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Race, Ethnicity and Inter-minority Suburban Politics: East Palo Alto, 1950-2002

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In December 1997, Time magazine featured an article on East Palo Alto, California entitled, "The Next Big Divide? Blacks and Hispanics square off over bilingual education – and for control of public schools." The article described an argument between African American and Latino parents at a school district board meeting which grew so heated that the police were called to break up a fight between a Latina and an African American woman who had told her to "go back to Mexico."[1]

Sitting in his living room, Victor Perez, a resident of East Palo Alto since 1987 and a former candidate for City Council, says, "Politics in East Palo Alto is not a black versus Latino issue."[2] Nevertheless, his campaign literature from the 2000 election explains that the Latino community of East Palo Alto has asked Perez and his Latino slate-mates to "step up to the plate and run for City Council."[3]

These types of contradictory messages complicate the process of sorting out how issues of race and ethnicity inform the political process of East Palo Alto, a community of approximately 30,000 residents squeezed in between the Bayshore Freeway (US 101) and San Francisco Bay. Made up almost entirely of working and lower-middle class people of color, East Palo Alto presents a demographic and socio-economic picture that contrasts starkly with the extremely affluent Silicon Valley suburbs surrounding the 2.5 square mile "minority" enclave. Are political interests and identities formed along racial and ethnic lines in East Palo Alto? This relatively simple question yields an ambiguous answer: in some cases they are; in some cases they are not.

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As a community made up predominantly of people of color, East Palo Alto reflects a new reality in American metropolitan society that historian Albert Camarillo has dubbed the "New Racial Frontier."[4] Transformations in American society have shaped the urban landscape, bringing new

groups into contact with each other. Most notably, perhaps, two major immigration waves during the world wars brought African American migrants from the South to all corners of the country, but especially to urban centers in the North and Midwest. Later, World War II provided a major impetus for many African Americans to move to new regions. Especially in the western and southwestern regions of the country, urban centers that had traditionally been the site of contact between European, Asian, and Latin American immigrant communities and their children were increasingly characterized by interactions among non-white groups. By 1990, the U.S. census revealed that several of the nation's major urban centers were "majority minority." Thus, as Camarillo observes, "relations among and between people of color increasingly define inter-group relations in the American metropolis and in many metropolitan suburbs."[5]

The rise of the so-called "urban crisis" is another change in metropolitan America brought by the demographic transformations of urban centers. A growing body of scholarship – most notably the work of sociologists William Julius Wilson and Douglas Massey – examines the array of forces that contribute to the poverty, crime, physical degradation and residential segregation that plague many of America's urban centers.[6] In his influential volume entitled The Origins of the Urban Crisis, Thomas Sugrue establishes the fundamental importance of understanding this crisis as the historical product of structural forces that combine to isolate and marginalize minorities.[7] Nevertheless, urban scholars have tended to explore the origins and nature of the urban crisis as it is experienced in cities in the northeastern and midwestern regions of the country. In many respects, however, East Palo Alto does not exhibit the same kind of residential segregation that was prevalent in other urban communities – North Philadelphia, South Chicago, East St. Louis, just to name a few. This important difference suggests the need to reframe our analysis with an eye toward capturing the implications of the spatial proximity of different ethnic and racial groups in shaping the interactions among them.[8] Indeed, most scholars who study the urban crisis are more concerned with documenting the rise of inequality and segregation than with exploring the relations between members of the "underclass." Moreover, the major portion of urban studies literature focuses on urban centers, not on the historical experience of ethnic and racial "minority" groups in suburban areas.

Perhaps most significantly, the traditional focus on "Rustbelt" cities in the Northeast and Midwest leads to an understanding of inter-group relations through the standard black/white (or majority/minority) paradigm. This model, however, does not adequately capture the complex experience of race and ethnicity in many of America's communities that make up the New Racial Frontier.[9] The social upheaval of the early 1990s in Los Angeles – and the discovery that California was rapidly transforming into a majority minority state – spurred scholars to explore the implications of demographic shifts (especially immigration) on inter-ethnic minority relations – and specifically on political culture.[10] In Racial and Ethnic Politics in California, an anthology edited by Byran O. Jackson and Michael B. Preston, several political scientists and sociologists attempt to explore how demographic shifts and urban/suburban transformations have shaped the political awareness and experience of California's minority communities, and how those minority groups have in turn shaped politics on the local, county and state levels.[11] Nevertheless, many of their insights – which clearly utilize race and ethnicity as primary units of analysis – fail to capture the complexity of East Palo Alto's political culture, which is not always parsed solely along ethnic or racial lines.

Scholars are just beginning to use the lens of history as a tool for exploring the complexities of inter-minority politics in these vanguard metropolitan societies. This paper is intended to contribute to that effort. It traces the role of race and ethnicity in shaping East Palo Alto's political culture during the second half of the twentieth century. Although race was the primary factor in the political formation and incorporation of the nearly exclusively African American community of East Palo Alto in the 1950s and 1960s, race and ethnicity can be seen as part of a more complex matrix of factors that determine political interests and identity in the East Palo Alto of the 1980s, 1990s, and today. Clearly race and ethnicity remain important factors in East Palo Alto's contemporary political arena; they also continue to shape the socio-economic reality of the community in its relationships with the surrounding region. Nevertheless, an examination of three major political issues – education, crime prevention, and redevelopment – reveals how the importance of racial and ethnic distinctions varies depending on the political context in which these distinctions may be activated or employed.

To present East Palo Alto (or any community) as a "typical" suburban community on the New Racial Frontier would be misleading. Most notably, East Palo Alto's overwhelming politicization as a hotbed of Black Power and its relatively recent incorporation as a city set it apart from other suburban communities that have a similar demographic make-up. Nevertheless, an exploration of East Palo Alto's post-War history is instructive in the development of a framework for understanding the complex nature of inter-group relations on the frontier of American metropolitan society.

Changing Demography and the Rise of Economic and Racial Inequality[12]

The history of East Palo Alto's asymmetrical relationship with the surrounding Bay Area region plays an important role in the community's current political dialogue. The roots of East Palo Alto's marginalization can be found even before large-scale migration of minorities beginning in the 1950s and continuing through the present. Since the 1850s, when the East Palo Alto region attracted its first non-native inhabitants, patterns of settlement, governance and development allowed surrounding communities to chip away at East Palo Alto's economic and geographic resources. This destructive process was compounded by racial discrimination in lending and hiring practices, which substantially affected settlement patterns and occupational opportunities as African Americans moved south from the Bay's industrial centers in increasing numbers in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, for much of the post-war era, "East Palo Alto" referred to an unincorporated area of San Mateo County without a real communal identity, its residents increasingly disenfranchised politically, socially, and economically.

East Palo Alto Before World War II: A Brief History

Originally inhabited by Ohlone Indians, and then by Spanish missionaries and ranchers, the parcel of land currently known as East Palo Alto[13] first attracted Anglo settlers during the gold rush during the 1840s and 1850s. Speculator Isiah Woods envisioned the town of Ravenswood as a potential satellite shipping center in San Francisco's orbit. However, the construction of a rival port in nearby Redwood City and the completion of the peninsula's railway from San Francisco to San Jose thwarted the plans to make Ravenswood a thriving commercial center, and the town was largely abandoned.

Settlement and construction continued sporadically during the nineteenth century and into the early twentieth, until the founding of the Runnymede Little Farms Colony by Charles Weeks in 1916. Also known as the Weeks Poultry Colony, the utopian agricultural community's population peaked at about 1,000 in the mid-1920s but dwindled considerably during the 1930s. Despite failing as a self-sustaining entity for a long period of time, the utopian community's presence did have long-term implications. Tension between Runnymede colonists and Ravenswood residents led to a bifurcated community with separate chambers of commerce and confused boundaries. They did compromise, however, in choosing the name East Palo Alto. Nevertheless, without a sense of civic identity, much less a unified governing body, East Palo Alto was passed by the 1920s movement to incorporate – part of the Progressive era's municipal reform movement to mitigate the corruption and graft of urban San Francisco – that engulfed many of the surrounding communities. Thus, East Palo Alto remained a sparsely populated, primarily agrarian community throughout the Depression era.

The Post-War Boom: Suburbanization and the Seeds of Political and Economic Marginalization

The boom produced by World War II was especially profound in the San Francisco Bay area, which served as a major hub of naval and munitions production. The war attracted thousands of job seekers to the shipyards of San Francisco, Oakland, and Richmond – most notably tens of thousands of African American migrants from the South – and spurred massive growth in the regional economy.[14] The post-war years also saw major transformations as former urbanites and newly arriving Californians fanned out over the Peninsula, many settling in the recently-incorporated municipalities that embodied the new American suburban ideal.

East Palo Alto experienced remarkable transformations during the post-war years. As its population swelled, growing from 1,500 to 1947 to 12,000 in 1953, the community shifted from a farming town into one of the few working class suburbs in San Mateo County.[15] Geographical location corresponded with relative affluence, with lower-income families concentrated in East Palo Alto, since builders "tended to construct the 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."[16] Even before African Americans arrived in significant numbers, the unrelenting structural forces of suburbanization sowed the seeds of East Palo Alto's marginalization.

Without a sense of communal identity or attachment, a significant tax base or viable civic institutions, East Palo Alto was often subject to the whims of county and state officials. It was especially vulnerable to the prerogatives of neighboring municipalities, which generally possessed a more developed sense of collective interest and identity than the working class residents living in an unincorporated area. In 1949, Menlo Park annexed Belle Haven, one of the more affluent sections of East Palo Alto, carrying with it one-fourth of the entire community's population and property value.[17] Other annexations and boundary adjustments continued through the next decade, slowly nibbling away at East Palo Alto's economic and geographic resources, especially its commercial areas and the valuable baylands region.[18] But the construction of the Bayshore Freeway in the mid-1950s proved to be the most devastating development for the community. The new highway devastated East Palo Alto's business community – of the 53 businesses forced to relocate, only five remained within East Palo Alto's borders – subjected the region to increased flooding, and perhaps most significantly, compounded the community's geographic isolation from the rest of the peninsula. As early as the 1930s, concerned residents mounted several campaigns to incorporate the community in hopes of resisting these detrimental developments, but without a true communal identity, significant politico-economic power base, or a dedicated, charismatic leadership, every attempt foundered.[19]

Racial Discrimination, Segregation and the Transformation from White to Black

The suburban boom of the postwar years also captured the newly arrived African American population. Pushed by high unemployment due to last-hired, first-fired policies, and lured by relatively inexpensive housing and the prospect of realizing the American dream of suburban middle classdom, many blacks migrated south from the industrial centers of San Francisco, Oakland and Richmond after the war.[20] Their patterns of settlement were not driven entirely by market forces, however. The Bay area's lenders, realtors and neighborhood associations engaged in racially discriminatory practices that characterized the national processes of urbanization and suburbanization.[21] These tactics contributed to a major transformation in East Palo Alto's racial make-up in the 1950s and 1960s.

Local realtors and neighborhood associations employed a variety of systematic methods to prevent African Americans from settling any mid-peninsula community besides East Palo Alto. Many area neighborhood associations adopted racially restrictive covenants. For example, in November 1954, William Diebel, president of the Palo Alto Gardens improvement association, was ousted because of his opposition to a "gentleman's agreement" to keep the neighborhood segregated by requiring that the association approve all prospective homebuyers. James Sossaman, after being chosen to replace Diebel, declared, "the people are not yet ready for the end of segregation."[22]

Beyond refusals to allow African Americans to buy or rent homes in all-white residential areas, "block-busting" was also a common practice among local realtors that contributed significantly to large-scale demographic shifts and residential segregation.[23] Real estate agencies would drive busloads of prospective black homebuyers from San Francisco and Oakland through white neighborhoods and otherwise spread the word that blacks were beginning to integrate previously homogeneous residential areas. The agencies would then follow up by knocking door-to-door or distributing pamphlets to homeowners encouraging them to sell their homes before property values inevitably plummeted.[24] Many white homeowners responded to these scare tactics and sold their homes to realtors for below-market rates. The realtors then turned around and sold these homes for a considerable profit to African American families.[25]

To be sure, not all Bay area residents, or realtors, were in favor of segregated housing. Indeed, many area community leaders and civil rights activists vehemently protested the discriminatory tactics.[26] In Palo Alto, for instance, branches of the International Labor Defense, NAACP and Fair Play Council all became increasingly vocal in their efforts to prevent discrimination in housing. Their efforts, however, failed to sway the overwhelming majority of realtors and developers to reform their tactics. A NAACP survey in 1958 found that nineteen of the twenty major realtors in the area used racially discriminatory practices.[27]

Discrimination in housing had clear implications for the racial make-up of East Palo Alto and surrounding communities.[28] By 1960, restrictive covenants and block-busting had concentrated three-quarters of the African American population of San Mateo County in East Palo Alto or the immediate vicinity.[29] In the next decade, the arrival of these new African American neighbors, as well as declining tax base – in large part the result of the geographic and commercial isolation caused by the construction of the freeway – prompted a growing number of whites to leave the community. In sum, discriminatory housing practices and white flight combined to produce a profound demographic flip-flop over a relatively short time in East Palo Alto. While total population figures remained relatively stable, the white population of East Palo Alto plummeted from 10,170 (67.7%) in 1960 to 5,574 (31.2%) in 1970, as the number of black residents increased from 2,291 (15.2%) to 10,846 (60.8%) during the same span.[30]

Racial attitudes also had consequences for African Americans in the economic sector. Although the Bay area was one of the more liberal regions of the country with respect to race relations, discrimination in hiring was still pervasive. While both whites and blacks in East Palo Alto were primarily blue-collar workers, whites had disproportionate access to skilled or professional positions.[31] In some cases, blacks were denied access to certain occupational sectors, most notably the service sector.[32] Hampered by meager educational resources and lower relative occupational or geographical mobility, most blacks settled at the lower end of an increasingly stratified occupational structure.[33]

Collectively, these structural factors had profound implications, as East Palo Alto was characterized by the conditions that Albert Camarillo collectively refers to as the "suburban crisis."[34] The community's crime rate soared in second half of the decade: in 1976, the crime rate in East Palo Alto was four times that of San Mateo County, and in 1992 the community earned the dubious distinction as the per-capita "murder capital of the United States."[35] East Palo Alto's unemployment rate ran about three times as high as the surrounding region.[36] For those who could find work, East Palo Alto's median household income of $29,206 was just 63% of the county level in 1989.[37] And almost ten years later, despite representing about 3.5% of county's total population, East Palo Alto residents represented approximately 25% of San Mateo's welfare caseload.[38] East Palo Alto's location in the heart of the booming Silicon Valley, and one of the richest counties in the nation, magnified the disparity between blight and affluence. In the 1994 fiscal year, East Palo Alto had only $4.5 million in its general fund, while neighboring Menlo Park, with a comparable population, had a general fund almost four times that amount.[39]

East Palo Alto's suburban crisis can be attributed to the long-term effects of racial discrimination and economic marginalization. A community study conducted in October 1983 connected many of the community's social and economic problems to continuing discrimination. The study concluded that the chief reasons "East Palo Alto housing prices are lower than surrounding areas . . .are high crime rates, poor schools, poor public facilities, and most importantly white prejudice against living in a minority community."[40] And a study in 1999 found that people of color in East Palo Alto – especially African Americans – still suffered from discriminatory lending practices in the housing market in the San Francisco region. For instance, depending on the type of loan, East Palo Altans were up to five times as likely to be denied a loan as their neighbors in Menlo Park's Willows area.[41]

The post-war story of East Palo Alto is of course not simply a narrative of economic, political and social marginalization. The response of East Palo Altans, as individuals and as a community, to the realities of inequality is at least as much a fundamental part of East Palo Alto's history. And that

history importantly influences how the African American community in East Palo Alto has responded – and continues to respond – to issues that arise in a new demographic context that finds a majority of East Palo Alto residents of Hispanic origin.

Demographic Change and Political Power: A Complex Relationship

African Americans moved in large numbers to East Palo Alto after World War II with visions of achieving the middle class Americans dream: a family home on a grassy plot in a nice suburb, good schools for their children, and jobs with prospects for upward mobility. Many were transformed, however, by the stark realities of inequality and marginalization. They became politicized by the racially-charged tumult and contentiousness of the 1960s, and their political mobilization and activity throughout the rest of the century was animated by a commitment to self-determination and nationalism – and in some cases, an adversarial view of neighboring communities – that remains within the black community of East Palo Alto today.

In the meantime, another demographic shift – an influx of immigrants, overwhelmingly Latinos – tipped the balance of the population in the 1990s. Unlike the transformations of the 1960s, however, the increase in the number of Latinos and other immigrants was not accompanied by an increase in their political power in proportion to their numerical dominance. And exploration of these divergent narratives of politicization and mobilization is fundamental to understanding the larger narrative of East Palo Alto's political culture.

The Roots of Racial Politicization: War on Poverty, Community Control, and Black Power

Although the political and economic marginalization of East Palo Alto can hardly be characterized as a positive development, the inequality of the fifties and sixties did succeed in galvanizing the community politically and culturally. Race and race relations provided the tonic that sparked the formation of a lasting communal identity that had long been missing in East Palo Alto. Once a settlement with no sense of itself as a political entity, and thus no real recourse to the encroachments from surrounding communities, East Palo Alto was transformed by the Civil Rights Movement – but even more importantly, the Black Power movement – into a hotbed of racialized political activism, which ultimately produced the successful movement to incorporate as a city in 1983.[42]

Many African American community members were heavily influenced by the radicalism of the 1960s, but especially by the developing theories of "community control" and self-determination.[43] President Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty programs, which were originally intended to promote "maximum feasible participation" by the communities receiving benefits, provided the impetus to spurt the community to "community action."[44] East Palo Altans formed the Committee of the Poor to negotiate with San Mateo County officials over the appropriation of War on Poverty dollars. This organization, along with a handful of church and school groups, served as one of the early mechanisms for asserting the desire for increased self-determination.

Indeed, as the years wore on and the federal programs did not appear to be winning the War on Poverty, East Palo Altans became increasingly vocal in their frustrations with county officials, who they felt were more concerned with maintaining "status quo power relations than with antipoverty programming."[45] In June 1965, the co-chair of the Committee of the Poor lambasted San Mateo County supervisors for dragging their feet in placing a member of the Committee on the county commission in charge of overseeing the implementation of the federal program. His charge that "The people are not willing to accept another colonial welfare program," became a familiar refrain in the language used by East Palo Altans to describe their relationship to the county and surrounding communities.[46] Calls for "community control" increased in force and frequency as community leaders became increasingly convinced that white county and federal officials did not really understand how to meet the needs of a black community like East Palo Alto. In 1967 a member of East Palo Alto's militant Community Action Committee (CAC), for instance, said she would rather foreswear federal funds than give up control of her own community.[47]

The frustrated reaction to the failings of the War on Poverty programs was, in many respects, an outgrowth of the zeitgeist of militancy and nationalism that was maturing in the East Palo Alto African American community throughout the 1960s. Nationally known as "Nairobi" during this period, East Palo Alto was a breeding ground of Black Power. The community served as the headquarters of several national black organizations, as well as the San Mateo County Black Action Council (SMCBAC, pronounced "smack-back"), which influenced and was influenced by national Black Panther leaders such as Huey Newton and Bobby Seale.[48] In the late 1960s, East Palo Alto hosted large-scale Black Action Conferences, each with over 1,000 attendees (all black, since whites were not allowed to attend) and appearances by national political and cultural figures.[49] Black nationalism was perhaps most prevalent in education and calls for community-controlled schooling. These years saw the founding of Nairobi Day School and Nairobi Colleges, which were community-controlled schools with curricula centered around grooming young black leaders with an activist political and social consciousness.[50] The movement for self-determination was not limited to local private schools, however, as "a militant, nearly all-black student body" at the public high school, "urged by its newspaper and supported by its community, made a number of changes in the school," including the revision of curricula and the forced resignation of the school's principal in fall of 1968.[51]

The developments of the 1960s had far-reaching consequences for East Palo Alto. The Civil Rights and Black Power movements solidified the community's identity as an Afro-centric enclave committed to black nationalism and self-determination. Although the War on Poverty was largely a failure in remedying the structural conditions that caused East Palo Alto's marginalization, it did succeed in putting some "institutional meat" on the bones of the community control movement.[52] The formation of the Economic Opportunity Agency (EOA) and especially the East Palo Alto Municipal Council (EPAMC) during the course of War on Poverty gave residents the ability to negotiate directly with federal agencies and at least marginal access to the county's power structure.[53] More significantly, perhaps, the EPAMC was a fundamental organizing and advocacy mechanism in the community's incorporation struggles during the late 1970s and early 1980s, which themselves can be viewed as an outgrowth of the 1960s movements for black power and self-determination.[54]

Clearly the incorporation of East Palo Alto as a city marked the culmination of a decades-long campaign to secure self-determination for and by African Americans.[55] Indeed, incorporation brought local political power that that community's African American leadership has yet to relinquish: for instance, with only two exceptions, every member of the City Council has been African American.[56] It would be erroneous to view East Palo Alto's African American community as monolithic, however. Even at the height of Black Power, there was never a complete consensus about how to achieve the community's goals. For example, in forming the more moderate Committee for Equal Representation (CFER) in May 1967, some community leaders sought to temper the militancy of the CAC in assessing the efficacy of War on Poverty programs.[57] The incorporation struggle in the 1980s exposed even more divisiveness within the community. Many were baffled – not to mention angry – when long-time community matron and Black Power advocate Gertrude Wilks led the campaign against incorporation. Motivated by fears that the community would not be economically sustainable, and supported by the pocketbooks of absentee landlords and propertyowners, the anti-incorporationists fought a pitched battle against cityhood.[58] In the end, the citizens of East Palo Alto voted to incorporate by the slimmest of margins on June 6, 1983 – the measure passed by only 15 votes. These divisions within the overwhelmingly African American community portended many of the political struggles that were to characterize East Palo Alto's landscape.[59] Incorporation was indeed "bittersweet political achievement."[60] Cityhood represented the culmination of a hard-fought battle by the residents to control their community's destiny; they were no longer a colony or a "stepchild" of San Mateo County or the surrounding communities.[61] However, incorporation also represented the removal of a common adversary, and thus a mechanism to maintain community solidarity. The destiny of the city, or so it seemed, would have to be decided within the confines of East Palo Alto's local political landscape that had not entirely healed itself from the wounds of the bitter incorporation struggle. And what that destiny would be – and how it would be achieved – were in some cases highly contentious issues, especially in the context of the impending demographic shift.

The Second Demographic Transformation: Formation of a Multi-ethnic Society

East Palo Alto experienced another major demographic transformation during the 1980s and 1990s. The influx of immigrants – overwhelmingly from Latin America, and especially from Mexico – was a part of larger patterns of international immigration. The 1965 Immigration Act had the unintended consequence of allowing for mammoth increases in the numbers of Latino and Asian immigrants entering the United States, and California in particular.[62] During the 1950s, 600,000 immigrants came to the United States from Latin American and the Caribbean; by 1990, that number ballooned to over 3.5 million.[63] In conjunction with high fertility rates among the Latino population, immigration contributed to a 35% percent increase in San Mateo County's Latino population between 1990 and 2000.[64] Attracted by the relatively stable Bay area job market and comparatively "inexpensive" housing in East Palo Alto, many Latinos migrated to the community. Preliminary ethnographic evidence reveals that some of the immigrants intended to work temporarily and then return home but decided to stay in the United States in order to provide better educational opportunities for their families.[65]

For many, previous community and familial ties figured prominently in their decision to immigrate. Extended families and friends would immigrate together in order to reconstitute their communal ties in their new community. Attracted by relatively low rents and good job prospects, one family would immigrate, "and then it didn't take much for extended family to get their cousin's cousin here and their uncle's uncle. And there were friends who did the same thing too."[66]

Discriminatory renting practices also helped concentrate Latinos in certain apartment complexes. The executive director of the East Palo Alto Community Alliance & Neighborhood Development Organization (EPA CAN DO), a non-profit neighborhood housing corporation, observed in 1996, "I know there are several landowners that prefer to rent to Latinos because they believe they would not exert rights on rent gouging or poor maintenance conditions – partly, I think, because they perceive Latinos may have problems with citizenship."[67] Some of the apartment complexes experienced a near-complete turnover in population. For example, the 2000 Cooley Avenue apartment complex was inhabited predominantly by African Americans prior to the 1980s. Over time, the complex was transformed into a Latino enclave, with all the trappings of a rural Mexican village. Ruben Avelar described 2000 Cooley as "a community within a community"; the complex was "self-sufficient, self-contained," with its own food vendors, herbalists, and other service-providers.[68]

An outflux of African Americans during this period also contributed to the demographic transformation of the community. A thriving drug trade and rampant crime convinced many it was time to move elsewhere.[69] The booming real estate industry in the Bay area provided an additional impulse for black homeowners to "cash out" and move away. Unable to afford homes in the surrounding suburbs of the opulent Silicon Valley, many capitalized on the "sky-high home prices" of the mid-peninsula by selling their home and relocating to the less expensive communities growing in the Central Valley.[70] Others, especially retirees, chose to return to their home states in the South.[71]

At the same time, many Latinos, who were more inclined to pool their resources among extended family members and friends, jumped at the opportunity for homeownership. Ruben Avelar, a "lifetime resident of East Palo Alto," estimates that 70% of the homes purchased in the early 1990s were bought by people with Spanish-surnames.[72]

In many cases Latinos have settled in apartment complexes and neighborhoods that traditionally housed African Americans, yet the demographic transformation of the preceding decades cannot be explained as the simple replacement of African Americans by Latinos. The emigration of African Americans has clearly altered the demographic make-up of the community, the increase of over 8,800 in the Latino population from 1990 to 2000 (an increase of over 100%) far out-strips the decline in the numbers of African Americans – the figure dropped by 2,580 – during the same span.[73] This numerical disparity can be explained in large part by the tendency of Latinos to live in larger households than other ethnic groups. The state-wide average household size in 2000 was 4.06 for Latinos and 2.53 for non-Latinos. In East Palo Alto, the average Latino household had 5.92 residents.

The following table illustrates how, even though East Palo Alto's housing stock increased only minimally, more and more Latinos were crowding into existing structures.[74]

Average Household Sizes according to U.S. Census 2000, East Palo Alto and SF Bay Area

(Source: San Francisco Chronicle, 24 April 2002)

Latino

White

Black

Asian

E.P.A. Renters

5.82

1.96

2.99

2.84

E.P.A. Households

7.02

2.32

3.21

3.48

Bay Area Average

3.90

2.31

2.69

3.16

East Palo Alto has thus transformed into a multi-ethnic city. Although many of the apartment buildings remain as "pockets" of ethnic concentration – the Cooley apartments, for example – the vast majority of the city does not exhibit the traditional signs of residential segregation that exist in many of America's metropolitan areas. Since almost all of East Palo Alto's housing stock consists of detached single-family units, Latinos, Pacific Islanders and other groups have fanned out and integrated into all corners of the community. Georgina Peraza proudly noted, "I get out of my door and I see people from five different countries."[75] As these new arrivals established an economic toe-hold, local businesses such as La Estrellita and El Bohemi began to dot East Palo Alto's commercial landscape. Thus, unlike the previous demographic transition of the 1950s and 60s, which left blacks and whites geographically and socially segregated, these more recent demographic changes have facilitated many points of inter-ethnic cultural and social contact. The relatively compact size of the community – 30,000 residents squeezed into 2.5 square miles – means that Blacks, Latinos, Asians, and many other groups live and work in close proximity in East Palo Alto.

Disproportionate Political Power: Latinos and the Struggle for Political Influence

The shifts in the demographic make-up of East Palo Alto since the 1980s have not had parallel effects on the city's political leadership structure, however. Despite their growing population figures, Latinos and Pacific Islanders have not achieved political representation in proportion to their numbers.[76] This disproportionality is especially evident with respect to East Palo Alto's Latino population, who have scant representation on the city's boards and commissions despite comprising well over half of the community's total population and representing an important economic presence.[77] Many, especially members of the newsmedia, point to inter-ethnic conflict as the source of the "Latino leadership vacuum."[78] The argument runs that city officials have contributed to the lack of Latino representation by failing to appoint more non-blacks to city commissions. In one oft-cited example, frustrated citizens contend that the City Council had an opportunity to appoint a Latino to replace Councilmember Nevida Butler when she resigned in 1993, but instead opted to hold a special election to fill the position, which Myrtle Walker, an African American, won.[79] A similar episode in 1999, when the council passed over 20-year Latina resident Belinda Rosales in favor of African American civic activist Pat Foster, elicited a comparable reaction.[80] Newspaper headlines track East Palo Alto's political landscape as the site of a "battle for influence" over the "soul of a city." Indeed, many African Americans – with the memories of the struggles of previous decades fresh in their minds – are reluctant to yield politically to the newer arrivals. Barbara Mouton, a long-time activist and the city's first mayor, says, "They want us to hand them something on a platter? Nobody handed us anything. Everything we got we had to struggle for." The response from some Latinos is predictable: "I know how the African-American community . . . fought so hard for the power they have. . . .But why don't they want to share it with us?"[81]

There is no doubt that these ethnic differences can serve as important political dividers. Nor is this a new phenomenon in East Palo Alto: the resistance to the economic and cultural changes brought by large-scale Latino migration were preceded by the white resistance to African American migration in the 1950s and 60s, and by African Americans themselves in the 1980s when they chafed at the arrival of several hundred Vietnamese refugees.[82] The salience of race in collective memory – especially when, as in East Palo Alto, it has been so fundamental to shaping political identities – allows ethnic and racial distinctions to acquire prima facie analytical – and indeed, political – import. Ruben Avelar identifies a general perception among many East Palo Altans that "a lack of leadership that represents them . . . in the physical sense – I'm talking about race, ethnicity" translates into the "sense that they are not being heard; they don't have someone to represent their needs."[83] Thus, it is easy to develop an understanding of East Palo Alto's political landscape as an arena that pits blacks versus browns in a fight over institutional resources and power like the fight decades ago between blacks and whites.

Nevertheless, inter-ethnic tension is not the only explanation for the lack of Latino political representation. Latino community leaders have historically had a difficult time in organizing Latinos as a political bloc. For example, despite the effort to bring together the disparate political and cultural constituencies of the Latino community (e.g. church organizations, business people and service providers) under the umbrella of the Latino Community Council, the effort for the most part has foundered.[84] To understand why this effort has not yet succeeded – to grasp why, as Marcelino Lopez notes, East Palo Alto's Latinos are "the sleeping giant, but it is hard to wake us up"[85] – requires a broader examination of the character of Latino life in East Palo Alto, and its implications for the community's political mobilization as a group.

Citizenship[86] is a primary factor in inducing that "slumber," not just in East Palo Alto, but also across the nation. As political scientist Harry Pachon argues, "Over 80 percent of the difference in voting between Latinos and black Americans can be explained by noncitizenship among Latino adults."[87] Indeed, once Latinos become naturalized, their political participation appears nationally to be higher than other ethnic groups; however, studies have also shown that Latinos have lower naturalization rates than other groups.[88] Although census data on citizenship are not yet available for 2000, the high numbers of documented non-naturalized foreign-born residents of East Palo Alto in 1990 (almost 6,000), and the increasing numbers of non-citizens in the subsequent decade, suggest that a very large portion of East Palo Alto's immigrants cannot yet vote.[89] Many of East Palo Alto's Latinos are undocumented immigrants, which makes them especially hesitant to engage in any kind of political activity. The worry that a public comment – or even a public appearance – might jeopardize an individual's ability to remain in the community gives many immigrants pause before taking any action that might call attention to themselves, including political action. Leo Chavez's ethnographic study shows that many undocumented immigrants see attempts to involve themselves in their community as futile, since their undocumented status generally serves to undermine attempts to integrate them politically and economically into the mainstream community.[90]

Although obviously primary factors in determining Latino political mobilization, citizenship and legal status are only parts of a larger cultural insulation that hampers efforts to formulate a "Latino political agenda."[91] Dee Uhila, a prominent Pacific Islander activist, articulates the challenges faced by any recent arrival, not just Latinos: "any time you go to a new country, it's obvious that you're a newcomer, you don't know the system, you don't know the politics, you don't know the system, you don't know the politics, you don't know the language . . . you're not going to be an activist."[92] It is clear that the language barrier, compounded by unfamiliarity with a new and seemingly complex political system, has undoubtedly hampered political participation, even for American citizens.[93] For example, Victor Perez contends that the absence of a ballot in Spanish and polling staff with bilingual skills acted to disenfranchise many Latino voters in the 2000 election.[94]

Voting aside, however, it is not entirely clear that all Latinos desire to be a part of East Palo Alto's political process in the first place. As Miguel Tirado observes on a national level, for many immigrants from Mexico, where the majority of East Palo Alto's Latinos originate, "the memory of political corruption and instability and Mexico . . . was so deeply ingrained in their psyches that it was only natural these early immigrants carry this abhorrence for politics with them and transmit it to their offspring."[95] It is not surprising, then, that many members of East Palo Alto's Latino population, which hails overwhelmingly from the rural province of Mexican Michaocan – and from Central American countries that suffer from enormous political unrest – arrived with a "hands-off attitude towards government."[96]

The difficulties of organizing the Latinos as a bloc are perhaps best illustrated by the results of the November 2000 City Council election. Three Latinos – Evarardo Luna, Victor Perez, and Jose Beltran – ran as a slate. Even though most Latinos were not politically active, many community members assumed that the estimated 1,600 registered Latinos would provide more than enough electoral firepower in a crowded race where a little over 1,000 votes were needed to ensure a spot on the City Council.[97] The electoral tally of 660 for Victor Perez, the slate's top vote-getter, was an indication that Latinos were hesitant to move as a monolithic political bloc.[98]

A conversation with Victor Perez, a member of the three-member Latino slate that ran unsuccessfully for city council, illustrates how the substantive merits of the issues dominated ethnicity as an issue. Perez and his running mates had tried to inject ethnicity as an important factor in the race.[99] He commented that if a Latino had been sitting on City Council, the controversial IKEA development project would never had been pursued.[100] Perez agreed, however, that if an African American or Tongan or Vietnamese opponent of IKEA had been on the Council, the project also would have not been pursued. He also said that he would not have voted for Marcelino Lopez, a Latino who favored IKEA. Perez affirmed that the politics of race and ethnicity in East Palo Alto are complex, and are intertwined with the politics of the underlying issues confronting all groups in East Palo Alto, not just Latinos:

Interviewer: So in disseminating campaign literature that appeals to Latinos as an ethnic group – as a political bloc – you were taking a calculated risk that the majority of the Latino population would agree with your political views, which aren't necessarily related to being Latino.

Perez: Yes.[101]

Accordingly, it seems prudent to conduct an analysis "issue by issue" in order to determine when and how political issues in East Palo Alto are parsed along racial and ethnic lines, and indeed, if political interest and identities are forged along those lines at all. This evaluation may, in fact, compel us to reconsider the use of race as the primary unit of analysis in understanding the politics of East Palo Alto.

Education, Law and Order, and Development: Unraveling the Politics of Race and Ethnicity

As is the case with all communities, East Palo Alto's political culture is the result of the city's unique history. In the case of East Palo Alto, structural forces that serve to marginalize the community economically, geographically and socially continue to provide impediments to equality and growth. Combined with these external factors, the divergent narratives of politicization that define the different groups in East Palo Alto shape how these groups engage in the city's complex, and often contentious, political discourse. The general inclination – among scholars, the media, and the public at-large – is to parse political issues according to racial distinctions. This approach involves the implicit appropriation of the standard black-white/majority-minority construction of racialized politics. However, if we look at three main political issues in East Palo Alto – education, crime prevention, and development – it is clear that this framework is not adequate to capture the complexities and contradictions of East Palo Alto's contemporary political culture. In exploring these issues, inter-ethnic tensions surfaces, but so does inter-ethnic cooperation. Through an issue-by-issue analysis, we can conclude that the relative salience of racial or ethnic distinctions depends on the political context in which they are employed or activated.

Education in East Palo Alto: "Fighting Over Crumbs"

The struggles of the Ravenswood School District[102], which includes East Palo Alto and some of the lower-income areas of Menlo Park, are not surprising when viewed in the light of the community's historical marginalization. East Palo Alto's school system suffers from a lack of funding, which translates into a host of problems: lack of special education and bilingual teaching resources, and low teacher salaries, which many view as leading to low test scores, high teacher turnover rates and even higher high school drop-out rates. Not surprisingly, frustrated parents have demanded results for their children, and the struggle over meager resources has pitted different groups against one another in recent years, making education a site of inter-ethnic tension. In more recent years, however, as disgruntlement with the school district's administration has grown more common, parents of different ethnicities have self-consciously cooperated in a an effort to develop a more unified expression of their grievances.

In many respects, the woes of the Ravenswood district can be seen as reflective of the problems facing the entire state. The availability of revenue for California's public schools has been limited since the passage of Proposition 13 in 1978, which limits the collection of property taxes and district

allocations.[103] Although this restriction on funds was mitigated somewhat by Proposition 98, which amended the state's constitution in 1988 to establish a minimum annual education expenditure level, California still lags behind most states in education funding. In 1998, California ranked 48th among states in "school finance effort," or school spending relative to per-capita income.[104] The state's "under-investment" in education is widely viewed as the primary cause of a chronic statewide teacher shortage.[105]

A lack of qualified staff also compounds another major education issue in California: the growing demand for bilingual education. In 1997, 1.3 million children in grades K-12 were classified as "limited English proficiency" (LEP) students, and their numbers are increasing as more immigrants enter the state.[106] There are not enough teachers capable of bilingual instruction, and efforts to bring LEP students up to speed are further hampered by the passage of Proposition 227, which limits the amount of classroom time instruction that can be conducted in languages other than English.[107]

These statewide concerns are aggravated in low-income, predominantly "minority" communities such as East Palo Alto. Districts with the most needy schoolchildren have the hardest time finding qualified teachers. In 1995, the California legislature passed a measure designed to reduce class sizes, offering extra funding to districts that could shrink pupil-to-teacher ratios for K-3 classrooms to 20-to-1. In the ensuing scramble to hire new staff, many teachers left low-income urban areas for better-paying positions in suburban schools, robbing the underprivileged districts of the state bonus, not to mention some of their most qualified teachers.[108] Thus, inferior funding and staffing shortages are mutually reinforcing factors embedded in the historical cycle of marginalization of low-income minority communities such as East Palo Alto. As Gary Orfield contends, the upshot is inferior resources and a substandard curriculum: "Low-income minority students are concentrated in schools within metropolitan areas that tend to offer different and inferior courses and level of competition, creating a situation where the most disadvantaged students receive the least effective preparation for college."[109]

These recent actions simply do not address the economic, social and geographic marginalization that produced East Palo Alto's troubled education system in the first place. Opened in 1958, East Palo Alto's Ravenswood High School exhibited the detrimental effects of the community's isolation and racial segregation that developed during the 1950s and 1960s.[110] "I felt like Ravenswood was the isolated stepchild of the district," recalled one former student body president.[111] Cut off from the rest of the district by the Bayshore freeway, lacking adequate funding and resources, Ravenswood simply could not pass muster. Indeed, the quality of education was so bad at Ravenswood that some families initiated a "sneak out" program in which East Palo Alto parents would list the residence of their children in one of the surrounding affluent communities so that their children could attend better schools. The program was later given official sanction as the "Tinsley program" in an effort to combat racial segregation in mid-peninsula schools.[112] Other methods were employed in attempts to integrate Ravenswood, where the student body was 94% African American in 1970, and improve the quality of education. In 1971, a voluntary busing program managed to drop the proportion of African American students to 51%. In addition, the district, in a program designed to re-make Ravenswood as a "model school," encouraged some of its best teachers to transfer to the East Palo Alto campus. Despite these efforts, student performance continued to stagnate, and as the interest in transferring voluntarily from an affluent neighborhood school waned, enrollment declined. Facing budgetary deficits and the need to combat the school's terrible public image, the district elected to close East Palo Alto's only high school in June 1976.[113]

Conditions did not improve in the ensuing decades, as a shrinking tax base continued to dry up the already modest funding for East Palo Alto's local schools. In some cases, the public schools were so poor that the district elected to relinquish control of them in favor of privately managed charter schools. And again, East Palo Alto's location in the heart of the booming Silicon Valley only highlighted its relative deprivation – in the 1992-3 academic year, Ravenswood spent $4,161 per pupil, while the nearby Palo Alto Unified School District spent over 50% more per student.[114]

The statewide teacher shortage also hit the Ravenswood district especially hard, as budgetary constraints made the district unable to compete with neighboring communities for qualified teachers. In 2001, the salary for a teacher in a Ravenswood school ranged between $35,811 and $66,667; in

Palo Alto, the average salary was over $65,000. Ravenswood's astronomical turnover rate – the district has consistently lost approximately 50 teachers annually, which is nearly 25% of the total teacher cohort – illustrates the district's inability to attract and retain qualified teaching personnel.[115] Many teachers are hired on a temporary basis, often working without official credentials.[116]

The disparity in resources had predictable results. The majority of Ravenswood's students continued to score below grade level on statewide tests. In 1999, Ravenswood's third and eighth graders scored in the 21st and 26th percentile, respectively, in reading on the statewide STAR test; students in those grades in neighboring Palo Alto scored above the 80th percentile. In 1997, East Palo Alto had a seventy percent high school dropout rate.[117]

Not surprisingly, frustrated parents have expressed their anger with the Ravenswood school administration in a variety of ways. Differences in educational priorities have also pitted different groups against each other in a struggle for Ravenswood's meager resources. Bilingual education is one issue that has African Americans and Latinos "fighting over crumbs."[118]

Ravenswood was largely unequipped to handle the rapid influx of immigrants in the 1980s and 1990s. As the Latino student body ballooned from 1,051 (31.8%) during the 1987-88 school year to 3,244 (61.8%) in just ten years, it became increasingly clear that Ravenswood lacked the institutional resources to provide for the new students' needs, and funding for bilingual education became an increasing source of tension in the community.[119] Latino parents, although generally hesitant to mobilize politically, found a common interest in the cause of bilingual education and filed a complaint with the state department of education in April 1997, identifying Ravenswood's bilingual programs as "insufficient, inappropriate, or inadequate."[120] Many Latinos argued that a school administration dominated by African Americans was uninterested and unable to meet the needs of Latino children. African American parents, for their part, recoiled at the thought of being served an even smaller slice of the district's already diminished pie. Noting that on average the district spent $2000 more per pupil on LEP students in 1997, African American parent Evan Moss commented, "The school district is spending an awful lot of money on bilingual education when it could be used to educate all children."[121] Many black parents worried that new bilingual programs would sap resources from the district's Ebonics programs, which although not as nationally known or controversial as nearby Oakland's plan, had been in place in East Palo Alto since 1981.[122]

The comments of beleaguered Ravenswood Superintendent Charlie Mae Knight reflected the tension brought by the recent demographic shift. With the influx of Latinos, she had "rushed out and hired all these native-born Spanish-speakers because parents came to me and said they wanted teachers who reflect their community. Now I have black folks coming to me and saying, 'Our children aren't fluent in English either.'"[123]

Ethnically-based political differences were also a product of divergent visions of the proper remedy for the district's general performance, which were themselves informed by each group's different politicization narrative. In the highly publicized case of Emma C. v. Delaine Eastin in 1996, parents of disabled students – African Americans, Latinos and Pacific Islanders – sued the Ravenswood district and the state Board of Education for failing to provide adequate special education programs, resources and staff for their children. Federal District Court Judge Thelton Henderson ordered the district to develop a comprehensive Corrective Action Plan (CAP) to remedy the deficiencies in the special education program within two years. A lack of funding, however, forced Ravenswood officials to "engage in an exercise of educational triage," falling short of the standards of improvement decreed by the court. On August 22, 2001, Henderson declared Ravenswood in contempt of court for failing to reform its programs, but he did not go so far as to order the state to take over the troubled district.[124]

In October of that year, Latino parents carrying American and Mexican flags demonstrated outside the offices of Superintendent Knight and the school board, protesting the court's decision to leave in place an administration that failed to meet the needs of the district's students – not just special education students. African American parents, however, were wary of outside encroachment. Still concerned about issues of self-determination and

community control, many blacks, despite the district's problems, continued to urge that "accountable local . . . leadership" was the best solution for East Palo Alto.[125]

Nevertheless, despite the historic tensions between the Latino community and the African American school administration over allocation of scarce resources, recent developments have witnessed a growing spirit of inter-ethnic cooperation in the community. In January 2002, the predominantly African American school administration hired a Latina deputy superintendent. Two months later, parents of various ethnic backgrounds joined together to develop a plan to make positive changes in the school's administration without abandoning local control. As part of the seven-year, multi-million dollar One East Palo Alto/Neighborhood Improvement Initiative – a community revitalization project designed to bring residents together to mobilize and strengthen the community – representatives from East Palo Alto's African American, Latino, Pacific Islander and Caucasian communities formed the One East Palo Alto Education Committee to promote parental involvement in the education of the East Palo Alto's schoolchildren.[126] In March 2002, the Education Committee met in an effort to reconcile the divergent visions of educational improvement that will provide for a change in "district leadership without losing control of their schools." Although members of the committee – and the community at-large – still disagree over the wisdom over a state take-over, many residents were still excited about the prospect of "Latinos and African Americans sitting together at one table" in an effort to forge a unified statement about the future of education in East Palo Alto.[127]

Crime in East Palo Alto: A Community Crisis (and Catalyst)

East Palo Alto's tremendous crime rate has understandably been at the center of the community's consciousness, politically and otherwise. Sharifa Wilson relates a story told by a woman addressing city council in the early 1990s. "One of the things she said was that her daughter slept in the bathtub because she afraid of bullets were going to come through the walls during the night." In the "Dreams of a City" video, several residents describe drive-up drug deals that transpire in broad daylight.[128]

East Palo Alto's problems with crime, like its problems with education, historical roots in the community's structural relationship with the surrounding region. And the major point of contention has also been one of jurisdiction: whether the city itself or an outside body should be in charge of the city's crime prevention program. However, unlike the debates over remedies for the community's educational woes, the major differences of opinion over how to maintain law and order has not been drawn along racial or ethnic lines.

East Palo Alto's troubles with crime and police protection did not originate its incorporation as a city. Stunted economic growth and widespread poverty during the 1960s and 70s – in part a product of annexations and a discriminatory job market – contributed to high crime rates in East Palo Alto throughout the second half of the century.[129] Drug dealers capitalized on the relative lack of vigilance by the San Mateo County Sheriff's Department, which was responsible for patrolling and protecting the unincorporated area. Long-time resident Bob Hoover recalls how drug dealers maintained a "hub" of activity in a house directly across the street from a sheriff's sub-station. "We in the community knew who the drug dealers were. Why couldn't the police department do something about it?"[130] Many residents felt that the sheriff's deputies viewed East Palo Alto as a "low-priority" area compared to the more affluent surrounding areas and provided poor service to the community. Some even recall deputies refusing to patrol the most crime-infested sectors of the city.[131] Community control of a local police department, designed and administered to meet the needs of East Palo Altans, became a major selling point of the incorporation movement of the late seventies and early eighties.

Although incorporation realized the vision of a locally-controlled police force, cityhood did not bring about a decrease in crime. To the contrary, the city's economic struggles only contributed to the newly-minted police department's inability to fight crime effectively. The cyclical pattern that kept quality police officers out of a community that needed them most bore a striking resemblance to the conditions of the community's educational system. The loss of valuable commercial land to annexations and the significant economic "leakage" of taxable consumer sales to surrounding cities

left the city without a sufficient tax base to provide vital resources to the community. Even though the police force received top priority in terms of funding, the city's "perpetual financial crisis" took its budgetary toll.[132] Comparing budget figures from 1998 illustrates a pattern that had persisted for fifteen years: in that year, East Palo Alto could afford $3.5 million for 41 officers, while Menlo Park, a neighboring city with comparable population figures but a much stronger economic base and a lower crime rate, budgeted twice as much money to pay for 49 officers.[133] A lack of revenue left East Palo Alto constantly relying on state grants for funding, but the East Palo Alto Police Department (EPAPD) still had the worst salary and benefits package in the county.[134] Thus, much like the Ravenswood school district, the EPAPD suffered from a terrible turnover rate – seventeen officers – over forty percent of the entire force – left in 1998 alone.[135]

As in the case of education, a lack of funding and qualified personnel had predictable results for the Police Department. East Palo Alto's crime rate soared in the eighties. The introduction of crack cocaine as a major drug influence in the 1980s was especially devastating, as the weakness of the EPAPD made it feasible for drug dealers to establish the city as a hub of the peninsular drug trade,[136] and made it infeasible to prevent or even reduce the gang-related violence that came with it. By 1991, the city's drug problem had become so terrible that Councilmember Bill Vines declared that the "crisis situation" warranted a declaration of a state of emergency in the city.[137] East Palo Alto's crime woes only worsened, however, as forty-two homicides in 1992 earned the city national renown as the per-capita "murder capital" of the United States. Although regional police efforts during the mid-1990s were successful in stemming the murderous tide and cracking down on drug dealers, East Palo Alto's crime rate still remains one of the highest in the state.[138]

Not surprisingly, serious budgetary constraints produced serious personnel deficiencies within the East Palo Alto police force. Civil grand jury investigations conducted at various points during the 1990s often found that the EPAPD suffered from "low morale and internal problems." Adopting the "least expensive hiring practices possible," the EPAPD attracted "officers who have been denied by other law enforcement agencies because the applicants [could not] meet the test standards of those departments."[139] The transgressions of these officers – which included excessive force, sexual harassment, and involvement in the drug trade – were often catalogued in local newspapers.[140] Angry citizens also complained that these incidents, beyond representing the negligence and delinquency of the police force, had the additional cost of sapping much-needed funds from the city's coffers to pay the damage awards resulting from police malfeasance.[141]

Although education and crime prevention are linked insofar as they are both a product of historically-based financial and personnel problems, the majority of the grievances leveled at the EPAPD were not racially or ethnically charged. To be sure, many identified the need for the police force to reflect the changing demography of the community – the grand jury reports echoed some of the citizens' calls for the city to hire more Latino officers.[142] However, the overwhelming majority of East Palo Altans correctly observed that the EPAPD's problems cut across ethnic and racial lines. The infamous "Wolf Pack," a corrupt cohort of officers known for their unethical conduct and propensity for using excessive force, was made up of police officers of all races and ethnicities, and they do not appear to have targeted any ethnic group in particular.[143] Evarardo Luna, a former member of the city's Human Resources Commission, notes that the Latino officers were just as bad as the rest of EPAPD's officers. He recalls a story in which a Latino officer pulled him over and attempted to provoke a fight. Luna, who was ironically a cadet with the county sheriff's department at the time, complained to some of his friends on the police force about the encounter, "I always saw him as a role model, [but] it's guys like him who give you guys a bad name. . . .He's nothing . . . to me now."[144] Indeed, although some residents maintain that the media has exaggerated the city's problems with crime,[145] it is clear that a majority of the residents were unified, regardless of race or ethnicity, in their frustrations with the police department.[146] And while community members were divided in their views of the proper course for the city to improve the quality of law enforcement, those divisions do not appear to have followed – or to be motivated – by ethnic or racial differences.

Many residents viewed the persistence of East Palo Alto's crime epidemic as resulting from the failure of local law enforcement efforts and concluded that an effective solution required the help of those beyond the city's borders. In 1991, the San Mateo Civil Grand Jury recommended that the "East

Palo Alto Police Department should be dissolved and police services in East Palo Alto should be supplied by an independent agency" if the city could not "correct the deficiencies" of the EPAPD "within a reasonable time."[147] Years later, as the city continued to be plagued by crime, many felt they had waited longer than a "reasonable time" for an effective police force. Some viewed the city's inability to maintain law and order as a symptom of larger governmental problems, and called for the City Council to relinquish control of the city government to the county or to an outside trustee; some even suggested allowing Menlo Park or Palo Alto to annex the entire community.[148] Some residents also expressed frustration that outside authorities did not make good on their recommendations to take over the reigns of East Palo Alto's crime prevention program.[149] For example, long-time resident Henry Salas finds the county culpable for the city's crime problems: "Take the police out of here. It's the county's fault – they don't step in. They've still got these cops out there . . . and three-quarters of the guys are rejects. The state's coming in after the schools; why can't the county come in to take over the city?"[150]

Advocates of external control pointed to the success of previous regional cooperative programs in achieving measurable results. From April 1992 to June 1994 the Regional Enforcement Detail (known as the "RED Team"), made up of officers from Palo Alto, Menlo Park and East Palo, succeeded in reducing East Palo Alto's appalling annual murder rate from 42 to 6 (in 1993). Subsequent programs, like the Regional Investigative Bureau – a regional team that focused on investigating major crimes – and "Operation Hotspot" – an intensive crackdown on drug trafficking operated in conjunction with the county sheriff's department – had similar success in reducing criminal activity.[151] Thus, for many, regional control represented the only answer, no matter the consequences for local autonomy. Samuel Rasheed framed the matter quite simply: "I don't want local control. I want public safety."[152]

Others in East Palo Alto were not so willing to give up local control of crime prevention programs. In 1998, Mayor R.B. Jones expressed his displeasure with San Mateo County Sheriff Don Horsley for announcing a collaborative plan designed to combat the escalating drug trade without consulting the City Council first. Pleased with the program in principle, he was frustrated with attempts to usurp the city's control of crime programs: "They don't have the right to impose [plans] without our input."[153] Many East Palo Altans felt that giving up autonomy was too big a risk for a community that had fought so hard to establish institutions of governance that were accountable to the local community. Belinda Rosales, a Latina who is generally associated with the political camp that favors a state takeover of the school district, argued, "We risk too much if we lose control of [police] service."[154] Others added that the potential "rewards" did not justify the risks. In other words, external control of the police department did not promise a crime-free city. In addressing the City Council, Barbara Mouton opined, "The sheriff is a nice person, but East Palo Alto doesn't need them [sic]."[155] Bob Hoover recalled the pre-incorporation days under county sheriff's jurisdiction as East Palo Alto's darker crime days, without the accountability of local control.[156] Supporters of local law enforcement authorities also highlight the role of the media in exaggerating East Palo Alto's crime problem, which they argue is steadily improving.[157]

Nevertheless despite their disagreements over the final disposition of the police force, all East Palo Altan participants in the law enforcement debate concur that East Palo Alto's problems with crime have originated from – and contribute to – the community's economic problems. Indeed, economic sustainability has constituted the fundamental issue in East Palo Alto's political arena since before the incorporation struggle. And it embodies the city's fundamental historical narrative, and in particular the role of race and ethnicity in its political deliberations.

Building (and Losing) Consensus: The Politics of Redevelopment

Issues of redevelopment[158] – what to build, where, and for whom – ultimately underlie other issues in East Palo Alto's political discourse, as the city struggles to confront its economic challenges. Tracing the path of the debates over redevelopment illuminates the major political divisions among East Palo Altans, some of which have been held over since the days of the incorporation struggle. The narrative of redevelopment also reveals the community's struggle to develop a unified vision of economic revitalization, a vision that for a long time was shared – surprisingly, in some ways – by

members of all ethnicities. However, the narrative also contains an event – the opening of the Bay Oaks affordable housing complex – that shattered the emerging inter-ethnic consensus and forced to the surface social and cultural differences that had not previously been expressed so prominently – and painfully – in the political realm.

The incorporation of East Palo Alto as city in July 1983 realized the vision of self-determination and community control. It also brought into focus the community's most immediate fundamental challenge: economic sustainability. Extricating East Palo Alto from county control also left the community without an economic safety net, and the city almost immediately plunged into long-term economic crisis. Lacking any substantial commercial development, in 1986 for example the city's taxable sales totaled only $18.2 million, in contrast to Menlo Park's $294.6 million, and Palo Alto's $1.022 billion. The absence of a substantial tax base caused repeated financial shortfalls in East Palo Alto's budget.[159] Without revenue, the city could not provide the services its citizens demanded, and scholastic achievement plummeted and crime soared, even though incorporation had been advocated as a way to deal with these very issues.

Consequently, the primary focus of East Palo Alto's political leadership has continued to center on developing means to secure and increase revenue. However, despite the consensus that economic sustainability remains a dire necessity, East Palo Altans were hopelessly divided over how to achieve that goal. For nearly ten years after incorporation, political contentiousness in the community – and especially on the City Council – prevented the city from moving decisively in any direction that might facilitate positive economic change.

In the late 1980s, a desperate City Council proposed a parcel tax to produce a bare minimum for the city's general fund. Intended as a temporary "band-aid" to allow the city to function until substantial redevelopment projects could "bear fruit," the measure passed in 1989 by a comfortable margin and was renewed again in 1994.[160] A lawsuit challenging the parcel tax revealed the deep-seated political divisions that had remained from the divisive incorporation struggle. Angry residents, led by the same homeowners and absentee landlords that opposed incorporation, charged that the tax was unconstitutional, since the measures had only passed by simple majority, not the two-thirds margin required by Proposition 13.[161] On October 31, 1995 San Mateo Superior Court Judge Clarence Knight declared the tax unconstitutional. While the decision sapped the city of needed funds, the fact that the lawsuit was brought itself underscored the troubling realization for East Palo Altans that "not enough healing was done after the divisive incorporation struggle."[162] Indeed, as community matron Gertrude Wilks noted, "after the [battle over] incorporation it seemed that we just got a little bit mean and . . . could never get it together."[163]

Faulty planning and political infighting also stalled the redevelopment projects that were designed to provide the permanent income the city required. Differing visions of redevelopment pitted advocates of community economic development (CED) – who pressed for community-initiated, piecemeal development in order to maintain local control – versus those who saw large-scale infusions of outside capital as a necessity, given East Palo Alto's dire economic circumstances. Current Mayor Duane Bay notes the difficulty in adopting a redevelopment strategy that pleases all parties: "If you can make [CED] work, it sticks better. The question is whether you can assemble enough capital. But it did not appear that the community could raise or attract enough capital; the perceived risks were too high. [CED] is still the best way to go, but it's insufficient, cause we're too far down. We need some kind of shot in the arm."[164] His comments reflect a division within the community and among councilmembers that emerged with the introduction of two major redevelopment proposals in the late 1980s.

In March 1987, wealthy San Mateo developer Joaquin DeMonet approached the City Council with a redevelopment plan to transform the "Whiskey Gulch" – a relatively run-down commercial strip just off the freeway featuring "a hodgepodge of liquor stores and bars, mom-and-pop shops, fast-food restaurants and a slew of nonprofit groups" – into "University Centre," a proposed 11-acre commercial site featuring twin 22-story office towers, retail shops, a hotel and theater.[165] Virgus Streets, the city's redevelopment administrator, outlined the need to tap into outside capital: "In a word, the City is without funds to implement improvements in the area that would be needed to be redeveloped."[166] As the City Council[167] voted to

enter into exclusive negotiations with DeMonet Industries on March 16, councilmember Bill Vines jubilantly pronounced, "the City has waited patiently for developers for over 20 years," and it was time to move forward with the current proposal.[168]

The DeMonet project ran into trouble almost immediately, however. Although a 3-to-2 simple majority of the Council favored the project, under California redevelopment law that margin was still short of the supermajority (4-to-1) needed to invoke the city's right of eminent domain. The Council's inability to condemn the land as "blighted," combined with increasing legal and financial problems, slowed progress on the project to a crawl. Residents in the immediately adjacent Palo Alto neighborhood of Crescent Park were the first to express their concerns about the environmental impact of the University Centre plan. The Crescent Park Neighborhood Association was later joined by nearby Menlo Park residents in a lawsuit charging that the DeMonet Environmental Impact Report (EIR) did not adequately address traffic and flooding problems that would stem from the redevelopment project.[169] After a protracted two-year legal battle, DeMonet agreed to a settlement with the two neighboring cities in which he scaled back the project.[170]

Funding issues also plagued the plan for years, as it grew increasingly uncertain whether, during a recession, DeMonet – who had already sunk over $6 million into the project – could muster the financial backing he promised.[171] DeMonet persisted in his efforts, but another huge setback came in January 1993, when software powerhouse Adobe Systems – which in 1991 had agreed to be University Centre's principal tenant – grew tired of waiting for the project to move forward and pulled out of the plan.[172]

The fatal blow came from within the community, however. For years, opponents of the DeMonet plan had expressed their concern that it did not contain "adequate affordable housing replacements" for the residents who would be displaced by the proposed commercial park.[173] Sharifa Wilson, an African American elected to the council in 1990, refused to throw her support behind the project because it did not include a plan to ensure local jobs for East Palo Altans. In addition, "it made no provisions to relocate any of the existing businesses."[174] Overall, many residents and political leaders were frustrated that DeMonet had neglected to get the community's input in developing his proposal. These concerns were crystallized in the form of a lawsuit filed against the city's Redevelopment Agency by Citizens United for the Betterment of East Palo Alto (CUBE), a coalition formed to represent the interests of the local businesses and tenants in the University Centre redevelopment area.[175] With the help of the East Palo Alto Community Law Project, CUBE filed suit to prevent the plan from moving forward without providing for relocation assistance.[176] In April 1993, frustrated by a seemingly endless stream of setbacks and stumbling blocks, a dejected DeMonet abandoned the project, laying most of the blame on the city's turbulent politics.[177]

At the same time the city was debating the merits of the DeMonet plan, another development project surfaced and caused a similar uproar. On December 19, 1988, Larry Barrone, an executive from Sun Microsystems, expressed his company's interest in building a $120 million research campus in East Palo Alto's Ravenswood Industrial Park and presented the city with a $50,000 check to enter into negotiations with the City Council and Redevelopment Agency.[178] The proposal plunged the city – and especially the Council itself – into a heated political battle over the fate of the Industrial Park and of redevelopment of East Palo Alto more generally. Three members of the Council – John Bostic, Bill Vines and Barbara Mouton – favored the project, which Sun said would bring 6,000 jobs and $5.3 million in annual tax revenue to the city.[179] The opposition of councilmembers Warnell Coats and Pat Johnson, however, prevented Sun from acquiring the supermajority necessary to invoke the city's eminent domain power and push the project forward.

Coats and Johnson were joined in their opposition by the Industrial Development and Employment Association (IDEA), an association of Ravenswood propertyowners who were set to be displaced by the Sun campus. Led by Mike Demeter, owner of Peninsula Charter Lines, IDEA members expressed their desire to boost East Palo Alto's economy by developing the industrial area themselves, predicting that Sun's arrival would turn East Palo Alto into a "company town."[180] Demeter and IDEA spent over $1.5 million on lawsuits and environmental studies in an effort to

thwart the Sun plan.[181] Supporting anti-Sun Council candidate Nevida Butler proved to be the most effective tactic, however, as Butler's election in November 1990 tipped the council balance to a 3-2 majority against the Sun plan. Realizing that the project was doomed, Sun withdrew the plan immediately after the November election.[182]

Thus, after almost ten years of governing an incorporated city, East Palo Alto's political leadership had very little to show for in the way of economic development except a reputation for "a history of plans for major developments falling through."[183] The failure of the DeMonet and Sun projects illustrated to the community the power of political contention in obstructing progress in the arena of redevelopment.

Despite the success of the efforts to block these economic development proposals, the wave of crime that slammed the community in the late 1980s and 1990s proved to be a powerful catalyst for change. East Palo Altans of all ethnicities demanded decisive action from their leadership: they wanted a short-term solution to curb the skyrocketing crime rate and a long-term strategy to bring the city out of economic oblivion.[184] As Palo Alto Weekly reporter Don Kazak observes, "1992 was a watershed year in East Palo Alto's history."[185] At a retreat held shortly after the fall elections, the newly-elected council made a commitment to put their personal and political differences aside and move forward for the good of the community. In many ways, this commitment to political cooperation served as the foundation for a community-wide consensus that crossed ethnic and racial lines that redevelopment was necessary for the growth if not survival of East Palo Alto.[186]

This consensus was expressed most prominently widespread support for the Gateway/101 redevelopment project. The multi-phased Gateway proposal, which was originally presented as early as June 1989 but not subject to serious consideration and Council action until 1993, included plans for a monumental shopping center to be built along Highway 101 on the old Ravenswood High School site as well as University Square, a 217-unit housing development.[187] Gateway seemed to be a response to two of the community's most pressing needs. Planners projected that the Ravenswood 101 Retail Center would boost the city's sales tax revenue by $1.5 million, and the housing development represented the largest increase in the community's housing stock since the 1950s.[188] The plan also received widespread communal support because it included a local "first-hire" policy to ensure that East Palo Altans would be first to benefit from the new employment opportunities. A unanimous Council pushed the plan through and officially broke ground in June 1995.[189]

A second attempt to redevelop the Whiskey Gulch/University Centre area confirmed the council's renewed commitment to redevelopment as the solution to the East Palo Alto's economic, education, crime and other problems. On March 18, 1997 the city's Redevelopment Agency heard proposals from two development groups – one headed by Charles "Chop" Kenan and the other by Linda Law, both of which generally recapitulated the earlier DeMonet plan to dismantle Whiskey Gulch and a commercial center with office towers, a luxury hotel and retail space.[190] The Council was disenchanted by Kenan's abrasive personality and excited by Law's willingness to grant the community widespread input and to include of a program to give East Palo Altans priority for new jobs, as well as by the diversity of her development team. Accordingly, the Council granted Law's Circle Partners Group exclusive rights to develop the University Centre area, which was renamed the University Circle Redevelopment Area.[191] As with the DeMonet project, community grumblings about the plan to dismantle Whiskey Gulch centered around the interests of the local businessowners and residents who would be displaced by the new project.[192] In 1997, however, the Council was better prepared to address – or circumvent – these concerns. The Council's unanimity in pursuing the project was a major factor in the plan's progress. With the four votes necessary to invoke eminent domain power, the Council was able to facilitate property acquisition by the Circle Partners group.[193]

One of the most striking factors in the success of Gateway and University Circle, however, was the willingness of displaced tenants to support the projects. To be sure, the Council and developers learned from past mistakes and made sure to remain in compliance with California redevelopment law in crafting provisions for relocation. Nevertheless, as Hilbert Morales poignantly noted in reference to the displaced tenants – who were overwhelmingly Latino – "you'd think they'd be breaking out their machetes and pistolas."[194] Nevertheless, the overwhelming majority of the

tenants were part of the community consensus that the redevelopment projects were vital to the city's survival, which made relocation a necessary and acceptable consequence. A letter written by Esther Hartwell, a representative of the residents who were being displaced by the Gateway project, reflects the willingness of residents to make sacrifices for the good of the community.

I want to stress that in general, Gateway 101 residents support the redevelopment project. We are excited about the potential to our community, and view this as a great opportunity to see some of our dreams come true in helping make our city economically self-sufficient. We realize that improving our city's tax base is a [sic] important if we are [to] be able to improve city services, including the police force, street maintenance, and programs for youth. We are also excited about the opportunities to spend our money within our city for basic services such as food and clothing.[195]

Hartwell's letter was of course not an expression of unconditional support for redevelopment, and the rest of her letter highlights the need for the city to take concrete measures to ensure that displaced residents receive their full displacement entitlements. Indeed, the economic benefits of relocating represented a primary reason most of the tenants were willing to acquiesce to displacement.[196] Indeed, many displaced residents viewed the economic "benefits" of dislocation as an "opportunity to make a new life for themselves and their families."[197]

Shattering a Community Consensus: Affordable Housing in East Palo Alto

It is ironic that the strong and broad consensus in support of the Gateway and University Circle projects was shattered by the controversy surrounding the Bay Oaks project, which was originally intended to serve as relocation housing for the residents displaced by the Gateway plan. For a large portion of East Palo Alto's history, the debate over affordable housing manifested itself as an issue of socioeconomic class rather than race or ethnicity.[198] Some of East Palo Alto's homeowners based their opposition to below market rate (BMR) housing on the perception that the construction of residential units designed for low-income tenants would increase crime and lower property values.[199] Bob Hoover regrets that a small number of community members adopted a mentality characterized by the sentiment "that we didn't need any more poor people in this community."[200] During the mid-1990s, most candidates shied away from advocating affordable housing, instead championing so-called "homeowner interests."[201] In response, affordable housing advocates attacked the notion that BMR housing was only intended for the poorest of the poor. "In this area," Sharifa Wilson notes, "you're talking about the teacher or the policeman being able to live someplace."[202] Thus, proponents of affordable housing in East Palo Alto presented the issue as a necessary measure to preserve the city's demographic make-up. They argued that so long as East Palo Alto remained a marginalized community economically, and so long as lenders still discriminated against people of color, affordable housing would serve as an important means to preserve the economic and ethnic diversity of the community.

In the late 1990s, skyrocketing real estate prices and rental rates convinced many former opponents of affordable housing of the wisdom of institutionalized BMR housing.[203] The overwhelming majority of residents – regardless of race or ethnicity – came to the painful realization that "rising home prices [were] displacing blacks and Latinos and anyone who [didn't] make a lot of money."[204] The statewide 1995 Contra/Hawkins Rental Housing Act of 1995 had severely circumscribed East Palo Alto's strong rent control ordinance, further limiting the prospect of finding relatively cheap housing in a community traditionally known as one of the peninsula's last bastions of affordable housing. As more and more residents were squeezed out of East Palo Alto, remaining residents increasingly looked to the city government to take concrete steps to mitigate the impending affordable housing crisis.[205] However, a bureaucratic "snafu" regarding a new affordable housing complex prevented the emerging consensus from crossing racial and ethnic lines, leading some groups to question whether the city's political leadership had the interests of all of East Palo Alto's citizens in mind.

Developed jointly by the Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition (MPHC) and EPA CAN DO in 1993, the Bay Oaks affordable housing complex was originally intended to serve as relocation housing for the residents displaced by the Gateway plan, but the project was not completed in time to house

the displaced residents, who were relocated elsewhere.[206] Instead, Mid-Peninsula CAN DO – a joint housing corporation established by MPHC and EPA CAN DO, and owner of Bay Oaks – held a lottery to determine which families would occupy the complex's 38 units. The Application Selection Guidelines developed by EPA CAN DO were designed to de-emphasize credit history and instead focus on the prospective tenant's two-year history of rental payments.[207] However, in the final selection process, MPHC in fact focused on the credit history of applicants. Since many Latino applicants had no credit history – which was considered in the selection process to be preferable to a poor history – they were disproportionately represented in the cohort of residents that moved into the complex in the spring of 1996.[208] Many African Americans were furious that 34 of the 38 families in Bay Oaks were Latino, assuming that MPHC was "very prejudiced towards the Latino community."[209] The disproportionate numbers fueled the bitter sentiment among African Americans that Latinos were their competitors for the city's resources. Omowale Satterwhite described the Bay Oaks debacle as "probably the most divisive issue in terms of race that East Palo Alto has seen."[210]

Affordable housing continues to be a racially charged political issue in East Palo Alto. In mapping out the selection criteria for subsequent BMR projects, the Council has been especially careful to ensure that the ethnic balance of the selected resident cohort reflects the demographic make-up of the community.[211] The Bay Oaks mix-up had far-reaching consequences that were difficult to erase, however. "It was a political disaster," noted Duane Bay, "It confirmed for many that the interest of African Americans weren't being looked out after [sic]. I do not think that perception will be undone."[212]

Thus, the importance of race and ethnicity varied significantly throughout the history of the debates and politics of affordable housing. As a consensus developed in the community that affordable housing was needed as a community-wide matter, racial and ethnic divisions did not seem to be important drivers in the positions taken by city leaders and residents. However, once it appeared that race had become an important if not controlling factor in deciding who would benefit from the new Bay Oaks project, then the issue began to take on the character of the debate over bilingual education – that is, whether one ethnically identifiable group was going to receive an apparently disproportionate share of a scare community resource.

Conclusion: The Politics of Race and Ethnicity in the Future of East Palo Alto

Race and ethnicity have served as important markers of identity throughout the history of any ethnically-diverse community. But perhaps it can be argued that, in the case of East Palo Alto, the experience of discrimination serves to highlight those divisions in the social, cultural and political consciousness of the community. This was especially evident in the 1950s and 1960s, as East Palo Alto's African Americans struggled to combat the pernicious effects of racialized marginalization and isolation – through the Civil Rights movement and the radicalism of Black Power, they formed their political consciousness around a struggle based on race. However, incorporation represented a milestone that steered the community's political dialogue away from issues of race – once the community achieved self-determination, new issues assumed primacy in the political arena. This is not to say, of course, that race was no longer an important factor. To the contrary, the influx of Latinos and other immigrant groups in the latter part of the century only reinforced the community's awareness of itself as an ethnic and racial minority community. Nevertheless, it is clear that in East Palo Alto, social and cultural distinctions did not, and do not, necessarily translate into political divisions along racial or ethnic lines. Racial and ethnic distinctions emerge as variables that are part of a larger equation of political interest and identity formation.

One political issue that clearly illustrates the extremely complex – and often contradictory – nature of East Palo Alto's current political culture is the recent debate over IKEA. In April 2000, the city's Redevelopment Agency[213] held a hearing to determine whether IKEA, the Scandinavian furniture store, or Ravenswood Venture Team (RVT), a venture capital group that proposed to build an auto dealership and an Old Navy clothing store, would be granted the rights to develop the remaining land in the Gateway redevelopment parcel.[214] Many residents favored RVT because they were partners with WPL Ventures, a minority-owned investment firm. Bob Hoover argued at the meeting that "including WPL as co-developers might be the only opportunity for people of color to participate in a significant way in the development of the community."[215] Other participants in the

discussion favored the RVT/WPL plan because of its commitment to community involvement. Councilmember R.B. Jones believed that IKEA was the "best project in terms of jobs, visibility and tax base. But based on community commitment and local participation of WPL," he concluded that the "RVT project provides [an] important local empowerment opportunity."[216]

On the other hand, the rest of the Council adopted the view that "job creation is paramount."[217] Councilmember Pat Foster explained that she "wanted to support the project that fills the greatest need. East Palo Alto has 38.5% unemployment. IKEA would meet our hiring and training needs." In the end, based on IKEA's pledge to provide a minimum of $1 million in annual sales tax for eight years and 550 jobs – 30% of which were guaranteed for locals – the Council voted 4 to 1 to enter into exclusive negotiations with the furniture store.[218] The battle was far from over, however, as a legal technicality forced the Council to submit the proposed development to the voters in a special election.[219]

The IKEA issue proved to be an especially divisive political issue, but not along any ethnic or otherwise clear-cut lines. As reporter Don Kazak notes, "IKEA was an issue that crossed all political lines in East Palo Alto."[220] The campaigns both for and against the IKEA proposal saw some strange bedfellows, as previous political adversaries teamed up to promote positions that took other residents by surprise. For instance, African American Barbara Mouton – a long-time self-determination leader and original advocate of Sun and other redevelopment projects – found herself in the political camp of Dennis Scherzer – a Caucasian political leader whose political posture was almost always opposition to the City Council, including the councils Mouton had served on – and Henry Salas – a Latino organizer for whom Mouton had previously had little political or personal regard.[221] Regardless of their previous political affinities or affiliations, opponents of IKEA claimed that the benefits of the store's construction would be far outweigh by the visual impact of its sheer size (605 feet long, over 7 stories tall) and the projected massive increase in traffic. Many also argued that the community needed a supermarket much more than a regional furniture store and continued to advocate a reconsideration of the discarded RVT plan.[222] No less than their rivals, the pro-IKEA camp represented an amalgamation of members of previously divergent political coalitions. Many were shocked to hear that Gertrude Wilks had aligned herself with the Council's supporters – which, like the anti-IKEA camp, included a sizeable number of Latinos – to push for construction of the store.[223] Thus, IKEA exemplified the fluidity of East Palo Alto's political arena – in the end, the debate boiled down to a rather simple question: whether an individual thought IKEA would benefit the community.

In some ways the outcome of the election (the measure passed, 1,562 to 1,419) was less important than some of the larger questions it raised about redevelopment and the direction of the community.[224] Vice Mayor Pat Foster viewed the election as "not so much about IKEA" itself but rather a referendum on the City Council and its redevelopment policies.[225] Indeed, IKEA highlights a fundamental question East Palo Alto faces: who is redevelopment for? Bob Hoover observes, "A lot of people in the community have the feeling that the Council is building East Palo Alto for people who don't live here now; that the new East Palo Alto will be for people from somewhere else."[226]

In many ways the structural forces that contributed to the community's economic and political marginalization of East Palo Alto also forced the city's residents and political leadership into a "Catch-22." The question remains whether the political leadership, in its drive to make the community economically sustainable – in response to the needs and demands of East Palo Altans – have taken steps that may inhibit the current residents from enjoying the fruits of their labor and sacrifices. East Palo Alto's redevelopment projects have undoubtedly spurred economic growth; but they have also helped plant the seeds of gentrification. The $410,000 price tag for a single family home in University Square – the housing development constructed as part of the Gateway plan – suggests a future socioeconomic transition that may portend a transformation in the ethnic makeup of the community (insofar as socioeconomic class and ethnicity remained linked due to continued disparities in educational achievement, occupational mobility, discriminatory lending practices and other factors).[227] Thus the possibility exists that racial and ethnic divisions – no longer the primary determinants of political interests and identity in East Palo Alto's political discourse – could re-emerge as political dividers that mimic the racialized political divisions that existed in East Palo Alto in earlier decades.

Consequently, in addition to the quandary of establishing fiscal solvency and promoting economic development, East Palo Altans also face the challenge of preserving the community's diverse flavor. "Silicon Valley is no longer side-stepping East Palo Alto," notes Omowale Satterwhite. "Gentrification is charging forward. It is a locomotive and the only way to slow this train down is to have a shared vision for this community, one clear resounding voice."[228]

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[4] Meeting with author, 1 May 2002.

[5] Albert Camarillo, "Black and Brown in Compton: Demographic Change, Suburban Decline, and Inter-group Relations in South Central Los Angeles, 1950-2000," unpublished paper (Stanford University, January 2002), 2-3. Cited with permission from author.

[6] Seminal studies of the urban crisis and the rise of the "urban underclass" include William Julius Wilson, *The Truly Disadvantaged* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987) and Douglas S. Massey & Nancy Denton, eds. *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). Also see Myron Orfield, *Metropolitics: A Regional Agenda for Community and Stability* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1997).

[7] Thomas Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

[8] Lawrence D. Bobo, et al, "Analyzing Inequality in Los Angeles," in idem, eds. *Prismatic Metropolis: Inequality in Los Angeles* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2000), 21-23; Camarillo, "Black and Brown in Compton," 15-6.

[9] Tomás Almaguer, *Racial Fault Lines: The Historical Origins of White Supremacy in California* (Berkeley: University of Calif. Press, 1994), 2.

[10] For example, Bobo, et al; Leland Saito, *Race and Politics: Asian Americans, Latinos, and Whites in a Los Angeles Suburb* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998); Virginia Yans-McLaughlin, ed., *Immigration Reconsidered: History, Sociology, and Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). Thomas Muller, *Immigrants in the American City* (New York: NYU Press, 1993) is a historical (and polemical) rendering of the effects of immigration on American politics on a national scale.

[11] Byran O. Jackson & Michael B. Preston, eds. *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California* (Berkeley: IGS Press, 1991).

[12] The following historical overview is drawn primarily from Robert Lowe, "Ravenswood High School and the Struggle for Racial Justice in the Sequoia Union High School District" (Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1989) (hereafter cited as "Ravenswood"), 24-35; Alison Post, "The Great Society and Its Discontents: The Story and Impact of 'Community Action' in East Palo Alto, CA" (History Honors Thesis, Stanford University, May 1997); Michael Levin, prod., *Dreams of City: The Story of East Palo Alto* (Stanford University, 1996), documentary film; and Rhonda Rigenhagen, *A History of East Palo Alto* (East Palo Alto: Romic Chemical Corp., 1993).

[13] The general law City of East Palo Alto, incorporated in 1983, encompasses a parcel of land approximately 2.5 square miles in area. The unincorporated area of San Mateo County known as East Palo Alto through much of the twentieth century was actually much larger prior to annexations by surrounding communities. Indeed, it would be fair to say that East Palo Alto's political and economic strength was diminished in direct correlation to the diminution of its physical size.

[14] See Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and David Kennedy, *Freedom From Fear* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 649-653, 768, for a discussion of World War II production in the Bay area and its profound impact on the economy and demography of the region.

[15] Lowe, "Ravenswood," 27. Lowe cites the *Ravenswood Post* and *Palo Alto Times* for population figures and the Palo Alto Directory for changing occupational orientation.

[16] Post, 12.

[17] Lowe, "Ravenswood," 29; Rigenhagen, 11.

[18] Like Alison Post, I contend that Robert Lowe and other East Palo Alto residents are too quick to ascribe malevolent intentions to the communities that border East Palo Alto. Omowale Satterwhite, for example, identifies the annexations of the 1940s and 50s as part of a long-term pattern of exploitation and oppression by surrounding communities. East Palo Alto Project Interview Transcripts (hereafter cited as "EPAP interview transcript"), August 1993, in Harmony House-Center for Black Performing Arts EPAP Archive, Stanford University (hereafter "Harmony House Archive"), 50. Although there is no doubt that the relationship between East Palo Alto and its neighbors is wholly unbalanced, annexation was not part of a purposive exploitation or "colonization" by the surrounding municipalities. In fact, as Post compellingly observes, annexation was a surprisingly

common practice in California – in fact, it was so widespread that the State Assembly formed an interim committee to investigate its causes (Post, 13-4). Nonetheless, regardless of intent, whether malevolent or "benign," the annexations undoubtedly crippled the community's ability to sustain itself economically, especially after incorporation in 1983.

[19] For example, Thomas Kavanaugh, a major landholder and one of the region's few long-time residents – and thus a potential community leader – annexed his considerable property holdings, which included an industrial park, to Menlo Park in 1958.

[20] Barbara Mouton, Gertrude Wilks, and Ed Becks, EPAP interview transcripts, August 1995, Harmony House Archive.

[21] For an in depth discussion of the mechanics and institutionalization of racialized residential segregation, see Thomas Sugrue, *Origins of the Urban Crisis*. Beyond the tactics of private and local governing institutions, Sugrue and Citizens Commission on Civil Rights, "The Federal Government and Equal Housing Opportunity: A Continuing Failure" in Rachel G. Bratt, et. al., eds., *Critical Perspectives on Housing* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), also identify the federal government's (namely the FHA) endorsement of discriminatory practices as a major contributing factor in residential segregation.

[22] *Palo Alto Times*, 6 September 1958.

[23] Interviewees in the documentary film *Dreams of a City* recall with remarkable clarity the tactics used by real estate agents. Gertrude Wilks, for example, recounts her request to view a home in Palo Alto. "Oh no, you can't live over there," was the reply from the real estate agent. Instead she was informed that she could only view houses in East Palo Alto.

[24] New Castle Realty of Palo Alto, for example, distributed postcards expressing their desire for a "chance to discuss the listing of your home." Harmony House Archive.

[25] *Palo Alto Times*, 2 December 1954.

[26] *Menlo Park Recorder*, 19 September 1963.

[27] Survey cited in Lowe, "Ravenswood," 44.

[28] Ibid., 41. Lowe provides a convincing street-by-street analysis of the relative turnover rate in areas that experienced blockbusting in contrast to those that did not.

[29] Ibid., 36.

[30] U.S. Census, General Characteristics of the Population by Census Tracts, SMSA, 1960 and 1970. Total population figures: 15,019 in 1960 and 17,837 in 1970. It should be noted that determining exact population figures (beyond the difficulties of measuring undocumented individuals, which continues to be a factor) during this period is somewhat problematic because East Palo Alto was not an incorporated city – in other words, in an all-too-true reflection of political reality, the census did not list East Palo Alto as a "place." Robert Lowe cites an even more drastic change: whites comprised: 71% of the population of East Palo Alto in 1960 but only 27% in 1970 (115). The numbers cited above were determined by totaling the figures for the census tracts that correspond to East Palo Alto's estimated borders at the time (in 1960, tracts 0083, 0084 and 0085; in 1970, 6118 through 6121). Also, since the U.S. Census Bureau does not list Hispanic or Latino as a race (in 1960 and 1970 they are listed as white), the number of

"Spanish surnamed" residents must be subtracted from the total white population listed as a way to approximate the actual non-Hispanic white population, which is noted above. The same process makes it possible to estimate the non-Hispanic black population of East Palo Alto in 1980 (10,969, or 60.2%), since that was the first year the Bureau asked about Hispanic origin, and thus persons of "Spanish origin" are cross-listed under the racial categories of black and white.

[31] See Lowe's analysis of 1960 census data, "Ravenswood," 70.

[32] Lowe, "Ravenswood," 47.

[33] Ibid., 44.

[34] Camarillo, "Black and Brown in Compton," 8.

[35] Rigenhagen, 27; *Dreams of a City* film and several newspaper sources cite the "murder capital" distinction.

[36] "EPA CAN DO Opens The Next Step Housing Assistance Center," report prepared for EPA CAN DO by Carol Lamont, HUD Community Builder, July 1999, 13. Haas Center/One East Palo Alto Research Database and Archive (hereafter "Haas Center Archive").

[37] U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1990 Census of Population and Housing, P080A, Median Household Income in 1989 (STF 3), on American FactFinder.

[38] "EPA CAN DO Opens The Next Step Housing Assistance Center," 13. Haas Center Archive.

[39] David Sylvester, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1994. Harmony House Archive. In 1994, Menlo Park, with a population of 29,400, had a general fund of $16.5 million.

[40] Final Report, East Palo Alto Displacement Study, prepared by Richard C. Carlson, Western Futures, Palo Alto, CA, 24 October 1983, 5. Haas Center Archive.

[41] Memorandum from Carol Lamont, HUD Community Builder, to HUD Financial Incentive Program Committee, 9 February 1999; idem, "Disparate Lending Patterns," Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, HUD 1997. Haas Center Archive.

[42] In this interpretation of African American politicization in East Palo Alto, I draw heavily on the arguments advanced by Alison Post in her honors thesis. She concludes, "The recent racial transition of the area ensured that [the political, geographic and economic marginalization of the community] would be interpreted in terms of race. This minority enclave had quickly been animated by the political consciousness of the Civil Rights movement" (24). In this analysis, Post draws on Kenneth Fox's conclusion that working-class suburbanites were generally slow to become politicized because they wished to identify themselves with the more affluent of surrounding communities. See Fox's chapter on "suburban development and the making of the middle class" in *Metropolitan America* (London: Macmillan, 1985).

[43] Post identifies Rev. Carl Smith and Bob Hoover as two of the followers of radical theorist Saul Alinsky. Lily Batchelder centers her honors thesis on an evaluation of the continuities between the East Palo Alto incorporation movement and Alinksy's theory of community organizing, finding many

similarities. Batchelder, "The Incorporation Movement of East Palo Alto: Renegotiating the Boundaries of Community Organizing Theory," (Honors Thesis in Political Science, May 1994, Stanford University).

[44] For a brief discussion of the origins of the War on Poverty legislation itself, as well as the problems the program encountered throughout the nation, see James Patterson, *Grand Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 535-540. It is clear that East Palo Alto was an example of the communities that the national media and other leaders portrayed as co-opters of War on Poverty programs for the purposes of Black Power rhetoric. See Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *Maximum Feasible Misunderstanding: Community Action in the War Against Poverty* (New York, 1969).

[45] Post, 27. The assertion is actually made by Post herself. Whether or not it was actually the desire of San Mateo County officials to maintain an asymmetrical power relationship is less significant than the fact that the majority of East Palo Altans believed this to be the case.

[46] "Poverty War Plan Announced," *The Burlingame Advance Star*, 11 June 1965.

[47] Evelyn Wallace, head of the CAC until 1967, cited in Post, 52.

[48] Batchelder, 29.

[49] Lowe, "Ravenswood," 119-121. See Lowe's chapters on the development of the Black Power movement in East Palo Alto for a more detailed discussion of the rise of the community control movement, especially with regards to education and Ravenswood High School.

[50] Batchelder, 29; *Dreams of a City* film.

[51] Lowe, "Ravenswood," 183, 153-5, 163-6.

[52] Post, 63. Not a direct quotation.

[53] Formed in 1967, EPAMC, unlike its largely impotent predecessor, the Alto Park Community Council (APCC), was funded by the county and sanctioned by the supervisors. However, like the APCC, the new council was given no decision-making authority, which only increased the residents' frustration with their "ultimate powerlessness" (Lowe, 118-9).

[54] For a discussion of East Palo Alto's incorporation movement as an outgrowth of the Black Power movement – or even an example of its continuing relevance – see Batchelder, 30, 51-2, 64.

[55] I use the singular in referring to the "incorporation campaign" because the several "discrete" attempts (one in 1967, others in the late 1970s and early 80s) can all be seen as part of a long-term effort to garner enough community and county support for incorporation. However, there is a distinction between the attempts of the 1930s and 50s and those during and after the 1960s, which stems from the demographic transformation the community experienced during the 1950s and 60s. In other words, the incorporation movement of the 1960s and afterward was championed primarily by African American leaders who were animated by the radical, racialized visions of community control, self-determination and nationalism.

[56] Ruben Abrica, a Latino, was on the original council in 1983. Duane Bay is white and has been on the council since 1996; he is currently the city's mayor.

[57] Post, 52-3.

[58] The incorporation debate was – and many ways continues to be – a highly complex and contentious issue. While community leaders were quite explicit in their reasons for supporting or opposing incorporation (as well as their opinions of the opposition's motivations), it is still unclear how rank-and-file voters parsed the issue. Self-determination and nationalism – namely that the community, especially as a minority community, should be in charge of its own destiny – were clearly important factors, as were the fear of declining property values and the lack of a tax base. Rent control was another important issue closely tied to the incorporation struggle, which is evidenced by the fact that the first act by the new City Council was a moratorium on rent increases until the broader Rent Stabilization and Good Cause for Eviction Ordinance was enacted. Almost all studies conducted on the incorporation movement are based almost exclusively on the perspectives of the leaders of the movement, and generally on those who favored incorporation. Batchelder, 96-124; Post, 69-71; "20th Anniversary Reminiscences: East Palo Alto Council of Tenants," video recording, Haas Center Archive; William Webster, interview with author, 25 April 2002; Robert Lowe, "A History of Incorporation" (unpublished paper, Marquette University) and Barbara Mouton, "A History of a City" (unpublished paper, August 1986), Harmony House Archive.

[59] According to census data, East Palo Alto's African American population comprised over 60% (61.1% total, 60.2% non-Hispanic African American) of the total population (using the method described above in footnote 30). U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1980 Census of Population and Housing—Census Tracts, San Francisco-Oakland, CA, SMSA, Table P-7: Race and Spanish Origin, 265. However, these population figures may include portions of Menlo Park (in tract 6121), which had a higher percentage of whites. Therefore, the African American population may have actually represented even more than 60% of the total population.

[60] Post, 70.

[61] Barbara Mouton, quoted in Batchelder, 97; Mouton, "History of a City."

[62] See Steve Gillon, *That's Not What We Meant to Do* (New York: Norton, 2000).

[63] Thomas Muller, *Immigrants and the American City* (New York: NYU Press, 1993), 49. This figure only accounts for legally admitted immigrants. The numbers for Latin America, especially for Mexico, would be much higher, especially in the previous three decades.

[64] U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Tables on American FactFinder, Table P008: Persons of Hispanic Origin, 1990 STF 1; Table P11: Hispanic or Latino, Census 2000 SF 1.

[65] Juan Gabriel Ibarra and Francisco Valdioserra, "The Evolution of the Mexican/Latino Immigrant Families Currently Living in East Palo Alto," report for EPAP, 13 October 1993, Harmony House Archive. Hereafter cited as "Ibarra and Valdioserra report."

[66] Ruben Avelar, interview with author, 13 May 2002.

[67] "Historically Black East Palo Alto Moving Toward Latino Majority," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 14 May 1996.

[68] Ruben Avelar, interview with author; EPAP interview (August 1995), Harmony House Archive.

[69] Belinda Rosales, interview with author, 8 March 2002.

[70] Tyche Hendricks, "Hispanics share housing to make ends meet," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 April 2002.

[71] Michael Learmonth, "Eastern Migration," *Metro*, September 30-October 6, 1999 issue. The migration of blacks from East Palo Alto is part of a recent national pattern of migration in which thousands of blacks have "returned" to the South from western, southwestern and northern urban areas. Camarillo identifies similar demographic patterns in Compton (13-14).

[72] Ruben Avelar, interview with author, 13 May 2002.

[73] U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Table on American FactFinder, Table P010 1990 STF 1; Quick Table on FactFinder, DP-1 2000 SF 1. Again, we should take into account that these numbers do not include undocumented immigrants, who by all accounts make up a considerable portion of East Palo Alto's current population.

[74] Tyche Hendricks, "Hispanics share housing to make ends meet," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 April 2002.

[75] *Dreams of a City* film.

[76] As a result of limitations on scope, time and resources, this paper focuses primarily on relations between African Americans and Latinos. Nevertheless, many of the observations about the Latino population may be generalized and applied to other immigrant communities in East Palo Alto.

[77] The only two Latinos elected to a city board are Ruben Abrica and Belinda Rosales. Abrica is only Latino to have served on the City Council (1983-8), and he currently sits on the Ravenswood school board. Rosales is currently a member of the Sanitary District Board. Ruben Avelar cites the importance of the Latino economic presence in the community. Interview with author, 13 May 2002.

[78] Jennifer Deitz-Berry, "Latino Leadership vacuum: East Palo Alto's leadership doesn't necessarily reflect its population," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 1 August 2001.

[79] Deitz-Berry, "Latino Leadership vacuum." Ruben Avelar, EPAP interview transcript (August 1995), Harmony House Archive.

[80] Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence," *San Jose Mercury News*, 11 March 2001. These sentiments are not limited to Latinos, however. Bob Hoover, a prominent African American activist, expressed his chagrin that the council had missed opportunities to share access to political power. Interview with author, 11 April 2002.

[81] Ibid. Interestingly, Mouton "really resented" the way Thaai Walker portrayed her comments in the March 11 article. She highlighted her respect and admiration for the Latino community, and her personal friendship with Marcelino Lopez and Refugio Huizar, two Latino leaders featured in Walker's article. Mouton, phone conversation with author, 9 April 2002.

[82] Phyllis Brown, "EPA fears refugee impact," *Peninsula Times Tribune (PTT)*, 21 October 1980; idem, "Viet refugees to live in E. Palo Alto," *PTT*, 17 October 1980; *PTT*, 8 May 1981.

[83] Ruben Avelar, interview with author, 13 May 2002.

[84] Ruben Avelar, EPAP interview transcript, interview with author.

[85] Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence," *San Jose Mercury News*, 11 March 2001.

[86] In discussing Latino political mobilization, every oral interviewee identified citizenship (or lack thereof) as a primary determinant of political activity in East Palo Alto.

[87] Harry Pachon, "U.S. Citizenship and Latino Participation in California Politics," in Byran O. Jackson and Michael B. Preston, eds. *Racial and Ethnic Politics in California* (Berkeley: IGS Press, 1991), 82.

[88] Ibid.; Don Kazak, "East Palo Alto has a Latino future," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 6 October 1993. In the article, political scientist Luis Fraga notes that Mexican immigrants have especially low naturalization rates due in part to their proximity to their country of origin.

[89] U.S. Census Bureau, Detailed Table on American FactFinder, P037 1990 STF 3 – sample data. These numbers are problematic, of course, because of the difficulty in cataloguing individuals who do not want to be catalogued – namely undocumented immigrants. Despite efforts to inform undocumented residents that there was no threat of deportation involved in responding to the census, by all accounts the census was "a debacle" in East Palo Alto in 1990 and 2000 (William Webster, interview with author, 25 April 2002). For an in-depth discussion of political participation as it relates to naturalization rates in California, see Belinda Reyes, ed. *A Portrait of Race and Ethnicity in California: An Assessment of Social and Economic Well-Being* (San Francisco: Public Policy Institute of California, 2001), especially chapter 9.

[90] Leo Chavez, *Shadowed Lives: Undocumented Immigrants in American Society* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1992), 183.

[91] Ruben Avelar, EPAP interview transcript.

[92] Dee Uhila, EPAP interview transcript, August 1985.

[93] Deitz-Berry, "Latino Leadership vacuum."

[94] Victor Perez, "Latino Election 2000 Factor," February 2001, 1-2.

[95] Miguel David Tirado, "Mexican American Community Political Organization: 'The Key to Chicano Political Power,'" in F. Chris Garcia, ed., *Chicano Politics: Readings* (New York: MSS Information, 1973), 73. Leo Chavez observes a similar tendency in immigrants from other parts of Latin America, specifically Central America and other countries with political unrest. *Shadowed Lives*, 36.

[96] Although further ethnographic/survey research would be necessary to fully corroborate this point – census data only reflects country, not province, of origin – this conclusion was affirmed by numerous oral sources, including Prof. Luis Fraga (meeting 18 March 2002), Duane Bay (22 March 2002), Richard Reyes (14 April 2002), Henry Salas (15 April 2002), Ruben Avelar (13 May 2002), and others.

[97] Of the fifteen candidates in the November 7 election, the three winners were the only individuals to win more than 1,000 votes. San Mateo County election results, from http://www.smartvoter.org/2000/11/07/ca/sm/city.html.

[98] Ibid. Several interviewees observed – correctly, I think – that running a single Latino candidate would have ensured victory. Although East Palo Alto's at-large election system allows voters to cast three votes (and thus the faulty assumption that a good portion of the 1,600 Latino voters would cast their three for the Latino candidates), it appears that Latino votes were spread over the three candidates, and none of them garnered enough support from other groups to win a spot on the council.

[99] Although Perez and running mate Evarardo Luna later downplayed the significance of their appeals to the Latino community as a voting bloc (interviews with author), their campaign literature was clearly intended to galvanize the Latino community as a unified electoral cohort. For example, a campaign flier exclaims, "We can win because there are over 1600 Mexican-American and Latinos [sic] voters in East Palo Alto." "Perez/Beltran/Luna Campaign Election Committee" (campaign flier, courtesy of Evarardo Luna).

[100] The debate over the proposed construction of an IKEA furniture store in East Palo Alto – which continues to be a complex and divisive political issue in the community – will be discussed later.

[101] Victor Perez, interview with author, 1 May 2002.

[102] The Ravenswood School District, which includes elementary and middle schools, should be distinguished from East Palo Alto's Ravenswood High School, which was a part of the Sequoia Union High School District.

[103] "California School Finance," from Ed-Data (Education Data Partnership) website, http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/District.asp.

[104] "A Primer on Proposition 98," Ed-Data website, October 1996, http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/Ed_Issues_top.

asp; "California's Rankings: 1999-2000," from Ed-Data website, http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/snapshot2.asp.

[105] Jennifer Deitz Berry, "Ravenswood parents vent frustrations," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 17 October 2001.

[106] Julian Guthrie, "Bridging the English Gap," *San Francisco Examiner*, 12 May 1997.

[107] Interestingly Prop 227, which passed in 1998, was drafted by Palo Altan Ron Unz.

[108] Deitz Berry, "Between a rock and a hard place," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 18 April 2001.

[109] Gary Orfield, "The Growth of Segregation: African Americans, Latinos, and Unequal Education," in *Dismantling Desegregation: The Quiet Reversal of Brown v. Board of Education* (NY: The New Press, 1996), 57, 67.

[110] For an in depth discussion of the tumultuous history of Ravenswood High School, see Lowe, "Ravenswood." I draw on his analysis for the following discussion.

[111] Tracy Jan, "Ravenswood revisited, reunited," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 11 September 1996. "The district" refers to Sequoia Union High School District, which includes a much wider area than the Ravenswood District.

[112] This program was later given official sanction as the "Tinsley program" after a 1974 lawsuit. Gerald Marer, "'Tinsley Case' after 25 years still evident in schools," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 30 January 2002.

[113] Jan, "Ravenswood revisited"; Lowe, "Ravenswood," 334.

[114] "District Financial Statements," Ed-Data website, http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/District.asp. Palo Alto's per-pupil expenditure was $6,572.

[115] Ravenswood City School District Board of Trustees (RSDB) Minutes, 26 February, 12 March 1998. The district employed 233 teachers in 2001. Deitz Berry, the "Between a rock and a hard place."

[116] In 2001, 40% of the teachers in district-managed schools did not have credentials; in privately-managed charter schools, the number was 60%. Deitz Berry "Ravenswood parents vent." The RSDB minutes reflect how often teachers are hired on a "temporary" basis and the remarkable yearly turnover rate.

[117] "STAR Test Results, National Percentile Ranking," Ed-Data website, http://www.ed-data.k12.ca.us/dev/

District.asp; Charlie Breitose, "STAR scores jump up at most Ravenswood Schools," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 21 July 2000; Elizabeth Darling, "Interfaith group targets education reform," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 2 February 1997.

[118] Shirley Hochausen, interview with author, 11 March 2002; Ruben Avelar used the same words; Julian Guthrie, "Schools struggle with shifting ethnic balance."

[119] "Trends in Ethnic Distribution of Students Since 87/88," Ed-Data website.

[120] Elizabeth Darling, "100 Latino parents file complaint against school district," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 25 April 1997.

[121] Romesh Ratnesar, "The Next Big Divide? Blacks and Hispanics square off over bilingual education," *Time*, online, 1 December 1997; Julian Guthrie, "Schools struggle with shifting ethnic balance," *San Francisco Examiner*, 14 May 1997.

[122] Elizabeth Darling, "Ravenswood cites success with Ebonics," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 8 January 1997; idem, "We speak standard English," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 19 February 1997.

[123] Julian Guthrie, "Schools struggle with shifting ethnic balance," *San Francisco Examiner*, 14 May 1997.

[124] RSDB minutes, 10 December 1998, 25 March 1999, 9 September 1999; Marshall Wilson, "Disabled Sue East Palo Alto School District," *SF Chronicle*, 19 November 1996; "Settlement reached in East Palo Alto class action suit," *California Special Education Alert*, 25 January 2000; Suzanne Herel, "Peninsula school district ruled in contempt of court," *SF Chronicle*, 23 August 2001.

[125] Deitz Berry, "Ravenswood parents vent"; idem, "Supervisor Gibson wants home control of Ravenswood," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 28 September 2001. Emphasis mine.

[126] Initiated in 2000, the One East Palo Alto project is backed by the support of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, the Peninsula Community Foundation, East Palo Alto's Community Development Institute and Stanford University's Haas Center for Public Service. "One East Palo Alto Neighborhood Improvement Project Community Plan," 26 June 2000.

[127] Deitz Berry, "Parents galvanize to protect schools," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 27 March 2002; idem, interview with author, 14 May 2002. "Editorial: Ravenswood's good news: parents are getting involved," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 3 April 2002.

[128] Sharifa Wilson, interview with author, 30 April 2002; *Dreams of a City* film,

[129] Many studies have confirmed the common-sense correlation between economic deprivation and high crime rates. On East Palo Alto's crime, see http://www.pcvp.org/pcvp/media/article4.shtml. For crime statistics on California, see http://caag.state.ca.us/cjsc/pubs.htm.

[130] Bob Hoover, interview with author, 11 April 2002.

[131] Don Kazak and Vicki Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?" *Palo Alto Weekly*, 11 March 1998; *Dreams of a City* film.

[132] Batchelder, 105.

[133] Kazak and Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?"

[134] San Mateo County Civil Grand Jury 1997 Final Report on the East Palo Alto Police Department (hereafter 1997 Grand Jury Report), from http://www.co.sanmateo.ca.us/sanmateocourts/cgjrepa.htm.

[135] Kazak and Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?"

[136] It is clear that East Palo Alto's drug trafficking was part of a larger regional trade. Although the site was chosen because of East Palo Alto's problematic law enforcement, many of those arrested in the early and mid 1990s were not actually residents of East Palo Alto, but lived in the surrounding communities (some in poorer areas like San Jose and Redwood City, but also in more affluent cities like Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Atherton). Sharifa Wilson, interview with author, 30 April 2002.

[137] East Palo Alto City Council Minutes (hereafter City Council minutes), 3 September 1991.

[138] As of April 25, 2000, East Palo Alto had the third-highest violent crime rate on the FBI's statewide list. http://www.pcvp.org/pcvp/media/article4.shtml

[139] 1997 Grand Jury Report.

[140] For example, Noam Levey's article in the *San Jose Mercury News* gives a month-by-month breakdown of the previous year's misconduct. "Allegations plague E. Palo Alto police," *San Jose Mercury News*, 21 January 2000. The *Mercury News* has been especially diligent in cataloguing the internal troubles of the EPAPD.

[141] City Council Minutes, 4 December 2000. Don Kazak, "Hard work, low pay, no respect," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 11 March 1998. Evarardo Luna, interview with author, 10 April 2002. Richard Reyes, interview with author, 14 April 2002.

[142] 1997 Grand Jury Report; City Council minutes, 2 October 1989, 17 March 1993.

[143] Edwin Garcia, "Officer guilty, judge rules," *San Jose Mercury News*, 18 September 1996.

[144] Evarardo Luna, interview with author, 10 April 2002.

[145] One example is Barbara Mouton, who identifies East Palo Alto's label as the murder capital as "a damn lie." Phone conversation with author. Also see Ibarra and Valdioserra report.

[146] For instance, members of different ethnic groups spoke out against police brutality at a December 2000 council meeting. City Council minutes, 4 December 2000. Concern about police brutality continues, as evidenced by recent interview with Evarardo Luna (10 April 2002) and Henry Salas (15 April 2002).

[147] 1991 Civil Grand Jury Recommendation #46, quoted in 1997 Civil Grand Jury Report.

[148] City Council minutes, 1 November 1997. Similar calls had been made earlier in the decade; for example, in 1990 State Senator Rebecca Morgan, suggested that a trustee should take over control of the city. Her suggestion was in response to an appeal by elderly African American woman C.W. Roddy, whose house had been sprayed with bullets. Bill Workman, "Plea to Have Trustee Run East Palo Alto," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 6 January 1990.

[149] The 1997 Civil Grand Jury reiterated the 1991 recommendation to turn over control of the EPAPD to outside agents for five years.

[150] Henry Salas, interview with author, 15 April 2002. Luna concurs, advocating abolishing the EPAPD, and then contracting with the county sheriff to provide police services for three years. Luna, interview with author.

[151] "The dividends of teamwork," editorial, *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 15 February 1995; Vicky Anning, "Operation Hotspot," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 4 March 1998.

[152] Kazak and Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?"

[153] Vicky Anning, "Sheriff plans anti-drug strike force," *Palo Alto Weekly*, online edition, 16 January 16, 1998.

[154] Kazak and Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?" The ethnic make-up of the local control advocates – like that of their adversaries – reflects how crime prevention crosses ethnic lines. Rosales, a Latina, lines up with Dennis Scherzer, a Caucasian, and many African American advocates of self-determination, such as Mouton and Hoover in favor of maintaining local control of the police force. On the other hand, Salas (who, interestingly, is generally allied with Rosales and Scherzer on most political issues) contends that "both blacks and Latinos are sick of the EPAPD." Interview with author.

[155] City Council minutes, 1 November 1997.

[156] Kazak and Anning, "Who Should Police East Palo Alto?"

[157] Ibid.; Ibarra and Valdioserra interview report, Harmony House; Barbara Mouton, phone conversation with author; Don Kazak, "Hard work, low pay, no respect."

[158] Some clarification of terminology is warranted at this point. "Redevelopment" is actually a legal term used to describe the legal empowerment of a Redevelopment Agency (in the case of East Palo Alto, the City Council also serves as the city's Redevelopment Agency) to declare an area as "blighted" and exercise certain legal rights over that land – namely to grant developers the right to demolish the existing structures and construct new buildings, infrastructure, etc. (In some cases the city develops the land itself, although East Palo Alto's financial shortfalls prevented the city from serving as the primary developer on most projects). There is some distinction between this type of city/community-sponsored redevelopment and private development, in which private land is condemned to be developed by private developers (this process is often negotiated through the aegis of a city's Redevelopment Agency). However, for the purposes of this analysis, I have used "redevelopment" in the broadest sense – to describe the construction projects that were proposed and undertaken with the intention of revitalizing the community's land, facilities, and economy. I am indebted to William Webster for his clarification of these terms.

[159] *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 January 1990, cited in Batchelder, 105; In 1988, the city was short over $1 million. Michael Shapiro, "East P.A. backs redevelopment," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, 29 November 1988.

[160] City of East Palo Alto Press Release, 8 November 1995; Bill Workman, "East Palo Alto Worries About Tax Extension," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 October 1993; Don Kazak, "Tax lawsuit filed against the city," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 20 July 1994.

[161] Don Kazak, "East Palo Alto lawsuit cites Oakland victory," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 28 June 1995.

[162] Sharifa Wilson, interview with author, 30 April 2002.

[163] Gertrude Wilks, EPAP interview transcript, August 1993, Harmony House Archive.

[164] Duane Bay, interview with author, 22 March 2002.

[165] Mary T. Fortney, "East Palo Alto Project advances – slowly," Peninsula Times Tribune, 27 June 1988; Carolyn Zinko, "Developers Eye Corner of East Palo Alto

[166] Public Hearing of Redevelopment Agency, 21 November 1988.

[167] In East Palo Alto, the City Council also serves as the Redevelopment Agency.

[168] City Council minutes, 16 March 1987.

[169] City of Palo Alto Meeting Minutes, 19 November 1990; Michael Shapiro, "East P.A. backs redevelopment." Some residents and community leaders point to these lawsuits (and similar suits in the late 1990s) as evidence of the desire of surrounding communities to "keep [East Palo Alto] in involuntary servitude" (minutes 21 Nov 1988). However, it seems inappropriate to attribute the lawsuits to simple malice. It is not unreasonable that

residents (especially residents of Palo Alto) would in their own self-interest be wary of additional congestion or the construction of multi-story office buildings near their homes.

[170] "Suits Settled Over East Palo Alto Project," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 22 January 1991.

[171] Bill Workman, "Lawsuit Challenges East Palo Alto Project," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 21 July 1992. By most accounts, DeMonet was not a reputable businessman. Several interviewees identified his propensity for bribery and described examples of his "under-the-table" tactics, although they did not provide specific documentary evidence.

[172] Bill Workman, "Adobe Decides Against Move to East Palo Alto," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 January 1993.

[173] Public Hearing of Redevelopment Agency (in City Council minutes), 21 November 1988.

[174] Sharifa Wilson, interview with author.

[175] It should also be noted that many of these businessowners proposed an alternative "mainstreeting" plan that would have preserved and improved the Whiskey Gulch commercial strip. That plan was never seriously pursued by the City Council however, which prompted many of the businessowners and residents to form the CUBE coalition. William Webster, interview with author, 25 April 2002; Daniel Hedden to Michael Bethke (Planning Director, City of East Palo Alto), 8 May 1998.

[176] Most newspaper accounts of the plan's trajectory identified the CUBE lawsuit as the major factor in the slowing, and ultimate failure, of the DeMonet plan.

[177] Bill Workman, "Highrise Developer Pulling Out of Project," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 April 1993.

[178] City Council minutes, 19 December 1988.

[179] Dave Howland, "Planning to boost community's economy," *Peninsula Times Tribune*, 28 March 1992. Also, recall that the Council was still entirely African American – this would remain the case until 1996.

[180] Ibid.; In fact, in late 1989 Demeter had secured an agreement with the San Francisco Newspaper Association (SFNA) to build a multi-million dollar publishing facility on his land. Although the 3-2 split on the Council prevented the it from pushing the Sun proposal forward, three votes were nevertheless sufficient to derail Demeter's project. Meeting minutes reflect how the Council delayed the SFNA project by continually ordering more studies and review. Eventually the 6-month time limit on the agreement expired, and SFNA backed out of the deal. City Council minutes, 4, 20 December 1989. Mike Demeter, interview with author, 16 April 2002.

[181] Mike Demeter, interview with author.

[182] Ken Siegmann, "Sun Microsystems Pulls Out of East Palo Alto Project," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 28 November 1990.

[183] David Sylvester, "Gateway Mall Plan Gets OK," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 3 March 1995.

[184] Even a cursory review of Council minutes during the early- and mid-1990s reveals how residents of all ethnic and racial backgrounds were frustrated by the failure of the political leadership to substantially improve the quality of life in East Palo Alto.

[185] Don Kazak, interview with author, 14 May 2002. Kazak has been the *Palo Alto Weekly*'s beat writer for East Palo Alto for several years.

[186] Ibid.; Sharifa Wilson, Duane Bay, interviews with author. It is clear that this retreat was an important and perhaps watershed event. Kazak, Wilson, and Bay all highlight the importance of the Council's commitment to progress that developed out of this retreat (the background for the retreat, of course, was the city's terrible crime problem). Many newspaper articles note the transition to a more "harmonious" Council after the retreat. For example, see Kazak, "Faith in the Future," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 1 July 1998 or Sylvester (3 March 1995) article. Indeed, a review of the Council minutes during the mid-1990s (especially regarding redevelopment decisions) reveals a much more unified decision-making body – there are many more unanimous decisions on important issues – when compared with the minutes from the previous ten years (or from 2000 on). It is also clear that during the 1990s, redevelopment is the central focus of the Council's attention.

[187] "Final Gateway/101 Corridor Specific Plan," prepared by Wallace, Roberts & Todd, 25 October 1993, EPA Library; Carolyne Zinko, "East Palo Alto Project Starts," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 May 1998. EPA CAN DO and BRIDGE Housing Corporation later added an additional 219 units to the development plans.

[188] Carolyn Zinko, "East Palo Alto To Finally Get Shopping Center," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 27 June 1998; idem, "East Palo Alto Project Starts." Figures on the estimated increase in sales tax revenue vary by source, as do the number of units in the housing development.

[189] City Council minutes, 21 February, 26 June 1995. Although the Council officially broke ground in 1995, actual construction did not begin for another three years. The delay was caused by difficulties in securing funding and the last-minute withdrawal of a major tenant, not division within the community. See Zinko, "East Palo Alto to Finally Get Shopping Center."

[190] City Council minutes, 18 March 1997. Both plans included two office towers (slightly smaller than DeMonet's original 22-story plan), a luxury hotel, and retail space. The Law plan originally included a computer training center for community residents. These plans were submitted in 1997 so that by the time they would be set in motion (i.e. after land acquisition, construction, etc.), the city would be beyond Joaquin DeMonet's five-year right of first refusal, which was part of the settlement of the *CUBE v. East Palo Alto* lawsuit in 1993.

[191] There is widespread speculation surrounding the Council's decision to choose the Law group (against the recommendation of the Redevelopment Agency staff). It is clear that Kenan's abrasive style hurt his prospects – many identified his sentiments as "I know what you people need." Sharifa Wilson, who was mayor at the time, recalls a meeting with Kenan in which he said, "You don't have a choice but to go with me." Law, on the other hand, presented herself as a community advocate, a booster who was willing to do what the community asked. Wilson, for her part, identifies Law's commitment to community input and the diversity of her team (as well as Kenan's abrasiveness) as the major factors in her decision to select Law's Circle Partners group. Wilson, interview.

[192] City Council minutes, 18 March 1997. Luna, Webster, interviews with author.

[193] In addition, an effort by Menlo Park residents to halt construction of the complex was thwarted by San Mateo County Superior Court Judge Phrasel Shelton's ruling that the proposal's EIR was in order. Carolyne Zinko, "East Palo Alto Wins Fight Over Complex," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 9 February 1999.

[194] Phone conversation with author, 27 February 2002; Out of 126 households that were to be displaced by the Gateway/101 project, 117 were Latino. Gateway 101 Retail Center, Phase I, Relocation Update, produced by City of EPA Redevelopment Agency, February 1997, East Palo Alto Library

[195] Esther Hartwell to Planning Commission, 27 September 1993, in Final Environmental Impact Report for Gateway/101 Corridor Redevelopment Plan, Vol. II (Responses to Comments on the DEIR), 25 October 1993, East Palo Alto Library. Emphasis in original. The widespread support – which also crossed ethnic and racial boundaries – is also reflected in oral histories conducted among members of the Cooley apartments (which were demolished as part of the Gateway project), EPAP interview transcripts, Harmony House. Also see Jeff Israely, "Living in the path of redevelopment," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 4 May 1994; Thaai Walker, "Redevelopment in East Palo Alto, Calif., Displaces 83 Stores," *San Jose Mercury News*, 21 February 2000.

[196] Under state development law, the developer (or Redevelopment Agency) is required to cover an increase in rent in a new location for up to 48 months. However, many of the tenants displaced by Gateway and University Circle – especially Latino families – utilized a stipulation that allowed them to collect their relocation in a lump sum in order to make a down payment on a new home. Carolyne Zinko, "Renter Relocation Funds Run Low in East Palo Alto," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 15 January 1999.

[197] Shirley Hochausen, telephone conversation, 7 March 2002.

[198] In this respect, affordable housing was directly linked to another highly contentious political issue in East Palo Alto: rent control. The division between advocates and opponents of affordable housing, and their respective arguments, traditionally paralleled the division between proponents and opponents of rent control.

[199] Bill Workman, "Plan to Move Residents Told to East Palo Alto," *San Francisco Chronicle*, 30 November 1993.

[200] Interview with author.

[201] William Webster, interview with author. Although Webster is an avowed supporter of affordable housing and rent control – and therefore his rendering of the motivations behind opposition to affordable housing should be taken with a grain of salt – he spoke specifically about campaign literature (from "the opposition") that explicitly mentioned "homeowner interests."

[202] Sharifa Wilson, interview with author.

[203] For example, Gertrude Wilks, a long-time opponent of affordable housing, is now a staunch affordable housing advocate. William Webster, email correspondence, 26 May 2002.

[204] Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence."

[205] Michael Learmonth, "Eastern Migration," *Metro*, September 30-October 6, 1999 issue; Heather Wax, "Less option for renters," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 4 October 2000; William Webster, email correspondence, 26 May 2002.

[206] Economic Development Task Force, Gateway 101 Redevelopment Project Area Plan, Review and Recommendations, 23 November 1993.

[207] "The Bay Oaks Rent-Up and Tenant Selection Process," produced by MP CAN DO Inc., Fall 2000. William Webster, who served on the board of EPA CAN DO, notes that the de-emphasis of credit history was designed to prevent a disproportionate rejection of African American applicants. Interview with author.

[208] Ibid.

[209] Bob Hoover, interview with author.

[210] Quoted in Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence."

[211] City Council minutes, 20 September 2000.

[212] Quoted in Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence."

[213] All of the members of the Redevelopment Agency/City Council were African American except for Duane Bay, who is white.

[214] City Council minutes, 3 April 2000. The RVT plan was also slated to include a supermarket at one point, which was a point that many East Palo Altans later highlighted in their arguments against the IKEA plan.

[215] Ibid.

[216] Ibid.

[217] Sharifa Wilson, quoted in City Council minutes, 3 April 2000.

[218] Ibid. Jones was the only dissenting vote. It also may have helped that IKEA offered a $5 million deposit towards land acquisition.

[219] Two councilmembers (Duane Bay and Myrtle Walker) had financial ties to the project and were therefore required to recuse themselves from the vote. Only three voting councilmembers (two for the project, one against), the Council could not legally approve the project and thus needed to submit the proposal to the electorate.

[220] Interview with author.

[221] Ibid.; Barbara Mouton, Henry Salas, Belinda Rosales, interviews with author. Interestingly, Mouton was joined in her opposition to IKEA by residents and political leaders of surrounding communities, since she had previously claimed that residents of Palo Alto and Menlo Park opposed East Palo Alto's redevelopment projects because they wished to prevent the community from developing economically.

[222] Don Kazak, "IKEA Divides Community," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 5 October 2001; idem, "IKEA wins initial victory," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 31 August 2001.

[223] William Webster, email correspondence, 26 May 2002.

[224] Don Kazak, "IKEA victory confirmed," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 15 March 2002.

[225] Don Kazak, "City on the brink," *Palo Alto Weekly*, 27 February 2002.

[226] Interview with author.

[227] Carole Rafferty and Karen De Sa, "Demand for Housing Changes Face of East Palo Alto, Calif.," *San Jose Mercury News*, 5 November 1999.

[228] Thaai Walker, "East Palo Alto: The Battle for Influence."