Abstract

Oakland, California historically known as the ghetto or the inner city, a place that was off limits to outsiders and was usually avoided, was now becoming commercial and popular to many. The old neighborhoods that were filled with mostly African Americans were now being displaced for Whites, Latinos and other minorities that were not frequently seen in these neighborhoods. My research addresses the issue of gentrification coming into Oakland from the perspectives of residents and non-residents. I conduct the research by examining the underlying forces that motivate people to enter these communities by extensively reviewing literature, attending local Oakland events, and taking note of the receptive and optimistic reactions of the change that was happening in Oakland.
Introduction

For the past three summers I have been a resident of the city of Oakland. Living in Oakland, was a big change for me as I have never lived there or even really hung out there until 2009. Going into my third summer of residing in the Laurel district of Oakland, I had become familiar with local hang out spots, bars, restaurants and community events. I tried to be an active member of the local community and engage in as many activities as I can. As my second summer came around, I started bringing my friends from other small suburban cities out to Oakland, going out at night to Downtown or hanging out at Lake Merritt, a popular 3.1-mile lagoon. As the summers came along I had friends that lived in the Oakland districts, we would enjoy some of the Oakland nightlife.

Before living in Oakland, my preconceived notions about the city were that it was a dangerous place filled with poor people of low-income. In the past, the only reasons I would go to Oakland were to go certain stores with my parents that only carried ethnic foods or go see a street fair. I always thought Oakland was a dangerous city. As the only media attention of the city was due to violence, gangs, and drugs. I remember taking day trips into Oakland and seeing mass amounts of homelessness and poverty just all around the Downtown area.

But Oakland was changing and evolving into something beautiful and controversial. The trends and fashion statements were changing, more people tended to shop green, purchases and consumers of Oakland were interested in only sustainable items that were good for the environment. It was suddenly hip to be from “Oakland,” it
gave a progressive, liberal image to others. The amount of new small businesses that started opening up started to have many commonalities. I started to observe the popular trends: the rise of vegetarian and vegan dishes, community art and murals being accepted as decorative liberal statements, music that was played was mostly local musicians. Also the popularity of recycling and using compost as a process were beginning to be embedded in many restaurants. Many of these small changes began to influence my perception of the city of Oakland. Believing in sustainability and caring for the environment was not so much an ethical solution but starting to become a trend. It even rubbed off on my actions as a consumer.

Another thing I started to notice were the amount of upcoming artists and students that were flooding the area. The first time I noticed a change in people’s socioeconomic status was when attending an art expression party in West Oakland, a neighborhood situated in the northwestern corner near the Port. I had preconceived thoughts of what I was to expect, I was a bit nervous thinking it might be dangerous to go to that “bad part” of Oakland especially being a group of girls at night. Everything was new to me, entering and feeling the vibe of the atmosphere was exciting, coming unto an unknown territory. Entering the house it was filled with art canvases on the walls, a skateboard ramp in the backyard with a fire-pit.

I started to notice that most of the attendees were all in their late 20’s, mostly white, bohemian artists with friendly attitudes. Conversing and mingling all were living around the West Oakland district, which surprised me because of all the violence and
stories I have heard. Everyone discussed the hot new dance spots that were “underground”, emphasizing the fact they were not mainstream spots. This was the first time that I started noticing my surroundings, and how I was being a part of this: I was truly starting to fall in love with Oakland.

On the other side of the bay, my father the co-owner of a family owned business established in the early 1990’s was starting to be affected by this new phenomenon of entering these secluded communities. Ibarra Brother Printing, which was settled in the predominantly Latino Mission district of San Francisco was complaining about their rents and property taxes going up. I started to see the affect on the employees of the business all in their older fifty’s were nagging about the adolescent white people invading the streets of the Mission; either because their influx of new businesses, or the traffic they created on their bikes, everything was a complaint.

Many of the other local business around the print shop were either closing or moving locations. I started to see how this was affecting my father he was complaining about how a cup of coffee across the street was promoting Salvadorian or Guatemalan brewed coffee at $4.50 a cup. I started noticing that the same people invading Downtown Oakland were similar to the ones in the Mission. The rise of organic restaurants, sustainable products, vintage stores, bike shops and art studios were invading this area. I was at a crossroad because at one point I felt bad because all this was occurring to a community where I grew up in full of my people, similar in ethnicity and values. But also I was developing these same attitudes and beliefs that were common to these so called “invaders.”
People were starting to act on this persona, these set of characteristics that were not like them. There personalities were changing and evolving into this form. These people entering the city of Oakland, started to be identifiable by their clothing, accessories, transportation devices, I started hearing through word of mouth that they started to call them, "hipsters". What did this mean? I started to see many of my friends from Concord, a small suburban city in the East bay hanging out in the Oakland nightlife. Shopping, consuming and attending Oakland on a regular basis, slowly these suburban kids were starting to change their styles, beliefs and were acting upon this persona that was not like them.

After being taught and educated as an ethnic studies scholar, these changes were starting to catch my eye. I knew it was something deeper than trends in fashion and restaurants. Through observation and participating in these city events I started to see less people of color that is when I knew something serious was happening in Oakland. People who were similar to my social location, young and middle class were invading the streets in large numbers. More of my friends from suburban areas were traveling to Oakland to shop, eat and engage in leisure activities.

I was centered at this point of juxtaposition. I was one of these invaders, shopping and buying at these new businesses. Their social mentality began to rub off, my style, attitudes and lifestyles began to change. At the same time I saw the affect it was having on my father and his struggle to keep his business open. I was being pulled both ways, and knew that this issue was deeper than a social problem. It was a movement that was going on in big cities across the United States.
After the summer passed and moved to Moraga for my last year at Saint Mary’s College, I saw myself still going out to Oakland. I enjoyed the lifestyle that I created there and met many good friends that still lived in this area. I began to see this problem I was having with my self-identity connected to these problems that were happening to my ethnic background. Internally I was battling these issues and trying to pick a side that would make me comfortable. I wanted to know more about these issues. Through my ethnic studies classes, I knew that there was a label to this movement. It was a clear sign that gentrification was happening.

**Purpose**

My intent is to better understand and to address my questions on this urban movement happening in the heart of the Bay Area in Oakland, California. I am observing and addressing questions on why it was happening so close to home in a city that was once known for its crime and lack of opportunities. I am on a quest to figure out why this area is becoming an attraction and the rise of its popularity. Trying to unravel the background behind these neighborhoods and understanding why they were changing through the perspective of residents who were gentrifying these neighborhoods. This approach would be from residents and business’ located in these affected neighborhoods and the others entering these neighborhoods known as the “Gentry’s”. It would shed light on the motives on which why so many young people were moving into Oakland. By reviewing literature on gentrification and seeing the affects of revitalization, I am not here to pick sides on whether or not gentrification is a positive or negative issue. As a researcher I am here to provide my readers with the information I have found and explain how my feelings have evolved throughout the project towards the movement.
Methods

Understanding gentrification persists through evaluating different ways in which it impacts people from a variety of literature that has developed over decades that reflects the nature of gentrification as a concept or movement in Ethnic Studies. Displacement discussed by scholars only focuses on the viewpoint of poor residents, but I wanted to explore the perspectives of indigenous residents and these new residents entering the city. Although I had some clear ideas on gentrification through my experiences I wanted to research it in a way where I understood the movement as a whole and would become open to questions that might occur on the way.

My status as both a researcher and a community resident not only influenced my subjective view of Oakland, but it also impacted the ways in which other community residents related to me. These identities and other social features worked to position me in ways that both constrained and helped me in conducting my research. “It is only through familiarity with a wide range of interactions and discourse genres then that it is possible to gain a holistic understanding of a community’s social structure and the complex relations of discourse and ideologies.”(Modan, 2007, p. 10)

Through plenty of participant observation and an analysis of different community events and festivals I wanted to understand the vantage point and impressions of these gentrity’s. By being an attendant of several events, I saw the collectiveness, appearance and actions of the indigenous residents and gentrity’s as a whole. The conversations I had with residents and non-residents served as raw data for the analyses presented in this research. Acting as an anthropologist walking down the streets of Oakland during these
events and observing, filming, taking pictures and notes of the similarities I saw between people.

Events Attended:

- Pedal Fest at Jack London Square
- Occupy Oakland at Frank Ogawa Plaza
- November General Strike at the Ports of Oakland
- Art Murmur: First Friday’s on Telegraph Ave, West Oakland

Business Attended:

- Oaklandish Apparel at Downtown Oakland
- Café Van Kleef in Downtown Oakland
- Pacific Cannery Lofts in West Oakland

One on one interviews with Gentry’s of all demographics depicted how they affected these neighborhoods. Other interviews showed the different perceptions of people changing up the neighborhoods of Oakland. I sought out particular focus on services, demographics, community events and neighborhood social interaction. The interviews pertained information on respondents housing information, future plans and relation to Oakland. Conversational style was used to establish a friendly environment where they can reveal their feels and emotions and how they were responding to change.

The qualitative methods I conducted in this research included multiple in-depth interviews with a variety of people that contributed to the Oakland community. One-on-one interviews were the best way to give non-residents the opportunity to express their feelings and perceptions to what attracted them to Oakland and what made them stay.
Also one on one interview’s with young people who have been living in Oakland for awhile and getting an insight on their perspectives that they had toward their new neighbors.

The conversations I had with residents of West Oakland to serve as raw data for the analyses. To see how they see their neighborhood changing and how gentrification impacts them. In addition to interviewing, I also attended several community events, workshops and festivals sponsored by the city of Oakland, to observe the interactions of indigenous residents and new ones.

Participants of Interviews:

- Nyame Brown - New West Oakland resident and Professor of Art History
- Hasib Jami- Non-Oakland Resident
- Natalie Garcia – East Oakland Resident and High School Teacher
- Matthew Lewis- West Oakland Resident

I spent much time analyzing and researching a variety of scholarly findings on gentrification and displacement in different urban cities across the United States. Seeing how this affected everyone in the community and comparing my findings to what I was actually seeing in the community. The findings that I find will help direct me to answers that I have towards the changes that were happening. I also researched an analysis of newspapers and other media. These local mass-media channels that I chose depict the process and changes in the neighborhood during a period of rapid gentrification.

Theoretical Framework

*Explaining Gentrification*
We have to ask ourselves is Oakland gentrifying. By this we need to review recent socioeconomic trends to answer this question. A definition of gentrification refers to, “the displacement of less affluent population groups by those enjoying a higher social status the “gentry” during the development over time of centrally located urban neighborhoods.” (Kaltmeier, 2011, p.239) Therefore this suggests that we look for evidence that shows increased investments in a poverty stricken neighborhood with people of higher economic status entering. But gentrification must be examined from a multitude of angles and perspectives.

There are certain theories that drive the act of gentrification and cause the spread of it into urban areas. Bruce London and J. John Palen (1984) compiled a list of five explanations: (1) demographic-ecological, (2) socio-cultural, (3) political-economical, (4) community networks, and (5) social movements.

My research will be focusing on the socio-cultural theory of looking at gentrification. This theory argues that values, sentiments, attitudes, ideas, beliefs and choices are used to explain and predict human behavior. The people leaving suburban areas are becoming pro-urban and the values that they intake with living in these impoverished areas get consumed, they bring back new pro-urban values and impose it on other people from their suburban areas. They become “urban pioneers” and make it appropriate and an acceptable place to live for others. The inner city now becomes chic and hip and it becomes a place that has not been encountered.

Kaltmeier (2011) found the following:
"The consumption side theory of urban gentrification, underlines the socio-cultural qualities and motives of the gentrifiers, who aim at a comfortable life in city centers equipped with art galleries, delicatessen stores, cafes and restaurants, as well as upscale living opportunities. The shared connection to production and upscale consumption experiences in the city establishes a tight link between gentrification and postindustrial consumer societies." (p.239)

We must understand this concept and how the media and government have socially constructed the concept of this class takeover. The word gentrification has a lot of negative connotations, the media and government have replaced it with revitalize, reinvest, re-enhance, restore, renewal, alter, redevelop, refine, rebuild. The social construction of these words makes us visualize certain emotions towards these people moving into the city. That what was happening to the city was a good thing, that the affects were only seen in a positive way. This gentrification was becoming sophisticated, turning the hood into a suburb. It was being promoted to outside residents as an urban positive movement. It was being looked at as something beneficial to outsiders and insiders of the community. ABC 7 News Reporter, Carolyn Johnson described Oakland as. "Where the city of Oakland’s Uptown district has spent millions to revitalize the area."

Blindness of Displacement

The problem with gentrification is that people are unaware of the role they play. They immerse themselves in this new culture with no intention of hurting others. It
sparks conflict between indigenous residents and the gentry's. Most are young, first
homebuyers and trying to just start their lives independently. Gentrification is not a subtle
change in Oakland; it is a force that everyone appears to be aware of it is something
people talk about and react too: either negatively or positively.

Natalie Garcia, a 27-year old Mexican-American teacher bought her three-
bedroom house in 2006, displacing a low income Latino family of four in the Laurel
district of East Oakland. Her intentions were never to displace this family but to find
cheap affordable housing closer to her work. In her eyes she felt like she was a gentry,
coming into Oakland not too damage others but to help out the education levels of the
community. She is the youngest and newest member on her street and was actually
welcomed with open arms. On the one on one interview Garcia says, “At my first block
party on my street, my next door neighbor informed me that she had lived here her whole
life that she even has childhood memories of sitting on the top of her roof.” Garcia was
aware of the strong pride that most of her neighbors had and she clearly appreciated it.

_Yaneli Cevallos:_ What was your motivation to moving into Oakland?

_Natalie Garcia:_ “One of the reasons why I chose this specific area was because I
saw the neighborhood love and bond they had built with each other. They built a
neighborhood of reliance informing each other when there was a break-in or
robbery and really tried to get to know each other.”

What Natalie Garcia noticed from the various amount of older residents on her
street were the positive impact these people had on keeping the neighborhood the way it
was. The development of watch groups set a sense of community between indigenous and new residents all placed out there to look out for each other.

Matthew Lewis, a 27-year-old white male living in Oakland expressed his views on displacement saying, “The people I knew that were being displaced were moving to areas such as Stockton or Modesto and were getting paid higher wages. Their quality of life was improving; they can now live in a spacious four bedroom house than a crammed two bedroom apartment.” Lewis was bringing out the benefits of displacement that I did not even notice occurs in the process of gentrification.

Lewis was the owner of a newly built work and live in loft built only five years ago in the heart of West Oakland right near the ports. Pacific Cannery Lofts was an attempt to revitalize the old train station in West Oakland and build 163 lofts attracting a younger crowd due to its “First Homebuyer Program” that Lewis had been a part of. One of the top reasons of why we decided to live there was because of the $7,000 tax break Obama’s Stimulus package was offering to him.

He spoke to me about the community that was being constructed inside of these lofts. They had just opened up a café whose rent was actually paid for by the developers of the loft to give incentive to small business. To help them establish some sort of input and connection within the community. Lewis was gracious enough to give me a tour of the development, the lofts included a bike lounge filled with couches and televisions that gave residents accessibility to a variety of bikes, spare tires, pumps and gave commuters an area to socialize and get to know each other.
While walking throughout the complex I was startled at how big it was. Since many owners of the lofts were given permission to have a business in their loft. There was a Yoga/Pilate Studio that opened up ran by a resident with a very friendly attitude. On the opposite side of the complex was a Wine Bar, where you were able to dine and socialize with other residents or guests of residents. Although there were many new features of this construction project it still tried to pay homage to the Old train station that was once located there. (See Figure A) It kept old wheels, and switchboards as sculptures or small monuments all scattered around the hallways of the complex. In a way it was showing the progress of revitalization. That something so new and beautiful can give memories to a historical landmark.

Figure A

*The Train Station wheels at Pacific Cannery Lofts in West Oakland, California.*

What these lofts were doing was setting a community of gentry's that can live, work and play all in their own vicinity. It was a clear visible image of gentrification. Which can either be seen as changing a historical landmark or as a shot at enhancing a
community that was nothing into a thriving new business of bringing new money and
diversity within this West Oakland neighborhood.

Many of the residents just like Lewis, were commuters traveling to work in San
Francisco. Lewis boasted about his view of the Bay Bridge from his loft it was a great
alternative of Oakland, cheaper living, and transportation and was actually producing
change in a neighborhood.

_Urban Pioneers_

Consequently, I often socialized in the neighborhood, taking advantage of the new
shops, restaurants and cultural attractions that were dotting the area. The public spaces
that were off limits to whites a few years ago now had a white presence. The
neighborhoods that formerly invoked fear were now trendy. As I researched and
reviewed many studies on gentrification, scholars only explored how gentrification
impacted the residents living there not on the experience for the residents who were
gentrifying these neighborhoods.

“People come downtown because downtown offers experiences and choices not
available elsewhere.” (McGraw-Hill, 2000, pg. 123)

_Yaneli Cevallos_: “As a non-resident what attracts you to the city of Oakland?”

_Hasib Jami_: “I tend to go into Oakland because it’s realer than my hometown
Alameda, California it gives me a sense of what is really going on. I enjoy the
amount of different people I meet every time I go out there. There are more
opportunities out there.”

Jami expands on our interview about his experiences of going into the tattoo shops in
West Oakland that were turned into art shows at night. The rise of artists and art galleries
opening up attracted people of different ages and races and lifestyles. Art is a form of 
expression that unites and builds community. Oakland has been influenced by art so 
much that it has nights dedicated to appreciate art called the “Art Murmur” either known 
as First Fridays.

*Art Murmur/First Fridays*

I notice the rise of younger urban pioneers such as Jami and myself at the 
Oakland Art Murmur or First Fridays. Art Murmur occurs every first Friday of every 
month between 22nd and 26th street along Telegraph Avenue where about fifteen to 
twenty galleries open up their space from 6-9:00 pm to show off and promote their art. It 
becomes a secluded area closed to car traffic. It not only promotes art, but crafts, jewelry 
and a variety of art vendors. It has grown to include street performances, political 
activities.

There is a deep desire for authenticity and to shape the local and metropolitan 
vision of Oakland. Through the inspiration of art and community, there was a bond that 
was starting to develop throughout the people. People were being united on their values 
and their quest to help promote the skills of the individuals in their community that were 
artists and sculptures selling their own art.

“Ordinary people can take for themselves the strategies that advertisers use so 
well to frame, metaphor, analogy, and the reclustering of attributes around objects 
to attach and rearrange meanings to remind participants of alternatives to 
consumption and commodities.” (Williams, 1988, p. 127)

On Fridays: September 30th and December 2nd I attended the Art Murmur. It was 
not my first time as I have been before and always had a good time. Getting there I met
up with friends enjoyed a few drinks and took the casual stroll through the art galleries.

We can see this in Figure 1. Now as an attendee I had put my anthropologist eyes on,
observing similarities and differences between people. I saw the people it attracted, gangs
of trendy bicyclists, artists, and students. Everyone was so friendly, striking up
conversations with strangers or trying to sell you some of their homemade jewelry. This
was also a center to spread information on the latest social and political activities two
Caucasian women came up to me with flyers on the latest news on the Occupy
Movement and the new spots they were going to gather at.

"As the bohemian character of the community grows, it appeals "not only to
committed participants, but also to sporadic consumers who eventually
economically push out the earlier arrival sub-culture aficionados." (McGraw-Hill,
2000, p.230)

When waiting in line to enter an art gallery, a young woman with a bohemian
style started to spark a conversation. Asking me where I was from and if I was enjoying
my night. She told me she just moved to Oakland from New York, and loved the urban
art life here. Later on after finding many similarities between us, she asked for my
number. This is when I noticed I was starting to fall in love with Oakland for this exact
reason. The excitement it brings me every time I met someone new and the connections
and friendships that these community events bring. This quick interaction brought to light
the unity of indigenous residents and new residents coming into the city and how events
like this bring positive change into the community.
Photos taken at Art Murmur on September 30th, 2011

Professor Nyane Brown: “Art Murmur is a beautiful meeting point for young people to surround themselves with the beauty that art brings. Specifically street art is an escape for people who are trying to make it out there in the art scene to showcase their abilities and become known in the community.” (2011)

I started to notice that I myself was becoming a part of this pioneer movement. I was attending the newest boutiques, restaurants and clubs that were opening up. I adored the nightlife that was being placed into the city to revitalize the area and was consuming and spending my money in Oakland. I often saw no desire to go to San Francisco when Oakland now was the new center of attraction.

Pedal Fest
Another event I attended was “Pedal Fest” which was hosted in Jack London Square in Oakland on October 22, 2011. It was an all day bike festival to celebrate all things bicycle. This included a pedal-powered sound stage, bike safety programs, a bike rodeo, parade, beer gardens and food vendors. Which attracted all riders from Oakland’s bicycle community. Spending the day there I saw many coalitions of Oakland come
together to show support for each other such as the Oakland Bicycle Coalition to spread awareness of their service in the community. Events such as these bring more outside visitors to Oakland and attract people to come together and unite. This only brings unity and provides a public space for people of these nearby neighborhoods to relax and enjoy the amenities the creative city of Oakland has to offer.

Author, Brett Williams in his book, “Upscaling Downtown,” he reinforces the politics of culture and the modifications that big cities across the United States are trying to create a sense of community through gentrification by uniting new and old residents. He says, “These community festivals are filled with musical stages, booths for foods and crafts, lively colorful sights to cut across ethnic boundaries and offer people the chance to participate.

“Hipster business”

Oakland is beginning to achieve upward mobility without having to escape to the suburbs. It is starting to become suburban living in an urban space. “People come downtown for the stimulation of being surrounded by different kinds of people, ethnic restaurants, festivals and cultural events, clubs and conventions.” (McGraw-Hill, 2000 pg. 123)

The marketing strategies of many new businesses have taken a complete 180; they are marketing to a group of consumers who have a different perception of society. “The stereotypical demographics of a hipster are predominately Caucasian, middle class, lovers of indie music, art and culture. The rise of the hipster coincided with the rise of independent entertainment -- music, arts and culture that set them apart from mainstream
tastes. "Hipster" became a cultural brand defining consumers of indie products. Oakland has a long history of being a resistance culture for example the Oakland Raiders and the Black Panther Movement. The idea of straying away from mainstream tastes bring along the notion of gentrification and whether or not it is hip to enjoy mainstream values and want to set their own identity.

When looking at the context of Oakland we must take into consideration the suburban cities surrounding it Alameda, Piedmont and San Leandro whose consumers are older and more conservative. Younger consumers do not have an outlet to socialize and engage in urban living. The restaurants in Oakland offer something different an escape of their usual lifestyles and the option to enter a city where there is always something to fit someone’s needs.

I noticed that people were attracted to Oakland because of how non-mainstream it is, the amount of cultural restaurants on one street all catering to different wants and needs. Stores such as, “Oaklandish” in Downtown Oakland is the prime example of a hipster business. Their purpose on their website states that,

“After years of public art, the Oaklandish brand of apparel was introduced to help support our ongoing calendar of free public events and the Oaklandish Innovators grant program. The civic pride-oriented merchandise is meant to spread "Local Love" while promoting awareness of our mission at large. Oaklandish is committed to encouraging the continuation of Oakland's "trailblazers' legacy," where trends are created and boundaries are redefined.”

This promotion of awareness of Oaklandish Apparel in the community opens itself up to people who are new to Oakland, specifically catering to the demographics of a gentry. We need to ask ourselves, is gentrification becoming profitable? In my past experiences I have noticed many people who were not residents of Oakland wearing shirts with Oakland slang, “I Hella Love Oakland,” or “Oaklandish” to visibly promote their love for Oakland. For myself I do not see this as an issue, people love Oakland for what it is why not show it? But to other indigenous residents there can cause conflict in which they feel that outsiders do not have the right to take pride in a community they do not live in.

The civil engagement of Oaklandish Apparel is incredible on the website it states, “Oaklandish has created the Oakland Innovators Award, a fund that offers annual grants to those organizations and individuals who are doing pioneering work in our community. This award is meant to offer recognition and financial rewards to local programs that exemplify the values of innovation and progress in all areas of civic life, including arts, education, technology, and business.” People are most likely to purchase from this store because of their ethical consumption process. After you consume their product of a sweater, jacket or t-shirt the money you spend is benefiting the community around you. It shows a unification of the city’s residents, mostly marketing to Generation Y, from the ages of thirty-five and under.

Café Van Kleef is a wonderful café to relax and enjoy drinks and coffee and features live music by local bands. Situated on Telegraph Avenue on the same street where the Art murmur is located in the newly renovated district of Downtown Oakland.
The restaurant opened during a time of boom and stimulus in Oakland, when millions of dollars were being used to revitalize the city.

What was exceptionally noticeable when entering the café was the drink special that were on the wall. Their daily special on Thursday’s were, “The 99% Solution or The Oakland Occupado,” which was an alcoholic drink mixed of coconut and vodka. This surprised me because I got the link of what customer base they were trying to attract: attendees of the Occupy Movement. When looking at the website the café explains, “Café Van Kleef has become home to a very wide-ranging clientele of bohemians, artists, entrepreneurs, politicians & urban professionals of all ages.”

Places like this café that has opened to suit the needs of the new people coming into Oakland, again fits one set of people. Another visible business that fits the specific need of one set of people.

Promoting Community Change

The new business opening up aren’t always bringing negativity within the community but also bringing community change. The youth and community involvement is incredible and is riding the trend of engagement. Gentry’s are there strengthening the community and improving the conditions of local schools. Oaklandish Apparel, gives back 10% of every purchase goes to supporting local community organizations and schools.

Occupy Oakland Movement

Another event I attended was Occupy Oakland numerous amounts of times in October, November and December. I decided to attend this in Oakland because there

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were no other sites closer to my location in the East Bay. Occupy was a coalition of
diverse people of all ages and colors there all for one goal to see change and justice
within the poverty stricken people of their community. I was not there to analyze the
political movements but to see the type of people that were attending these
manifestations. There were African American people that had been displaced now living
on the streets and were actual products of gentrification shouting and fighting for their
beliefs along the sides of young, white activists who were new to the city of Oakland.
Gentry's and products of gentrification were being united from this event.

Everyone was their for the same reasons whether or not they have been residents
for a long or short time being them being there meant they wanted to see their community
thrive. Political Gridlock, a co-op of artists and activist from Alameda donated their time
and paint to make propaganda for Occupy. (See Figure C) This was a clear example of
how non-residents also loved Oakland so much that they also wanted to contribute to the
upscaling of the city.

Hasib Jami: I love screen-printing and giving out posters to the community, it
feels as if I am doing something good for others. I have to show my love for
Alameda’s backyard, Downtown Oakland.
Figure C

*Occupy Oakland Propaganda made by Political Gridlock Artists: Kalleb Afreaine*

When looking at the pros and cons of a variety of different people, I have noticed that gentrification is not necessarily a bad thing. It has much more benefits than costs. Natalie Garcia, resident of Oakland spoke about how the city is doing anything it can to revitalize the areas and make it look more appealing to the community. "They are starting to do the smallest things such as remodel all the garbage cans on High Street to make them look more artsy and trendy." What gentrification has been doing is bringing more money and promoting community involvement within these washed up areas of Oakland.
Nyame Brown: “I was sitting at home one day, when my doorbell rings up comes a white young male in his late 20’s asking me to sign his petition for the opening of a yoga/meditation center. At first it seemed bizarre to me, what was this guy doing in my neighborhood of West Oakland, did he not feel intimidated? He is trying to promote change and have a center for young people to spend their time in, instead of being out in the streets. What was our community is there’s now.”

Many developers of these new condos and lofts actually reached out to the community in which they were entering. Rick Holliday, the developer of Pacific Cannery Condominiums in West Oakland linked himself with Oakland’s community activist Marcel Diallo. Before building the development himself and the planning commissions started to become friendly with the businesses and barbershops built around that area. Holliday began to show his commitment to preserve the scene of West Oakland.

“A cafe at the Cannery Condominiums entrance displays photographs by Julie Placencia, depicting all the families on her block in West Oakland standing in front of her homes. In the gallery next door, Diallo has mounted an exhibit of old Black Panther newspaper covers and poster graphics by San Francisco artist Emory Douglas.”(Swan, 2008)

Role of race in Gentrification

Unlike any other group in urban America, we must reflect the importance of race and how the majority of blacks were being confined to racially homogeneous neighborhoods. Blacks and Latinos are the marginalized groups that are the ones that constantly get displaced. The identity of the city begins to change when race does. More
diversity among the people brings a sort of inclusiveness into these neighborhoods. Education levels began to exceed in the community and it starts to show a presence in Oakland.

What I did notice through my participant observation that was contrary to what I was finding in the studies of gentrification was that besides the fact that more Whites were entering the city, many people of color were labeled “gentry’s” as well. It was based more on their age and the amount of income they were making, enough to afford their own household in Oakland. Whites were not the only driving force of gentrification. These books have a racially coded language my observations have showed me that every race is out to pursue better living standards.

Professor Nyame Brown was a prime example of an African American man as gentry. Living in West Oakland for about seven months, he saw himself as an inspiration to younger generations. He felt as if residing in West Oakland was an affordable choice and enjoyed the artist community. Although was frequently saddened by the fact that many of the people that were being displaced were African American. Nyame states, “Living in this community, I am now that one Black man that others do not have to be scared of, I am here to help and protect others from the crime, my presence there can actually reduce the violence.” Brown felt as if he was giving back to impoverished areas and was improving the community.

“Many black gentry’s cherish the notion of living on the same streets of history. How history has contributed to “black energy” that creative types want to tap into. They were aware of the reputation and social problems that afflicted these urban
cities. Their desire and obligation as someone advantaged to help the city reach its former glory.” (Freeman, 1992, p.55)

Not only has Downtown Oakland been a neighborhood with Black as the majority but also it has historically been an area that overcame white privilege. Outsiders, such as urbanized Whites are not expected to be seen walking down the streets. “In neighborhoods an increasingly visible presence of whites was the most noticeable change associated with gentrification. Until recently the change from predominantly black to white has been a relatively rare occurrence. When whites came that meant the neighborhood would improve and changes were under way.”(pg.80)

Yaneli Cevallos: Did you notice any differences of demographics or visibility of gentrification in your community?

Professor Nyame Brown: Yes, one day I was at home while this white male no older than his late 20’s approaches my home and rings my doorbell, he says Hello I’m one of your new neighbors and I’m going around trying to get people to sign my petition to open up a new yoga center in the neighborhood.

Yaneli Cevallos: What did you think?

Professor Nyame Brown: I thought it was great to see people trying to improve the neighborhood and provide outlets for these kids. I am all for improving the quality of life for people. But when I look at it now, other folks might think that these young white guys are trying to takeover their hood.

When it comes down to the rich and the poor, professionals with condos to the working class every economic and social background. Long-term residents and gentry’s are not
necessarily opposed to gentrification. “It is often argued that the benefits of gentrification are far greater than the costs. The benefits and costs are so unevenly distributed that one has to look not at some overall equation but at different segments of the population.” (Schill and Nathan 1983, p 5)

“Upcoming neighborhoods seek out ways to create a community of memory by exercising its symbolic action, revealing the power and the limitations of grass-roots efforts to create community.” (Williams, 1988 p.121)

It started to hit me that my project was beginning to extend my perceptions and views of Oakland. I started to mentally note all the changes that were happening around me.

Attending the Oakland Farmers Market on Grand Avenue in Downtown Oakland made me see the changes that were quietly happening. I thought it was beautiful on how this brought the community together to celebrate healthy living. I started to notice that there was a very diverse crowd.
Census Data

Data from a Census helps to illuminate a picture of the extent in which Oakland has changed in the past ten years. There has been a dramatic shift of race in Oakland’s population which is due to the cheaper rents and the attracting street art and music the city has to offer. According to the U.S Census American Community Survey of 2000-2010, there has been 32,989 African Americans who have left the city of Oakland in just a span of ten years. (See Appendix A) A number that is quite shocking since Oakland has been the starting grounds for African Americans, especially because the Black Panther Movement originated in one of the city parks. There has also been an increase of white residents entering into the city with a jaw dropping 9,912. Painting a picture that Oakland is a classic example of a gentrifying neighborhood and race does take a position in the movement of gentrification.

This change in number is shifting the population and causing a displacement within the city. This displacement has brought a subtle process that includes bringing in large amounts of professionals into the city. We can track his when comparing the educational attainment in Census from 2000 and 2010, 18% of the population had Bachelor’s degree in 2000 (Appendix A) which dramatically rose in 2010 with a 36% of the population over 25 with a Bachelor’s degree. (Appendix B). That means there is twice the amount of people with Bachelor’s degree. This correlates with the shift of race, white people have a greater chance of finishing college than a person of color does. This can be a positive thing in which more knowledge and resources have entered the city causing a great change in the goals of the city. The rise of people with education can also bring great minds with ideas to improve and bring back a thriving community. These new residents can also be provided as role models to younger residents of the community.

Also the median household income has risen from $40,044(Appendix A) to $49,695
(Appendix B) which has to do with the number of professional people in the city. These people are bringing more money into the Oakland economy, consuming in local bars, shops and restaurants. This can bounce back the city and bring in more attraction to Oakland. New residents of the city will bring their friends and families to explore the city’s leisure activities.


"Decoding my Self-Identity"

Through this project I often came to a point of confusion and guilt. Engaging in a lot of participant observation and attending these community events I gained much more appreciation for the city of Oakland. I felt as if I was getting sucked in. While explaining and telling others about my project I was often criticized as being a hipster. "It is not a desirable stereotype to be associated with, and in my work I refrain from calling anyone a hipster unless they would like to self-identify," Arsel said. "As you might guess, almost nobody self-identifies." I came to a conclusion that I am what I am, I was born in an urban area: San Francisco and grew up around this type of environment. I was born to appreciate this tempo and lifestyle.

Gentrification was all around me from the experiences I saw my father face daily at his printing shop in the thriving Mission District of San Francisco, to my sister moving into Oakland, displacing a family and bringing up the community to my friends coming all the way from Oakland every weekend just to hang out with the culture and people of Oakland. Gentrification was a process that was all around me and affecting me my self-identity in every way. I enjoyed Oakland, I loved the community events and impact it had to the younger generations. I loved eating and trying all these new restaurants Oakland had to offer. I bought my bike from a small business in Downtown Oakland and loved biking around the city. I was fully engaged in this "gentrification lifestyle," I stated all throughout my research. I did have somewhat of a bias to my research since I myself was an actual resident and participated in much of these activities.

But I came to a conclusion that gentrification was not necessarily always a bad thing. It does benefit the community as a whole and at times of a recession we are in
desperate need for more money coming into cities so that they can become what they used to be.

What I did notice that whether being a resident or non-resident of Oakland people had a tremendous amount of pride and love for the city and wished to do anything to bring it up. People with all different socioeconomic class all told similar stories. Business owners, teachers, Oakland residents, students all had the overall same perspective that the indigenous residents of gentrifying neighborhoods were definitely being displaced to another location. But what we cannot determine is the future affects of all this in later years.

This research showed me a lot about myself and how susceptible I am to fall in the new trends of urban living. I have a desire to live an urban lifestyle and that is why perhaps people like myself tend to flow into these big cities. I learned a lot about myself, and the identity I like to express to others. I enjoy Oakland and the services and number of opportunities it has to offer and even consider moving there after graduation.
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