1980.
[49]These new directives placed new pressures on the San Mateo County Community Action Program. The changes, first of all, required the county to increase its contributions from 10 - 20% of program costs. Field representatives also informed agency commissioners that the OEO would be more likely to fund

projects and funding cuts left "community control" proponents and more traditional program supporters debating the costs and benefits of, and modifications to, pre-designed OEO programs. A few new projects did garner funding that spring, but for the most part the Human Resources Commission found it difficult to expand the county program.[50] Responding to these tensions, the East Palo Alto Community Action Council members demanded that a Stanford-sponsored Upward Bound program increase student stipends, require Stanford staff members to donate a portion of their salary to the program budget, and provide foster homes in outside communities for participating students during the year.[51] This incident in particular aggravated East Palo Altans less committed to "community control." In May of 1967, a group of residents formed the Committee for Equal Representation (hereafter CFER), which aimed to make more balanced assessments of War on Poverty programs.[52] The Human Resources Commission now needed to respond to a growing number of East Palo Alto voices and positions.

An OEO-proposed "demonstration project" inspired yet more controversy. That spring, OEO administrators decided to revive a 1965 proposal made by the San Mateo County Department of Welfare.[53] The county department had applied for funding for a Neighborhood Health Clinic for East Palo Alto well before a Community Action Program had officially existed in the county. The original proposal had called for a clinic with two doctors. But federal officials, according to a local paper, "complained that the original

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"canned" programs such as Head Start and the Neighborhood Youth Corps than locally-initiated projects. Human Resource Commissioners protested these changes. At an April, 1967 meeting they resolved to write Washington: "We must ask that any budget cuts made this year should be referred back to this commission for review and recommendations. Further, we should tell them that arbitrary cuts will be viewed with disfavor." "Bortolazzo Asks Probe of 'Poverty,'" *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 10 February, 1967; "No Effect on Mid-Peninsula Seen in Poverty Fund Cuts," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 23 November, 1966; "$2 Million EPA Health Center," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 March, 1967; "Little Folk Protesting U.S. Bureau," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 April, 1967.

[50]The Mothers for Equal Education, for example, did obtain funding that spring for a teen summer employment program.

[51]"EPA Sets Conditions for 'Upward Bound,'" *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 8 April, 1967.

[52]CFER was to be constituted by members elected from block-precincts. This group joined the Alto Park Community Council, created in 1960, and the Community Action Council. "New Community Group Formed in East Palo Alto," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 13 May, 1967.

[53]"False Claim Alleged in EPA Plan," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 January, 1967.

concept wasn't ambitious enough, and urged county representatives to 'forget about the money' and say what they wanted."[54] The new OEO design incorporated a staff of 63, including twelve doctors. Essentially, the County Health and Welfare Department would administer a federally-funded clinic in East Palo Alto, rendering traditionally private services accessible and affordable to the poor.

East Palo Alto public opinion splintered in response to the proposal. "Community control" advocates campaigned against approval because community members had not clamored for the project.[55] African-American doctors protested that this "socialization of medicine" would hurt their private practices. Other East Palo Alto residents protested that the center constituted a "ghettoization" of medical care; they preferred Johnson's 1966 Medicare voucher system, which allowed residents to see a private doctor of choice.[56] Many Human Resources Commissioners questioned the federal government's long-term commitment to the project. It seemed doubtful that, after the two years of guaranteed funding, anyone would volunteer to pick up the costs.[57] Commissioners eventually approved the proposal, but not without misgivings. They were finding it impossible to respect OEO prerogatives in addition to everyone else's.

After weathering these storms, the county Board of Supervisors began to admit that the War on Poverty had failed to alleviate county racial problems. Political in-fighting plagued existing programs at the ground level; the peaceful co-existence characterizing community and outside efforts in 1964 and 1965 had faded. The Human Resources Commission found itself fielding contradictory demands. In setting out their Community Action strategy, the supervisors had not anticipated that conflicting political programs and tactics would emerge from East Palo Alto, in reaction to the national Black Power movement. They had also failed to foresee growing OEO restrictiveness and budget cuts.

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[54]"$2 Million EPA Health Center," *The Peninsula Times Tribune.*, 3 March, 1967.
[55]This is a paraphrase of Harry Bremond's critique. He complained that the County Human Relations Commission's 1965 approval of the smaller-scale project did not constitute community acceptance this late in the game. "False Claim Alleged in EPA Plan."
[56]"$2 Million EPA Health Center."
[57]"HRC Nurses Doubt About EPA Center," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 12 May, 1967.

Placation, under such circumstances, was problematic to say the least. By June of 1967, they publicly expressed their frustration with the federal War on Poverty. Not only were programs "abortive, sporadic, and short-sighted;" the OEO also tended to grant money for "pump priming" and then withhold the water.[58] The War on Poverty was beginning to look like a bad deal for the county government.

[58]"Supervisors Call for 'Ghetto' Plans," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 28 June, 1967.

IV. *In From the Periphery*

Concerned that antipoverty programs were exacerbating county racial tensions, San Mateo County officials made some initial, modest concessions to "community control" the spring of 1967. The Board of Supervisors set up a new form of representative government for East Palo Alto, and applied for a federal program for that area specifically. Rather than quieting controversy in the community, however, these county moves became the center of escalating conflict. Civil rights moderates had, during the preceding months, grown increasingly frustrated with other leaders' tendencies to place "community control" before actual antipoverty programs. Their annoyance increased as "community control" advocates dismissed some of the new county moves. In response, moderates organized and began to vie for advisory board seats.

Meanwhile, the local and national media began to portray War on Poverty programs as sources of black power rhetoric and riots, as opposed to just victims of community power struggles. In this shifting political climate, the San Mateo County supervisors realized that they could not afford to engage with East Palo Alto political demands and grievances solely in the context of antipoverty programming. At the beginning of 1968, county officials began to allow and encourage East Palo Altans to pursue their ambitions within community, county, and national political frameworks. They invested a new East Palo Alto Municipal Council with substantive authority over local services and a voice in county decision-making, and finally permitted those frustrated with the War on Poverty to communicate directly with federal bureaucracies . Concomitant OEO overtures to East Palo Alto leaders and amendments to the Economic Opportunity Act crystallized this new arrangement.

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Following the OICW controversy, county officials made some initial, modest concessions to "community control." In March of 1967, County Manager E.R. Stallings

drew up an East Palo Alto application for the new HUD "Model Cities" program.[1] Model Cities had been billed as a way of coordinating a comprehensive attack on social and physical problems such as blight and unemployment—problems that East Palo Alto, though a suburb, shared with urban areas.[2] The federal program's urban focus provided county officials with a politically acceptable rationale for channeling funds straight to South County. Model Cities guidelines required that municipalities involve program recipients in detailed statements of problems, goals, and improvement plans. Stallings consequently proposed a de facto city council for the East Palo Alto unincorporated area; the representative body would, in lieu of an official city government, advise the supervisors on county and federal programming in the area."[3] Creation of the council and community-specific programs through the Model Cities program, county officials hoped, would divert attention from the beleaguered antipoverty programs. It would allow the community to control, at least in a limited sense, one antipoverty effort.

The Municipal Council plan pleased most East Palo Alto residents. After all, it promised to eliminate the inefficient "special district" system and increase community control over policing and other controversial services. Residents split, however, in reaction to the Model Cities application. Some applauded Stallings' move as an important recognition of East Palo Alto needs. Still more, however, rejected it as an empty ploy. Unlike Community Action, the Model Cities program placed considerable weight upon planning in collaboration with community groups. Though Stallings had made a titular concession to "community control" in the form of the Municipal Council, he had sidestepped substantive public participation from the outset. CAC head Everlyn Wallace lambasted Stallings for not consulting her group on the application contents. "He lives in Hillsborough," she exclaimed at a May CAC meeting. "How does he know anything about

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[1]"CAC Leader Splits on Request for U.S. Aid," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, 6 May, 1967.
[2]Dennis Judd, *The Politics of American Cities*, (Harper Collins Publishers, 1988), 321.
[3]*Peninsula Times Tribune*, 27 March, 1967. It is unlikely that the supervisors approved the council for any reason other than Model Cities. The unincorporated area already had two representative advisory bodies. The first, the Alto Park Council, had been formed in 1960. The second, the Community Action Council, had been formed in 1966 in order to satisfy O.E.O. participation requirements.

East Palo Alto?" When another member attempted to defend Stallings, she countered, "I will not live on a plantation!"[4] Stallings tried to defend his actions by emphasizing that he had been under time pressure. Wallace and others, however, would not be appeased. She fired off a letter to HUD, complaining that the community had not been consulted.[5] That July, the supervisors approved the Municipal Council plan, but HUD denied the county a Model Cities grant.[6] Wallace and others would rather foreswear federal funds than ever back away from the objective of "community control."

Wallace's actions added insult to injury for many East Palo Altans. As black power had gained currency, many community members had developed different and conflicting strategies for community improvement. "Community control" advocates had, for the most part, dominated the area's Community Action Council. Their tendency to nit-pick or jettison proposed antipoverty programs aggravated some more moderate community members. The Model Cities incident finally spurred moderates to take action. Tensions surfaced during local antipoverty advisory board elections; those who controlled the boards, after all, could follow their own agenda. Wilks and Wallace—who had spearheaded the OICW campaign—chose to retire from the CAC in July, just as the whole body was up for re-election.[7] The newly-formed Community For Equal Representation (hereafter CFER), composed of civil rights moderates, launched a campaign for control of the CAC and Wilks' empty seat on the Human Resources Commission. Their efforts bore fruit: twelve out of fifteen CFER candidates won seats on the CAC at the July election.[8] The new members designated Mrs. Frances Morgan, a white resident, as their representative to the county Human Resources Commission. Wilks and candidates of her political persuasion were surprised and angered by the election results, and particularly by the choice of Frances Morgan.[9] That September, they launched a counterattack. With

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[4]"CAC Leader Splits on Request for U.S. Aid."
[5]"CAC Leader Protesting Fund Plea," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 13 May, 1967.
[6]San Mateo County. *Model Cities Application.*
[7]"CAC Credited with Civic Gains," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 8 July, 1967.
[8]"'Moderates' Score Victory in HCR Vote," *The Peninsula Times Tribune.* 29 July, 1967.
[9]"Protest Due on Election for EPA Job," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 9 August, 1967.

teenage members of the "Cool It Squads"—an East Palo Alto self-policing organization—in tow, they voted as a bloc at the next "town hall" CAC meeting. They succeeded in electing their three representatives to the key working committee posts.[10] Though "community control" won in this instance, civil rights moderates had emerged as a serious political force.

Tensions between the two groups kept escalating in the context of the War on Poverty. The county Board of Supervisors finally held elections for the East Palo Alto Municipal Council, proposed the preceding spring, in November of 1967.[11] Instead of shifting the community focus away from the War on Poverty programs, the body's immediate effect was to worsen controversy. The new Municipal Council, during its first months, elevated additional community members to official, public status. Moderate William Black, elected that November, proceeded to inveigh against alleged CAC voting irregularities from his new post.[12] Black criticized a November CAC election for the OICW advisory board. Attendees of the "town hall meeting" had apparently elected three militants to the board. Having already publicized his opinions, Black brought his allegations to a December CAC meeting. His verbal attacks prompted others to turn violent. Upon his exit, Black was assaulted. He then stumbled back into the meeting hall, only to be assaulted inside as well.[13] Disagreements over strategies for racial advancement had, in the context of the War on Poverty, grown violent. Some felt antipoverty programs to be important opportunities for the community; others aspired to self-governance in whatever senses possible. At that point, the two objectives were incompatible.

While these debates were raging East Palo Alto, county officials began fretting about their War on Poverty in the "ghetto" for other reasons. Race riots had shaken major

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[10]"CAC Power Seized by Negro Militants at 'Town Hall' Meet," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 September, 1967.

[11]32% of the registered E.P.A. electorate actually participated in the election, an astonishingly high turnout in comparison with War on Poverty participation rates. From, San Mateo County. *Model Cities Application*, 1967. Part VII.A, p.1.

[12]"'Stacked Meetings' Charged," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 1 December, 1967.

[13]"Brawl Halts Menlo Park Poverty Meet," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 29 December, 1967.

cities during the summers of 1965 and 1966. The most destructive wave, however, came in 1967. Violence convulsed Newark, Detroit, Boston, Buffalo, Cincinnati, and a hundred other cities across the county.[14] With these events dominating the headlines, county residents turned a wary eye toward East Palo Alto. To the chagrin of county officials, threats of violence surfaced in connection with War on Poverty programs. By the summer of 1967, few African-American, community-based antipoverty programs had survived OEO's funding cuts and increasing conservatism. Only the "Teen Summer Project," a summer employment program run by the Mothers for Equal Education," and the Committee of the Poor's "Project INFO" flanked more standard programs such as the OICW, a Ravenswood Elementary District Head Start Program, a Legal-Aid clinic, and the Neighborhood Health Center in East Palo Alto.[15] Yet the Teen Summer Project and the Mothers for Equal Education made headlines with an alarmist local press upon several occasions that summer.

During the summer of 1967, local press reports twice linked the Mothers for Equal Education's Teen Summer Project—and by association, the War on Poverty—with black power rhetoric. In the first instance, teen tutors in the Summer Project had not received paychecks by mid-July due to OEO bureaucratic delays. When a San Francisco speaker riled up the angry teens, they threatened to riot if not paid. Faced with newspaper reports and scared constituents, the supervisors volunteered to pay the teens' salaries if federal funds failed to materialize.[16] On another occasion, papers gave full press to a policeman's allegation that the Mothers for Equal Education taught kids to "hate whitey" in the Summer Project and their independent "Day School." Black power philosophy did animate the Mothers for Equal Education programs. Yet Wilks and others had no intention of

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[14]Harvard Sitkoff, *The Struggle for Black Equality*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 187-189; Manning Marable, *Race, Reform and Rebellion*, (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1991), 92.
[15]San Mateo County, *Model Cities Grant Application*, Part II.B, p.1; Day School People, *Day School E.P.A.*, (East Palo Alto: M.E.E. Bookstore, 1970), 27. East Palo Alto Project Archives.
[16]"Commission on Race is Endorsed," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 April, 1967; "90 Negro Teenagers Cheer Militant Talk," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 14 July, 1967; "County Wants to Pay Teen OEO Teachers," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 July, 1967.

instigating riots. Rather, they considered black power to be a way of instilling confidence, cultural pride, and drive in their students.[17] Newspapers neglected to mention that the Teen Summer Project was by no means representative of county antipoverty programming; county papers simply publicized the incident and thereby helped give the antipoverty programs a black radical reputation. Newspaper coverage of the policeman's allegations prompted complaints to the county Human Resources Commission. The War on Poverty had, in this reactionary climate, become a political liability for county officials.

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The San Mateo County Human Resources Commissioners had tried repeatedly to use antipoverty programs to ease racial tensions, despite the fact that prominent East Palo Altans from the outset appealed for political power rather than services. County officials, however, did not actually accede to minority demands for political power until they became associated with violence. Widespread nervousness about the county's "ghetto" finally prompted county officials to make concessions they had avoided during the 1965 debates over program structure: granting East Palo Alto minorities a substantive role within the county political system.[18] The supervisors began by giving the new Municipal Council substantive work and allowing East Palo Alto leaders to communicate directly with federal agencies. In the process, they exposed several community leaders to political, institutional, and financial constraints upon antipoverty programming and local service provision generally.

County officials began vesting the East Palo Alto Municipal Council with important duties shortly after its initial membership election and the East Palo Alto election controversies, although they were not obliged to do so. They gave the council substantive authority on two fronts. The supervisors began to consult actively with the group on

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[17]Wilks' "blackology" curriculum consequently emphasized Negro spirituals, readings by SNCC members, as well as basic phonics. Day School People, *Day School E.P.A.*, 22-29. EPA Project Archives. Although this piece is a retrospective, it includes writings from the mid and late sixties.

[18]I am inferring county officials' motives from their actions and published comments. I have been unable to find testimony explicitly stating, however, that they made the following political changes in order to avert racial violence.

county planning decisions affecting the area, such as storm drainage plans and road widening proposals.[19] As the county manager initiated a second Model Cities application, he designated the Municipal Council as the county coordinating agency for the program. This concession of authority deviated considerably from the county position regarding Community Action two years earlier. The county manager, in the spring of 1968, proceeded to involve the council and other East Palo Alto citizens groups during the Model Cities application process—a definite change from the year before. Stallings charged citizens' committees with providing the content for most of the application sections.[20] He assigned the problem analysis sections to the staff of "Project INFO," the Committee of the Poor's federally-funded service referral center.[21] County officials had conceded a significant degree of control over program goals and proposals to the East Palo Alto community this time around. During just a few short months, the political responsibilities of East Palo Altans had expanded considerably.

The more deferent Model Cities application process and other new Municipal Council responsibilities were not just important concessions in principle. They also introduced participating East Palo Altans to the mechanics of local, county and federal relations. The application process helped contributors to clarify the community's problems and suggest solutions, a focus never achieved during the more political Community Action process. Through the analysis of citizen commentary and government documents, councilmembers and INFO staff formalized their understandings of the scope of and constraints upon existing community improvement efforts—independent, county-run, and federally-sponsored. The application authors found that most county efforts to fill service gaps East of Bayshore had been federally-financed, and that these efforts were grossly inadequate considering the scope of the problems. The application framers evaluated the antipoverty programs in light of grievances raised by community members and INFO staff

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[19]San Mateo County. *Model Cities Grant Application.* 9 April, 1968.. I.A.p. 1a.
[20]Ibid., Part I.A., p. 1.
[21]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, p. 17.

research. The process also allowed East Palo Altans to voice their grievances directly to the federal government, as opposed to having them mediated by county officials.

Research and discussion during the Model Cities application process enabled community members to evaluate War on Poverty efforts with respect to their impact on problems of concern to East Palo Alto residents, essentially forcing "community control" proponents to assess their assumption that outsiders were a priori unable to meet residents' needs. Contributors found that, despite two years of War on Poverty programming, many problem areas had yet to be addressed; in areas where programs did exist, supply could not meet demand.[22] In the field of education, the Ravenswood elementary school district administered a Head Start program. Yet residents felt Ravenswood High School to be woefully inadequate. East Bayshore residents also had difficulty reaching and affording traditional private services, such as law and health care. The OEO-sponsored Legal Aid office in East Palo Alto, the author stressed, provided essential services, but could not afford sufficient staff to meet community needs.[23] The new Neighborhood Health Center, once up and running, would be able to tackle access problems by bringing coordinated medical services closer to the target population, and making them affordable.[24] Community residents, however, also needed specialized services, unavailable in the private and inadequate in the public sector. In the field of economic development, OICW had collaborated with industry and succeeded in placing several hundred workers, but had

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[22] In April, 1968, the O.E.O. and other federal agencies funded the following War on Poverty programs in East Palo Alto:

OICW: fy 1967-1968	$780,000
Legal Services: fy 1967-1968:	$202,722
INFO Center: fy 1967-1968	$39,911
Day School: Summer Employment: fy 1967-1968	$73,117
Neighborhood Health Center: fy 1967-1968	$1,203,316
Neighborhood Youth Corps, SMC Schools Office, fy 1967-1968:	$427,000
Head Start, Ravenswood Elementary School District (6/68 - 8/2/68)	$30,418

Ibid., Part II.B, p.1.

[23] Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, p. 19.
[24] Ibid., Part III.A., Appendix A, pp.10-12.

grown politically unpopular.[25] All in all, the application process revealed that surviving War on Poverty programs constituted limited efforts to address key community problems.

The War on Poverty, however, failed to address yet other concerns. Residents, according to the INFO staffperson, still received inadequate public assistance grants.[26] OEO programs had made no inroads on the housing front, either—yet a serious problem still existed. Most residents had originally bought their homes at inflated prices during the blockbusting period. Unable to afford routine maintenance, residents had let their stock decline over the years. In many cases, banks foreclosed on those unable to make payments. [27] War on Poverty programs also failed to address policing, an issue of deep concern to residents.[28] The Model Cities application cited inadequate public transportation, especially given the suburban geography of the area and commute distances.[29] Surviving War on Poverty programs were mitigating several problems identified by East Palo Altans. They failed, however, to address low income levels, crime, or transportation difficulties, or improve the quality of the physical environment.

Application framers, through contributing to this analysis, cooly evaluated the existing War on Poverty with respect to the nature of magnitude of East Palo Alto's problems. Participating community members emerged with a better understanding of projects underway and needs still unaddressed. The application underlined the fact that the federal government had financed all inroads against service gaps in the community; the county had undertaken few efforts on its own. Proponents of "community control" could not have emerged without a sense of the value of antipoverty programs, and an understanding that program limitations were for the most part due to inadequate funding. County officials, in allowing East Palo Altans to participate in the Model Cities application process, had exposed them to the financial and institutional realities of the county War on

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[25]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, p. 21.
[26]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, pp. 17-19.
[27]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, p. 13.
[28]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A, p. 25.
[29]Ibid., Part III.A, Appendix A., p. 32.

Poverty. In the process, they also positioned community members to submit their grievances directly to the federal government. The federal government, they implied, would respond to the community's needs, while the county had an extremely limited capacity to do so. In letting East Palo Altans interact with the federal agencies, the county had made a concession of political power, but a concession that would in all likelihood make its job easier.

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New OEO policies encouraged the county to consolidate their concessions of substantive political power to East Palo Altans. The policies originated from pressures similar to those county officials had faced over the summer. Throughout 1967, the War on Poverty grew increasingly unpopular in Congress. Community Action had gained a national reputation as a black radical program, for the same reason that the county program had: the national press and congressional representatives highlighted instances in which proponents of black power had become involved with antipoverty programs[30] To make matters worse, Vietnam War costs consistently escalated, prompting many congressmen to support cuts in social programs. OEO Director Sargent Shriver had to fight for the program's life in October of 1967. The office might not have survived, had not Oregon Representative Edith Green proposed an amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act. The "Green Amendment" enabled local governments to take formal control of the thousand Community Action Agencies across the county. The revised bill also formalized community participation, requiring that one-third of all board members represent program recipients.[31] These changes, it was hoped, would erase the controversial participation issue, and rein in black power forces.

In San Mateo County, the Green Amendment and concomitant OEO administrative decisions crystallized county concessions to East Palo Alto political autonomy. First, federal officials began to cater to East Palo Alto "community control" advocates. In

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[30]Lemann, 180; Moynihan, 150.
[31]Matusow, 269-70; Moynihan, 157-8.

January of 1968, the Regional Office designated Ed Becks, head of the East Palo Alto INFO office, and Gertrude Wilks and Ida Berk as county representatives to a National Conference on Poverty in the Southwest, hosted by Sargent Shriver.[32] All three had been affiliated with the CAC's more recent black power line, and were original members of the Committee of the Poor. This federal move constituted an unprecedented acknowledgment of East Palo Alto political leaders. OEO officials, armed with the new one-third participation clause, also chose to discontinue the beleaguered OICW training program, arguing that its leadership did not comply with federal regulations.[33] They had again made an obvious concession to the "community control" set. The OEO, it seems, was courting and training the same group of East Palo Alto leaders as county officials.

The Green Amendment to the Economic Opportunity Act at first produced a bit of controversy on the county front, but by the summer of 1968 also encouraged county officials to consolidate allowances for East Palo Alto political participation. Human Resources Commissioners at first debated the implications of the amendment's requirements for increased minority participation and greater local government control. East Palo Alto commissioner Harry Bremond pushed one interpretation: he proposed a new, more extensive community organizing program to ensure that target areas could meet the stricter participation requirements. The Human Resources Commission approved and forwarded a reduced version of his proposal to the OEO.[34] The OEO, however, quickly rejected the application.[35] Since press reports and congressional representatives had blamed community organizing programs for the rise of political conflict in the ghetto, the OEO had no intentions of further identifying itself with the concept. The office, through

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[32]Ida Berk was also involved with Project INFO. "Report! Model Cities in California," *The Review of the News*, 27 November, 1968, 20. It is difficult to establish OEO's motives this late in the game. National Archive Inspection records for East Palo Alto only extend through the beginning of 1967.
[33]"Job Center Making Progress, HRC Says," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 1 May, 1968; "No Funds for Job Center," *The Peninsula Time Tribune*, 22 June, 1968.
[34]"County Plan for Poor Defeated," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 15 May, 1968.
[35]"OEO Rejects County's Fund Plea," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 30 May, 1968.

the application rejection, signaled to "community control" advocates that working within the system was their only viable option.

After this rebuff, the Board of Supervisors interpreted the OEO directives as encouragement to make Community Action and minority participation more established features of local government. In May of 1968, the supervisors finally separated county "human relations" and War on Poverty duties, a change that had been in the works for a year and a half. They created a new Economic Opportunity Commission and Agency, over which the county government would exert greater influence; its decisions could be appealed to or overridden by the Board of Supervisors.[36] They then re-enacted the county's Human Relations Commission. The supervisors also began to grant East Palo Altans even more political responsibility. When Community Action Agency Director George Riley stepped down, county officials chose Edward Becks, an original members of the Committee of the Poor and Project INFO Director, to take his place. Becks announced his agenda from the outset. "The answer," he argued, "is to bring people from the 'periphery of power' into the struggle for government programs and money."[37] Becks planned to go to battle on the national, as opposed to community or county, front. The Model Cities application process—in which he had been a key player—and OEO overtures had apparently convinced Becks to revise his "community control" approach. The Green amendment had encouraged county officials to make structural and personnel changes, which in turn gave East Palo Alto minorities the opportunity to address their own problems within the county and federal system.

By the end of 1968, "Community Action" was four years old. San Mateo County antipoverty programs had only been up and running for two years. During most of this period, program administration had been seriously compromised by power struggles between "community control" proponents and more conservative East Palo Altans. By the end of 1968, however, county officials, East Palo Alto activists and OEO administrators

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[36]"Supervisors to Control War on Poverty," *The Peninsula Times Tribune,* 23 May, 1968.
[37]"Future HRC Leader Continues Rights Battle."

finally developed a mutually-agreeable niche for the program. Antipoverty programs would no longer serve as the sole means by which the county related with its unincorporated minority community. The county would partner with minorities who wished to work toward "community control," race advancement, and poverty alleviation within the system. Working toward this end, the county began to consult with the East Palo Alto Municipal Council regarding county services and planning issues. And it began to allow East Palo Altans to bring their grievances straight to the federal government; the county was happy to give up its role as a beleaguered intermediary. The Green Amendment and other OEO changes simply allowed the county government to formalize this new arrangement. This set-up would still allow others, frustrated with programmatic constraints and loathe to cooperate with whites, to pour their efforts into independent schools, religious organizations, artistic projects, and other initiatives. Perceptions of African-American violence had finally prompted county officials to let East Palo Alto take its place within the federal system.

V. *Epilogue*

As county antipoverty programs became mired in political in-fighting and violence, county officials realized that it would be necessary to offer East Palo Alto minorities political power as well as programs. They created formal mechanisms—the Economic Opportunity Agency and the Municipal Council—for residents to use to negotiate independently with federal agencies. The supervisors also began to consult with the Municipal Council regarding county services and planning issues. These political concessions allowed East Palo Altans to voice grievances and pursue their visions of community improvement within standard political frameworks. The War on Poverty had improved the East Palo Alto lot in the political arena at least.

These and subsequent political achievements, however, proved to be mixed blessings. During the seventies, federal funding for social programs dried up, and a California property tax revolt ultimately limited county and municipal revenues. When an East Palo Alto movement to achieve "community control" within the county system culminated in the eighties, incorporation had long since become financially unfeasible. As a result, an incorporated East Palo Alto has been able to marshal few resources for an on-going War on Poverty.

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Drastic OEO budget cuts compromised existing county antipoverty programs during the late sixties and early seventies. Asked to launch new efforts such as an "Emergency Food and Medical Program" with fewer and fewer resources, the county Economic Opportunity Agency (hereafter EOA) found itself stretched too thin.[1] These pressures forced newly-instated EOA director Ed Becks to canvas for alternative funding sources almost immediately after his appointment. He first approached the cities for help with INFO Center budgets.[2] In 1970, he made appeals for private donations in county

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[1]The program was designed to spread awareness about assistance programs such as food stamps. "EOC Gets $75,000 'Aid Use' Funds," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 9 July, 1970.

[2]"EOC Requests Funds from Cities Because of Federal Cutbacks," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 4 April, 1969.

newspapers and launched a festival fund-raiser.[3] Becks even lead a fruitless 100-person plea before the Board of Supervisors for assistance with a minority summer job program.[4] Becks described the contradictory pulls upon his Community Action Agency in an Economic Opportunity Commission newsletter:

> EOC is trying to continue existing programs and develop a new profile at the same time. . . The EOC has too many small and under-funded programs. Some consolidation of existing programs would give greater operational efficiency. However, there is still the need for visible Program Activity at the community level . . . To meet the growing need and awareness the EOC will have to develop more and more local resources.[5]

Becks' pleas for local contributions went unanswered. The county apparently had little political interest in picking up federal slack. Mid-seventies OEO cuts further emasculated the county program. In 1973 Becks was forced to reduce the county EOC staff from twelve to four. That same year, federal officials transferred East Palo Alto's Neighborhood Health Center and the county Head Start program to the Department of Health and Welfare, but left the Neighborhood Youth Corps and OICW stranded.[6] The War on Poverty had wound down to a skirmish.

Community Action died a lingering death in San Mateo County. In 1975, the Community Services Administration formally succeeded the OEO, taking over supervision of surviving Community Action Agencies.[7] The San Mateo County agency—first affiliated with the Human Resources Commission, and come 1968 with the Economic Opportunity Commission—managed to secure program grants from other federal agencies for a short duration. As a result, the Economic Opportunity Agency came to preside over an increasingly disjointed hodgepodge of antipoverty programs. By 1978, the agency administered an emergency food and medical program, weatherization project, social

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[3]"County Will Back 3 Day EOC Festival," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 9 March, 1970.
[4]"Plea to the County for More Job Funds for Minorities," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 24 June, 1971.
[5]*EOC Action News*, July-September, 1972. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.
[6]"Poverty Programs: Who Goes, Who Stays." *The Peninsula Times Tribune*. 3 Apr., 1973.
[7]Congressional Research Service, Education and Public Welfare Division, *The Community Services Administration: Programs, History and Issues: 1964-1980*, By Karen Spar, Report No. 80-121-EPW. HB 601 B1. July 15, 1980.

technician training course, water conservation project, and home child care training program.[8] Economic Opportunity Commissioners allotted an increasingly small portion of this shrinking pool of services to South County during the late seventies. The mid and north-county Latino population had begun to fight for what they perceived as their fair share of the county's shrinking pool of antipoverty dollars, despite Agency Director Becks' attempts direct all animosity toward federal stinginess.[9] The Reagan revolution swept away most of the remaining programs. Federal agencies stopped requiring "community participation" in grant administration shortly thereafter; with this change, the county could administer federal contributions without input from a Community Action policy board.[10] A casualty of a national tide of conservatism, Community Action gradually faded from the San Mateo county scene. The federal government had seemingly renounced most commitments to help marginalized communities like East Palo Alto.

The county government's modest generosity faded during the seventies as well. To the chagrin of East Palo Altans involved with the Municipal Council or antipoverty programs, county taxpayers began to grumble about redistributive policies, such as county contributions toward "matching-grant" antipoverty and HUD programs.[11] Forced to make budget cuts, the Supervisors eliminated non-mandated programs, such as its "Human Relations" commission.[12] The scene worsened in 1978, when state Proposition 13 capped local property taxes. East Palo Altans had seen the writing on the wall, and rallied against the initiative. Municipal Council members and Ed Becks of the county Economic Opportunity Agency knew all too well that its passage would prompt large cuts in county

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[8]*Community Action News*, February, 1978. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.
[9]"'StepChild' Demands Training Funds," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 10 October, 1970; "Stormy Session on EOC Funds," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 27 August, 1971; "Latinos Blast County's EOC, Demand Panel," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*. 14 February, 1975; "New EOC Chief Sees Minority 'Solidarity,'" *Peninsula Times Tribune*, 27 September, 1975.; Becks' appeal: "The Chicano community is on the move. . . People who are in trouble find it easier to fight each other rather than the enemy. Oppression causes the oppressed to lose focus; with poor focus it becomes easier to attack friends and call it progress and allow oppression to thrive," *EOC Action*. July-September, 1971. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.
[10]"Change in EOC Status," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 20 September, 1982.
[11]"250 Attend Property Tax Summit," *The San Mateo Times*, 1 December, 1976.
[12]*Community Action News*, July, 1977. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

social services, especially those targeting minorities.[13] Their protests and editorials, however, had little effect. One county supervisor rationalized subsequent budget cuts in retrospect:

> We started off the 70s with the thought that we could solve all the human problems and we started all kinds of new programs, there being plenty of money, especially from the state and the feds. . . all the special interest groups got attention. . . We spent more and more money and got farther and farther away from the traditional role of local government in offering such basic services as police and fire, libraries, parks and roads.[14]

His sentiments recall those voiced before Community Action had entered the local scene fifteen years earlier. East Palo Altans were, once again, "elements" or "special interests," with no claim to tax revenues collected in other localities. Since social programs disproportionately benefited people in poorer communities, wealthier taxpayers paid more than their fair share. The federal and local fiscal foundations for "community control" in East Palo Alto had crumbled before their eyes.

Nonprofits and less formal organizations were not, in most cases, viable substitutes for federally-funded social programs. Many East Palo Altans had formed new organizations as the OEO approved fewer and fewer locally-designed programs.[15] In some cases, individuals were loathe to cooperate with whites or the white power structure. Frustrated with local educational opportunities, the Mothers for Equal Education developed the Day School, an independent school system.[16] The school began on weekends during 1966, and ran full-time by 1969. Within a few years, however, financial difficulties forced leaders to close the school. Nairobi College, an independent community college founded in 1969, thrived during the early seventies before closing as well, due to financial and

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[13]"'Poor People's Task Force' Rallies to Counter-Attack 13," *The Redwood City Tribune*, 2 June, 1978.
[14]"County's Bubble of More and More Services, Programs, Spending, Bursts," *The San Mateo Times*, 26 July, 1980; *Community Action News*, March, 1978.
[15]The description that follows is by no means comprehensive. The nonprofit sector is the most difficult to document in retrospect.
[16]The Mothers for Equal Education (M.E.E.) published several descriptions of the history and philosophy of the Day School, including: *Day School EPA*, 1970, and *Recipe for Building a School*, 1971. East Palo Alto Project Archives, Harmony House, Stanford University. For outsider descriptions of the schools, see: "Educational Revival Planned," *The Peninsula Bulletin*, 20 May, 1972; "Gertrude Wilks," *The Palo Alto Weekly*, 10 December, 1986. East Palo Alto Municipal Library, History Binders.

management difficulties.[17] "Community development" efforts flourished during the late sixties and early seventies as well. An organization called "Counterparts," an outgrowth of the Menlo Park Presbyterian community, applied white skills to East Bayshore residents' self-defined problems.[18] Their activities ran the gamut from child care to small-scale land acquisition and redevelopment. This group, however, folded as well, although not until the late seventies. A few organizations did manage to survive. Two former War on Poverty programs, for example, proved quite successful. Opportunities Industrialization Center West managed to acquire sufficient grant money after losing federal funding to stay open; the center is still in operation. East Palo Alto's Neighborhood Health Center now survives as the Drew Clinic on University Avenue. These efforts, though, are the exception rather than the rule. Due to financial and labor constraints, the independent sector has not been able to consistently provide viable alternatives to government projects and programs.

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In the face of—and perhaps in spite of—these changing economic realities, East Palo Altans pressed for more political influence and autonomy during the seventies and eighties. "Community participation" clauses had found their way into most antipoverty programs passed after the Economic Opportunity Act, including Model Cities and HUD planning grant programs. Such requirements forced the San Mateo County supervisors to set aside slots for "target area" representatives on public commissions overseeing different federal programs. In some instances, the supervisors chose to appoint residents of the coastal or North County communities instead of East Palo Altans to the "target area" seats; this was the case for significant periods with the county's CETA Council (Comprehensive

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[17]The East Palo Alto Project Archives contain a substantial number of the Nairobi College records and promotional material.

[18]On Counterpart: "Cooperation, Not Tom," *The Ravenswood Post*, 15 January, 1969; "More Black Aid Counterpart Aim," *The Ravenswood Post*, 18 June, 1969; "New Look for Nairobi Village," *The Ravenswood Post*, 9 July, 1969; Wallace Stegner, "Changes in the Black Ghetto: East Palo Alto," *The Saturday Review*, 1 August, 1970; "SM County OKs Lot Purchase," *The Palo Alto Times*, 11 September, 1978.

Employment and Training Act Council), and Housing Authority.[19] In many more cases, however, East Palo Alto residents or council members represented the community in groups such as the Alcohol Advisory Board and the Overall Economic Development Committee. The five members of the East Palo Alto Municipal Council alone comprised the county's Redevelopment Commission for several years. In addition, the supervisors chose to grant East Palo Alto representation alongside the county's cities on bodies such as the Regional Planning Commission. In 1984, after the repeal of most federal participation requirements, the county still retained East Palo Alto representatives in many posts. While East Palo Alto representatives—and poverty area representatives generally—would not have been able to dictate committee decisions, they did emerge with a much more significant political, numerical presence at the county level in the wake of the War on Poverty.

East Palo Altans pushed for autonomy as well as representation within the county political system during the seventies and early eighties. Community members utilized their Municipal Council to pursue community improvement and "community control." Council members continued to consolidate and improve local services such as policing and garbage collection during the late sixties and early seventies.[20] They also lobbied regarding county planning issues affecting the community, such as the closure of the East Palo Alto spur of the Southern Pacific line, and a proposed replacement of the Dumbarton bridge.[21] Though HUD rejected the county's 1968 Model Cities application, the council was able to tackle deficiencies in the East Palo Alto physical environment through other federal "community development" programs. Council members, for example, expended immense energy on a

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[19]In my discussion of public commission membership, I draw upon copies of: San Mateo County Board of Supervisors, *San Mateo County Boards and Commissions*, October, 1975; January, 1977; January, 1978; January, 1980; January, 1984. San Mateo County Historical Association Archives.

[20]East Palo Alto Municipal Council, *Revised Proposal for Operation of East Palo Alto Sheriff Substation.* 6 January, 1969. East Palo Alto Municipal Library, History Binders. Regarding garbage collection: "Council's Corner," *Ravenswood Post*, 14 August, 1974; "East P.A. Garbage Plan Approved," *The Palo Alto Times*. 9 May, 1974.

[21]"S.P. Plans End to Spur Line," *The Palo Alto Times*, 16 July, 1974; East Palo Alto Municipal Council, *Position Paper: The Dumbarton Bridge Controversy*, 1975. East Palo Alto Municipal Library, History Binders.

HUD "701 Comprehensive Planning Program." Matched on a 2-to-1 basis by county-financed improvements, the federal grant provided for urban planning consultant studies, housing rehabilitation, and street improvements.[22] Municipal Council members, in these efforts, expanded upon their original, already-substantive responsibilities.

Various Municipal Council members promoted "community control" through incorporation as well, building upon preceding campaigns. During 1967 and 1968, the Citizens for Self-Government and then the Legal Aid Society had applied for Community Action funds with which to push for incorporation.[23] The Municipal Council renewed the campaign, and used a black nationalist rhetoric to inspire a sense of solidarity among residents. During its first summer, the council supported an unsuccessful campaign to change the community's name to "Nairobi."[24] The Council then contracted with The Mothers for Equal Education for a "Black Liberation" flag to hang outside the Council offices, next to the California and United States flags.[25] Municipal Council members also

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[22]"E.P.A. Urban Renewal Plan," *The San Mateo Times*, 21 August, 1969; "Grant for EPA Project," *The Redwood City Tribune*, 26 March, 1971; "East Bayshore: $4 Million Plan for Area," *The San Mateo Times*. 17 August, 1972.

[23]"Human Resources Official Urges Close Look at Plans. *The San Mateo Times*. 3 October, 1966; "Report! Model Cities in California." *The Review of the News*. 27 November, 1968, 18. The story of San Mateo County Legal Aid, during the late sixties and seventies, is an interesting one. During its first few years, Legal Aid lawyers concentrated their efforts on individual client cases of bankruptcy, divorce, and landlord/tenant disputes. But as most antipoverty programming grew more conservative, Legal Aid lawyers grew frustrated with staffing shortages and impossible workloads. In 1970, Assistant Dean of the Stanford Law School and former director of the East Palo Alto Legal Aid Society, Thelton Henderson, complained that conditions had been impossible. "We can't just service poor people," Henderson emphasized. "We have to change their condition in life." Those in charge decided that the society should challenge discriminatory or unfair laws as well as serve individual clients. The society first engaged with more broadly-reaching work in 1967, when it successfully applied to undertake legal research for the East Palo Alto incorporation movement. During 1968 and 1969, the society began filing law reform suits. For example, in 1969 the society unsuccessfully challenged Article 34 of the state constitution, which required public approval of low-income or public housing before development. In 1970 Legal-Aid lawyers targeted raids of Redwood City neighborhoods for illegal immigrants. Not unsurprisingly, the Legal Aid Society grew very controversial, especially with the County Bar. For some reason, however, the program remained politically popular in Washington. It fared much better than other programs when the O.E.O. was cut. "'No One Takes Them Seriously,'" *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 6 November, 1970; "Suit Seeks to Kill Housing Vote Law," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 6 October, 1969; "Immigration Raids Illegal, Attorney says," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 29 August, 1970; "Legal Aid Fund Cut Off," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 2 May, 1970. On the late history of the San Mateo County Legal Aid Society, see the following *Peninsula Times Tribune* articles: "Legal Aid Lucky: It's Funded," 13 June, 1973; "Legal Aid Gets Its Final OEO Grant," 1 April, 1974; "20,000 May Lose on Legal Services." 14 March, 1981; "Cutting Through Red Tape," 22 December, 1992.

[24]"East Palo Alto--Or Nairobi?" *The Redwood City Tribune*, 2 November, 1968; "Renaming of Town Divides Negroes on Coast," *The New York Times*, 26 December, 1968.

[25]"EPA Orders 'Black Flag,'" *The Redwood City Tribune*, 19 April, 1972.

began requisite negotiations with the county government for legal incorporation. In 1970, the Council requested that the county's Local Agency Formation Commission study the special district structure in East Palo Alto.[26] In 1974, council candidates Gertrude Wilks and Frank "Omowale" Satterwhite revived the issue, campaigning on pro-incorporation platforms; in 1978, the issue still dominated Municipal Council races.[27] In the aftermath of county and national social welfare cuts, the East Palo Alto Municipal Council held two referendums on incorporation. Residents vehemently debated its fiscal feasibility during 1982 and 1983 campaigns. In 1982, the measure lost by a 41 vote margin, while in 1983, the incorporation initiative passed 1,778 to 1,766.[28] Opponents contested the vote, and the issue languished in courts for several more years, impeding efforts to get city services off the ground.

This realization of political participation and autonomy within the federal and county system is the extended legacy of Community Action in East Palo Alto. It embodies the culmination of African-American efforts to improve a community already marginalized upon their arrival. Incorporation, however, has proven to be a bittersweet political achievement. It did not change the overall county landscape—the coincidence of economic and political boundaries has actually been magnified. East Palo Alto simply functions differently within this political system. Without assistance from the outside, the community has scant ability to provide basic services, much less finance significant antipoverty efforts.

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Can History shed light on contemporary situations? The answer to this question is always "yes and no." As East Palo Alto enters a new era of federalism promising locally-

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[26]Staff, Local Agency Formation Commission, *East Palo Alto Governmental Reorganization Study*, 13 November, 1970. East Palo Alto Municipal Library, History Binders.
[27]"Incorporation Requires Work, Experts Advise," *The Palo Alto Times*, 26 November, 1974; "Driessel, Stamper, Wilks Chosen in EPA," *The Palo Alto Times*, 8 November, 1978.
[28]"East Palo Alto Incorporation Bid Loses by 41 Votes," *The SF Chronicle*, 14 April, 1982; "East Palo Altans Vote 1,778 - 1,766 for Incorporation," *The Peninsula Times Tribune*, 8 June, 1983.

controlled programs similar to those described in the preceding pages, it appropriate to reflect on the community's history. Local as well as federal factors shaped East Palo Alto's experience with Community Action. Knowledge of which of these local influences are still in existence, and which have faded long ago, can help residents to examine critically the constraints under which they work.

East Palo Alto's shifting relationship with the San Mateo County political establishment molded the community's experience with the War on Poverty, within parameters set by federal regulations and actions. Residents managed to secure a large portion of the county's antipoverty funds because of its economical, geographic, political and racial marginalization. These characteristics not only made the community eligible for federal funds. They also made circumstances ripe for political mobilization. Racial solidarity helped dynamic leaders mobilize the community to an extant never achieved before the community's demographic transition, and to an extent never approached in other county "poverty pockets." As riots flared across the country, county residents grew wary of this "ghetto," prompting the supervisors to make a series political concessions. Since funding dwindled so shortly after the program began, these political changes constitute the most important legacy of the Great Society in East Palo Alto.

The community's relationship with the county, however, promises to be less important this time around. The county, beginning in 1968, began to assume less and less responsibility for East Palo Alto. And now that the community has incorporated, the county is no longer required to provide it with even basic services, much less lobby for its benefit in Washington. So the county will exert less influence regarding programming content or personnel. Instead, East Palo Alto's relationship with the federal government will, at this next stage, be very important. And the area's continuing economic, geographic, and racial—now multi-racial—marginalization will continue to qualify it for federal programs. But eligibility itself will not secure sustained funding or even an adequate share of the federal pie.

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