



C/CAG's Equity Framework Draft Historical Perspective Memo

Purpose: The purpose of this memo is to establish a shared historical understanding to inform the development of the City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG) equity definition and other elements of the agency's Equity Framework.

Context: A literature scan was conducted of online resources at the intersection of social equity, C/CAG's Program Areas, and San Mateo County and regional geographic scales. In conducting the literature scan, several examples of California's history related to genocide, dispossession of land, infringement of civil liberties, and other injustices towards racial and ethnic demographics were also obtained and incorporated in the memo.

The content below is largely focused on racial justice and land use and housing themes because of availability of research and specific examples connected to San Mateo County's past; however, it's important to note that this represents only part of the picture. Other factors often considered in diversity, equity, and inclusion work include gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, socioeconomic status, language, and physical ability.¹ Furthermore, C/CAG's program areas extend beyond land use and housing, including transportation, stormwater pollution prevention, and climate. Still, racism in land use and housing policy and planning is important to understand because of the role it has played in establishing and reinforcing today's inequities, the high degree of local land use and housing discretion and authority, and its connections with C/CAG's other program areas.

Historical Perspective:

Beginning with the State of California's inception and well into the 20th Century, White settlers and political and business leaders infused California's laws, regulations, and actions with racist, exclusionary, exploitative, and discriminatory worldviews. At first, State discrimination and racialized capitalism was focused on Native Americans and Chinese citizens and migrants. Later, as populations shifted, the focus of those in power turned to other racial minorities. As described below, the tactics and strategies to uphold White wealth, power, and privilege were diverse, extensive, and at times overlapping depending on demographic, political, and other evolving factors.

California Native genocide: Prior to European colonization, the Bay Area was home to tremendous biological diversity and abundance that helped support one of the densest populations of people living in the US. "Approximately one-third of all Native Americans in the United States were living in the area now known as California prior to contact with Europeans. In an area spanning from San Francisco to Big Sur, there were 50 documented villages and

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion: Key Terms and Definitions. (2021, November 29). NACo. <https://www.naco.org/resources/featured/key-terms-definitions-diversity-equity-inclusion>



extended family groups who spoke at least eight distinct dialects and were loosely united by a similar language.”² Indigenous groups calling the Bay Area home included the Ohlone (Costanoan), Coast Miwok, Wappo, Patwin, and Pomo.³

Before and after California’s statehood, Spanish, Mexican, and American governments, and by extension their citizenry, dispossessed Native peoples of the vast majority of their land, subjugated and exploited them, practiced forced cultural and spiritual assimilation, and committed genocide on the land which we now inhabit. “In the early decades of California's statehood, the relationship between the State of California and California Native Americans was fraught with violence, exploitation, dispossession and the attempted destruction of tribal communities, as summed up by California's first Governor, Peter Burnett, in his 1851 address to the Legislature: “[t]hat a war of extermination will continue to be waged between the two races until the Indian race becomes extinct must be expected... The State of California's laws and policies discriminating against Native Americans and denying the existence of tribal government powers persisted well into the twentieth century.”⁴ The development of the State’s entire economy and settlement patterns are based on these historical facts; however, the State of California, the Bay Area, and San Mateo County have largely failed to rectify this historical stain in any meaningful way.

Perhaps miraculously considering the violence and oppression towards them, a small percentage of Bay Area and California Native people were able to survive. Today, the Bay Area and California is home to the descendants of these survivors, as well as Native Americans from other parts of the US. “The Bay Area has... become one of the largest populations of Intertribal Indians in the country with people coming from communities in the Southwest, Great Plains, and Eastern Woodlands areas. Now, California is home to close to 200 tribes with only 109 of them recognized by the U.S. federal government.”⁵

Injustices towards Chinese and Japanese immigrants: In addition to injustices towards Native people’s, people of Asian descent faced intense discrimination and harrassment locally and statewide towards the beginning of the California Republic and into the second half of the twentieth century. Three years prior to the Federal Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 that “for the first time, proscribed entry of an ethnic working group on the premise that it endangered the good order of certain localities”, State of California lawmakers imposed their own set of restrictions banning Chinese labor.⁶ In 1879, the California legislature passed Constitutional

² Parrish, W. (2018, May 30). *Living on Ohlone Land*. East Bay Express | Oakland, Berkeley & Alameda. <https://eastbayexpress.com/living-on-ohlone-land-2-1/>

³ Moore, Eli, Nicole Montojo, and Nicole Mauri. (2019, October). *Roots, Race, and Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley. haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/rootsraceplace

⁴ *Executive Order N-15-19*. (2019, June 18). Executive Department, State of California. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/6.18.19-Executive-Order.pdf>

⁵ *Indigenous Populations in the Bay Area | Bay Area Equity Atlas*. (n.d.). <https://bayareaequityatlas.org/about/indigenous-populations-in-the-bay-area>

⁶ *Chinese Exclusion Act (1882)*. (2022, February 17). National Archives. <https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/chinese-exclusion-act>

Amendment Article 19 under the premise that “the presence of foreigners ineligible to become citizens of the United States is declared to be dangerous to the well-being of the State”.⁷ The effect of these policies was among other things, the rapid depopulation of Chinese residents in California and the US.

Several decades later, another sizable minority and one growing increasingly economically successful, became the focus of State and Federal action - people of Japanese ancestry. “California adopted alien land laws in 1913 and 1920 with the purpose of driving Japanese farmers out of California agriculture and undermining the economic foundation of Japanese immigrant society... Before the alien land laws were struck down, forced internment of people of Japanese descent during World War II resulted in a massive loss of property and community in the Bay Area... During World War II, Californians aggressively sought to enforce the alien land laws to prevent interned Japanese Americans from returning. The laws remained in place until 1952” (pg. 19-20).⁸

Land Use & Housing Discrimination: Land use and housing policy is a well documented and important part of the historical context of San Mateo County because segregation, the wealth gap, environmental and economic justice, public health, energy equity, and transportation equity are all intertwined with the way our towns, cities, region, and state have been planned and built. Documented actions include forced dispossession of Native people from their lands (as noted above), exclusionary zoning, redlining, racial steering, blockbusting, racially restrictive covenants and homeowner association bylaws, and racialized public housing policies. These actions, including examples from within San Mateo County, are documented in detail by multiple sources, including the Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society in their report “roots, race, & place - A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area”. The report states “The rampant displacement seen today in the San Francisco Bay Area is built upon a history of exclusion and dispossession, centered on race, and driven by the logic of capitalism. This history established massive inequities in who owned land, who had access to financing, and who held political power, all of which determined—and still remain at the root of deciding—who can call the Bay Area home. While systems of exclusion have evolved between eras, research indicates that “it was in the early part of the twentieth century that the foundation for continuing inequality in the twenty-first century was laid” (pg. 7-9).⁹

Examples cited by the Haas report with explicit references to San Mateo County, include:

- Extrajudicial and Militia Violence: “Extrajudicial violence including arson, assault, and lynching was a longstanding strategy through which racial exclusion, dispossession, and control were exerted... In the 1940s, some realtors proposed designating the entire San Mateo peninsula a sundown area. An Atherton real estate agent “urged exclusive ‘white occupancy in the region,’” stating that the peninsula was “not a proper place” for “Negroes, Chinese, and other racial minorities.” The Pacific Citizen reported that other

⁷ *Constitution of the State of California*. (1880, April 16).

<https://archives.cdn.sos.ca.gov/collections/1879/archive/1879-constitution.pdf>

⁸ Moore, Eli, Nicole Montojo, and Nicole Mauri. (2019, October). *Roots, Race, and Place: A History of Racially Exclusionary Housing in the San Francisco Bay Area*. Haas Institute for a Fair and Inclusive Society, University of California, Berkeley. haasinstitute.berkeley.edu/rootsraceplace

⁹ Ibid.

members of the realty board “felt the only way to handle the minority problem was to set aside acreage and subdivide it for minority groups with schools, business districts, etc.” Though the proposal for a sundown area was shelved, threats and violence largely kept people of color from moving in... In Redwood City, the newly built home of John J. Walker, a Black war veteran, was burned down in 1946 after he received threats and demands to move out” (p.27).

- Comprehensive and Euclidean Zoning: “Modern zoning has its roots in Berkeley, and racial exclusion and real estate profits were among the primary reasons for its development” (pg. 31)... “Incorporated municipalities... turned to exclusionary land use policies like large minimum lot sizes, growth boundaries, and caps on new units. For example, immediately after Atherton was incorporated in 1923, the town adopted a zoning ordinance imposing a one-acre minimum lot for housing. In the mid-1950s, more suburbs, typically seeking to prevent annexation, followed suit in adopting stringent land use regulations” (pg. 34).
- Racially Restrictive Covenants and Homeowner Association Bylaws: “Throughout the late-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, white property owners and subdivision developers wrote clauses into their property deeds forbidding the resale and sometimes rental of such property to non-whites, particularly African Americans... The first homes in the subdivision of Westlake in Daly City were sold in 1949 and included a racial covenant that covered all properties in the development” (pg. 35)... “While unenforced, racially restrictive regulations remained within homeowner association bylaws in some instances as late as the 1990s and 2000s, such as... Cuesta La Honda in San Mateo County” (pg. 37).
- Racial Steering: “For at least 25 years following its release in 1924, the National Association of Realtors’ code of ethics provided the guidance that “A Realtor should never be instrumental in introducing into a neighborhood a character of property or occupancy, members of any race or nationality, or any individuals whose presence will clearly be detrimental to property values in that neighborhood”... Realtors and community advocates servicing northern Santa Clara County and southern San Mateo County reported widespread racial steering in the 1960s... Real estate agents attempted to dissuade Black buyers from purchasing in all-white areas, sometimes explicitly telling those families that neighbors would object to their purchase or that the current owner would not want to sell... The real estate community forced the majority of the area’s Black population into a “small region lying partly in the city of Menlo Park and partly in an unincorporated portion of San Mateo County known as East Palo Alto.”” (pg. 49-50).
- Blockbusting: “Blockbusting was a particularly pernicious and profitable form of racial steering where real estate investors would provoke fear of racial change in the neighborhood so they could profit from the transactions. For instance, after the first African American family moved to East Palo Alto’s new Palo Alto Gardens subdivision in 1954, real estate agents carried out a blockbusting campaign... The outcomes of racial steering, blockbusting, and other tactics were starkly evident in many areas of the region in the 1960s. A realtor in San Carlos boasted that steering Black applicants away from the area had kept the city entirely white as of 1957, stating, “We are proud that we have no Negro living here in San Carlos” (pg. 51-52).

Factors that contributed to the development and ongoing existence of Equity Priority Communities and associated geographic inequities in San Mateo County: The historical places of concentration of people of color and low income households in San Mateo County were typically redlined communities physically separated from White communities by space or infrastructure (such as Highway 101), located in flood prone areas or places less desirable for

development, and/or unincorporated areas of the County without direct representation. These segregated spaces were created and reinforced by both exclusionary and racist public and private sector actions, including the examples cited above.

In “Un-forgetting the segregationist history of Palo Alto (and Daly City, and San Francisco, and...)”, author Richard Rothstein shares the multiple layers of racialized housing and land use policy that created and reinforced segregated communities across the nation and in San Mateo County. One of the communities Rothstein describes is Daly City. “The suburbanization of the country that took place in the late 1940s and through the 1950s that was underwritten by the Federal Housing Administration was created on a racial basis. So you talk about... Westlake in Daly City, a development that was financed by the Federal Housing Administration... The only way you could [finance] it was to go to the Federal Housing Administration and make a commitment to never sell a home to an African American, to concede to the Federal Housing Administration’s requirement that every deed in the home prohibit resale or rental to African Americans. And on that basis, Daly City was built on a racially segregated, exclusively white basis... African Americans could have afforded to move to Westlake, but they were prohibited from doing so by the Federal Housing Administration and were instead concentrated in government created ghettos”.¹⁰ But African Americans weren’t the only demographic barred from living in places like Daly City, as a KQED report on Daly City points out. “In Daly City, and across the Bay Area, it wasn't just African Americans who were excluded — it was anyone who couldn't pass as white. That included Filipinos... as well as Latinos and Asians.”¹¹

In addition to Daly City in the north, southeastern San Mateo County also has several areas of concentrated poverty and people of color, including North Fair Oaks, East Palo Alto, and Belle Haven. "North Fair Oaks, often referred to as NFO, has never been incorporated as a city with its own government, nor has it been annexed to any of the neighboring cities. This makes it the responsibility of the County of San Mateo and the five members of the Board of Supervisors. Lack of city government services also has fostered and exacerbated the contrasts between NFO and the cities that surround it, contrasts in affluence, infrastructure, public services, ethnicity and commerce."¹²

As opposed to North Fair Oaks, which has remained unincorporated, East Palo Alto, previously an unincorporated area of the County, went through an incorporation effort that resulted in it becoming its own city several decades ago. “After World War II, the predominantly white cities that surrounded East Palo Alto used property tax rates, land use laws, municipal services and racial covenants to facilitate development of Silicon Valley’s tech industry, “clean” manufacturing and high-end suburbs, while excluding “undesirable” populations and land uses. In addition, the

¹⁰ Russo, C. (2020, June 28). *Un-forgetting the segregationist history of Palo Alto (and Daly City, and San Francisco, and. . .)*. News | Palo Alto Online |. <https://paloaltoonline.com/news/2020/06/28/un-forgetting-the-segregationist-history-of-palo-alto-and-daly-city-and-san-francisco-and>

¹¹ *How Daly City Became One of the Most Densely Populated Cities in the Country*. (2021, July 29). KQED. <https://www.kqed.org/news/11882379/how-daly-city-became-one-of-the-most-densely-populated-cities-in-the-country>

¹² Shoecraft, D. (2022, May 16). *Rooted and uprooted in North Fair Oaks*. Climate Online. <https://climaterwc.com/2022/05/16/rooted-and-uprooted-in-north-fair-oaks/>

redevelopment of “blighted areas” of San Francisco resulted in the “expulsion of Blacks” from its small neighborhoods. However, because they lived in an unincorporated area, East Palo Alto residents were not able to make social and economic choices. The county, not the residents, controlled land use decisions. While some white East Palo Alto residents attempted to shut Black and Asian Pacific American families out of East Palo Alto, they did not have the power to enshrine their biases in local law. As a result, many of the people and the industries excluded from neighboring cities settled in East Palo Alto” (pg. 4).¹³

As expressed in these and other sources, concentrated areas of BIPOC populations such as East Palo Alto were susceptible to disenfranchisement in relation to surrounding cities and neighborhoods which, among other things, resulted in an oversupply of negative infrastructure and services and an undersupply of positive infrastructure and services. “Because of its unincorporated status, East Palo Alto relied wholly upon San Mateo County for services. Instead of representing specific locales or districts, San Mateo supervisors were chosen through countywide elections. As a result, no supervisor specifically represented East Palo Alto. Nor did the votes of East Palo Alto residents carry sufficient weight to ensure political clout. As a result, the community’s interests were routinely ignored.”¹⁴ “San Mateo County cited a disproportionate number of harmful industrial projects in East Palo Alto, including the county landfill, the regional hazardous waste recycling plant, auto dismantling facilities and pesticide and herbicide producers. These activities benefitted the county but imposed substantial local economic and environmental burdens on East Palo Alto. For example, the Romic hazardous waste plant operated in East Palo Alto from 1964 until 2007, when it was shut down in response to community pressure... Soil and groundwater contamination from the plant extended 80 feet below ground level” (pg. 4).¹⁵

One example of governmental action related to transportation that harmed East Palo Alto prior to incorporation was the placement of Highway 101. “In 1958... the expansion of the Bayshore Freeway... led to the erasure of East Palo Alto’s main business district and the closure of over 50 shops, only a few of which relocated within the community. Appeals by local residents to shift the route to spare the business district were rejected. Freeway construction also prompted neighborhoods to the west of the Bayshore to leave Ravenswood School District, which served East Palo Alto and parts of Menlo Park, and to join the Menlo Park School District, thereby worsening existing patterns of racial segregation in schools”.¹⁶

¹³ Layton, F., Allison A. Johnson. (2019, January). *From Crisis to Solutions: A Case Study of East Palo Alto’s Water Supply*. Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

<https://www.siliconvalleycf.org/sites/default/files/publications/east-palo-alto-water-report-reader.pdf>

¹⁴ Skidmore, D. (2022, March 29). *How Rent Control Helped Create East Palo Alto*. Shelterforce.

<https://shelterforce.org/2022/03/22/the-nexus-between-rent-control-and-incorporation-in-east-palo-alto/>

¹⁵ Layton, F., Allison A. Johnson. (2019, January). *From Crisis to Solutions: A Case Study of East Palo Alto’s Water Supply*. Silicon Valley Community Foundation.

<https://www.siliconvalleycf.org/sites/default/files/publications/east-palo-alto-water-report-reader.pdf>

¹⁶ Skidmore, D. (2022, March 29). *How Rent Control Helped Create East Palo Alto*. Shelterforce.

<https://shelterforce.org/2022/03/22/the-nexus-between-rent-control-and-incorporation-in-east-palo-alto/>

These inequities, in turn, contributed to generational economic, environmental, health, and quality of life impacts. “In a 1968 application that San Mateo County wrote for a grant from President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Model Cities program, it said: ‘The adjacent cities do not desire to annex East Palo Alto with all of its costly problems such as unemployment, low level of income, overcrowded housing, low education attainment, high number of welfare recipients (highest in the County), drainage, street repair, and lack of certain facilities...’”¹⁷ Over a half a century later, some of these same issues continue to plague East Palo Alto and other San Mateo County Equity Priority Communities.

History of anti-racist and social justice community organizing/mobilization in EPC’s in SMC in relation to C/CAG’s program areas: The economic and political system has continued to reproduce unequal outcomes, and some, but not all, local, regional, and state governments are only relatively recently beginning to make meaningful commitments and attempting to make measurable progress in addressing these historical injustices and discriminatory actions. Despite this sobering reality, it is important to convey that over the course of the history shared in this document, there is a parallel history of survival, resistance, and organizing at local, state, and national levels to move us closer to the ideals of democracy, equity, inclusion, and justice.

East Palo Alto, for example, is the birthplace of the Nairobi Movement, which in addition to its important local contributions, influenced activists across the nation and beyond.¹⁸ Another often cited East Palo Alto example is Youth United for Community Action’s (YUCA) successful campaign to close down Romic Chemical Corporation in East Palo Alto after decades of toxic contamination and health impacts in the community.¹⁹

Clearly the issues of inequality and injustice would be even worse had it not been for individual and collective resistance and organizing of BIPOC and other historically disenfranchised demographics in San Mateo County, California, and across the nation. From the uprisings of California Native people in response to Spanish and Mexican occupation, repression, and violence, to local manifestations of the Civil Rights Movement, and contemporary social justice struggles, examples abound, despite the potential for retaliation and other adverse consequences. It’s important to shed light on this important part of our history for many reasons, including the very fact that the moment we are in today is a direct consequence of this legacy.

¹⁷ Cutler, K. (2015, January 10). *East Of Palo Alto’s Eden: Race And The Formation Of Silicon Valley*. TechCrunch. <https://techcrunch.com/2015/01/10/east-of-palo-altos-eden/>

¹⁸ San Mateo County Libraries. (2022, February 23). *Conversation with Community Elders about the Nairobi Movement*. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fi-8Nrt2uhw>

¹⁹ Center for Health Journalism. (2019, September 12). *Uneven Ground: Part 1 - How unequal land use harms communities in southern San Mateo County*. <https://centerforhealthjournalism.org/fellowships/projects/uneven-ground-how-unequal-land-use-harms-communities-southern-san-mateo-county>