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Modern Day Colonization: Gentrification as a Public Health Emergency

and its Impact on Health, Safety, and Wellbeing

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the impact of gentrification in the San Francisco Bay Area, specifically in Oakland, and its relationship to the health and wellbeing of communities. It highlights the public health consequences of gentrification, presents recommendations for policies that will mitigate this impact, and encourages behavior change among newcomers as well as long-term residents. To provide an understanding of gentrification and the Bay Area landscape in which it occurs, a comprehensive literature review was conducted and an exhaustive web search was undertaken to obtain all pertinent information related to the topic. Based on the research, recommendations to combat gentrification now and prevent its future negative impacts include housing policy reform, strict enforcement of new corporate responsibility policies that respect the community, education to increase awareness of the negative effects of gentrification, and a call for the mobilization of long-term residents to resist gentrification. Community-based participatory research is also an important recommendation to support collaborative interventions. Adopting these recommendations can lead to a healthier Bay Area by promoting greater access to essential health-related resources, such as housing and financial security. Furthermore, embracing these recommendations can position the Bay Area as a pioneer in implementing gentrification-related policies. Corporations and newcomers will be held accountable to pay reparation to the communities they enter. These newcomers will have a sense of self-awareness and long-term residents' voices will be heard, their needs and demands will be respected and met, and their vibrant communities will be preserved. Overall, this paper calls for policy reform that supports the prevention of the decolonizing impacts of gentrification.
Introduction

The movie *Blindspotting* hit the box office in 2018. In the film, writers and producers Daveed Diggs and Rafale Casal, both born in the Bay Area, explore the intersection of race and class in Oakland, California at the epicenter of a rapidly gentrifying Bay Area. This year was particularly exciting for Oakland. The town was starting to receive more positive recognition in national media and through films like *Blindspotting*. The Golden State Warriors were still in Oakland and had just won their second championship in a row. Nightlife was surging, with residents of all ages hitting the town every weekend to dance and celebrate the city's unique culture at new and popular venues downtown like Starline Social Club and Hello Stranger. And what may be best of all, COVID-19 didn't exist yet. However, something else, seemingly beneficial but with drastic negative consequences, was surging in the community: gentrification. The Bay Area and Oakland seemed like the place to be, and with that, more tech companies took advantage of the cheap leases and property taxes, and rapidly moved in. Out-of-towners were flocking to the town to work at these companies, and in turn, rents began to rise, new high-rise apartments were being built at increasing rates, and local businesses were closing for good because they were unable to afford the rents.

When Diggs and Casal were working on their film and witnessing the gentrifying state of the community, the two called on Oakland natives to tell their stories (Rasilla, 2018). An *East Bay Express* article answered Diggs and Casal’s plea by interviewing long-term Oakland residents on what they thought about the situation and what could be done to support long-term residents as they fought to remain at home (Rasilla, 2018). Local residents responded with a series of requests: for the respect of the local people and local culture by newcomers and for them to attempt to co-exist with residents who have been in Oakland for generations; for an
emphasis on inclusiveness and support for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) families in the public school system as schools are becoming gentrified; for more affordable housing as new construction is built; for corporations to practice social responsibility and ensure local residents are hired; and for the attention of and resources from local governments to support long-term community members (Rasilla, 2018). Four years and one pandemic after Azucena Rasilla wrote the *East Bay Express* article, the health of the Bay Area has rapidly deteriorated, but there may be a light at the end of the tunnel.

This capstone paper examines the public health emergency ignited by gentrification and the adverse health outcomes it has contributed to among BIPOC communities in the San Francisco Bay Area. It draws on secondary data presented in peer-reviewed and other published articles that reveal how serious an issue gentrification is. After analyzing the issue, this paper presents recommendations for attainable solutions and offers various methods to measure the impact and effectiveness of these policies on the health of the community. While this paper is meant to highlight the negative impacts of gentrification and introduce recommendations to combat and prevent these impacts in communities in the Bay Area, findings from this paper can be adapted by communities across the United States that share a similar demographic makeup and that experience similar effects of gentrification.

**Background and Literature Review**

The term “gentrification” was coined in 1964 by sociologist and urban planner, Ruth Glass (Next City, 2022). Glass said:

> One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class – upper and lower … Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on...
rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed (Next City, 2022).

Today, gentrification is defined as "a process in which a poor area experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses, and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents" (Merriam-Webster, 2022). And gentrification is a process of neighborhood change in historically disinvested communities, making room for wealthier newcomers and leaving long-term and lifelong residents behind (Urban Displacement Project, 2021). This institution of gentrification not only impacts communities negatively, but it specifically harms BIPOC communities (Feder, 2020). When displaced, BIPOC residents typically have fewer neighborhood options to move to compared to their wealthier and White counterparts (Feder, 2020). Gentrification is an epidemic transforming the urban setting. This process is decreasing residential options within cities for underserved residents, while expanding opportunities for the more privileged (Feder, 2020).

Gentrification goes beyond displacement; it is essentially a form of modern day colonization that injures BIPOC communities and strips them of their cultural identity:

[Gentrification] plays a massive role in neighbourhood disinvestment… Black neighbourhoods are not valued as sites of culture, community, and resistance on their own. Rather, they become sites of colonization, making them unrecognizable and often unsafe for the people who have always been living there (Mehl, 2020).

Mehl emphasizes how gentrification reconfigures Black communities, as gentrifiers strip them of their identity. The issue of gentrification not only leaves the former communities unrecognizable, but it also exacerbates health inequities underscoring how gentrification is a public health issue that urgently needs to be addressed in cities across the United States.
This paper highlights six social determinants of health associated with gentrification: housing, the environment, employment, social cohesion, safety, and mental health.

**Housing**

Those who are less impacted may argue that gentrification has benefits. Some may view it as a means for more development, to allow for rapid economic investment and to foster spaces for entertainment and commerce (Chong, 2017). Resources allocated to schools, stores, and other community developments might even increase in gentrifying neighborhoods. However, gentrification most often leads to displacement and discriminatory behavior, especially by people in power. Its existence doesn’t benefit all people. In addition, gentrification focuses on spaces that exclude the participation of lower-income residents and people of color, many of whom are elderly (Chong, 2017). Gentrification, thus, perpetuates systemic inequities that service more privileged residents, leaving marginalized and low-income people behind.

In an article published on *The Atlantic’s* Business page, author Chris Bodenner describes the lived experiences of residents who have been displaced due to gentrification (Bodenner, 2015). Common situations include eviction from an apartment after missing one month of rent, a family home seized because less than $200 was owed in property taxes, locks changed suddenly while the landlord was carrying out supposed repairs, landlord dishonesty about the building being condemned, and landlords intruding to destroy rooms and/or the floor to force out tenants (Bodenner, 2015). These are just a few of the common ways that local residents have been ousted from their homes by landlords eager to raise rents by removing long-term community members to take advantage of opportunities to secure higher rents from more well-off newcomers.
Being displaced not only leads to homelessness, but it also has detrimental impacts on one's health regardless of whether one is able to find another home. The displacement caused by gentrification leads to stress and associated health conditions, resulting in higher rates of emergency department visits and hospitalizations among those displaced from gentrifying neighborhoods (Smith et al., 2020). Often the newcomers, typically more wealthy and younger, are unaware of the extent of displacement they are causing when they move into a gentrifying community and how their behavior causes the health of the people who were living there first to deteriorate (Bodenner, 2015).

**Environment**

When developers invest in gentrifying communities, they often cause environmental gentrification. Environmental gentrification is the process where what seems to be a progressive way to improve the sustainability of a community is used to drive up property values and consequently displace low-income residents (Greenburg and Smith, 2022). Environmental gentrification has rooted itself in major cities across the United States. One study conducted in West Oakland, California, highlights the damages it can have on low-income and long-term residents.

Following the Cypress Freeway collapse in the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, two options were presented for addressing the need for a new transportation route through this area: rebuild-in-place or reroute the freeway (Patterson and Harley, 2019). With the community's support, the Cypress Freeway was rerouted and later the original alignment became a landscaped boulevard called Mandela Parkway. Notably, the researchers found that the freeway rerouting decreased air pollutants in the neighborhood (Patterson and Harley, 2019). However, a new landscaped boulevard and reduced traffic volumes contributed to an increase in property values
and the decline of the Black population in West Oakland (Patterson and Harley, 2019). Now, a neighborhood with more greenspaces and less automobile and truck traffic is becoming out of reach of the residents who were there for generations.

Environmental gentrification contributes to displacement and spatial inequities similar to the example of the Cypress Freeway rerouting in West Oakland. These spatial inequities contribute to an unequal distribution of resources and services and are associated with health inequities that affect overall population health (BioMed Central, 2022).

**Employment**

Employment of local residents is also impacted by gentrification, which can lead to poorer health. When tech companies enter a gentrifying community, they are less likely to hire local residents as they typically do not meet the screener criteria (Kenan Institute, 2022). Meanwhile, housing costs are rising around them (Kenan Institute, 2022). These increased financial burdens can cause significant psychological and physiological stress, which are risk factors for poor health (Smith et al., 2020). Skyrocketing housing costs and other financial burdens can make it near impossible to live in a gentrifying community on minimum wage.

**Social Cohesion**

Gentrification is associated with impaired social cohesion. This occurs when long-term residents feel a disconnect from the community due to the changing demographics and can cause social isolation (Healthy People, 2030). Social isolation is detrimental to health and can increase mortality (Healthy People, 2030). For example, one study interviewed older adults in focus groups across nine senior housing facilities in gentrifying Central Harlem, a historically African
American community, and identified four major themes related to social cohesion from the interviews.

The first two themes are related to race, culture, and norms. The first is the dramatic racial dynamic shift in Central Harlem due to gentrification. More than any other theme, study participants mentioned that the newcomers were creating change in the community, specifically they referenced the increase in White residents (Versey et al., 2018). With new retail stores and restaurants, as well as increased housing costs, these long-time Central Harlem residents were more likely to feel out of place, which highlights the racial and socioeconomic tensions that arose in the community (Versey et al., 2018). The second theme was the violation of cultural norms, trust, and reciprocity. Interviewees described a decline in neighborhood trust and a loss of neighbors who once looked after the older adults in the community (Versey et al., 2018).

The third theme was the rupture of social networks. Study participants noted that their adult grandchildren could no longer live independently due to increases in housing costs (Versey et al., 2018). Many of their family members began to move away, which contributed to a decrease in the population of long-term residents, especially Black long-term residents, which led to disinvestment in community institutions, such as churches (Versey et al., 2018). With newer, younger, and whiter residents moving in, older residents commented on a lack of intergenerational cohesion and a lack of respect given by younger residents to the elder members of the community (Versey et al., 2018). The decline in social cohesion between generations led to a perceived increase in violence and crime (Versey et al., 2018).

These characteristics of ruptured social networks have contributed to a decline in social spaces where older adults can congregate with other community members outside of their homes. New coffee shops, wine bars, and boutique restaurants have taken the place of original
neighborhood establishments, leaving long-term residents and seniors feeling forgotten and isolated (Versey et al., 2018).

The fourth theme is aging in place. As the United States becomes an increasingly older society, the need for older adults to age in place is increasing. Aging in place is the process of staying in one's home or community as one ages (National Institute on Aging). Older adults have a strong desire to not only feel safe and secure in their homes, but also to gain social capital in their communities as they age (Versey et al., 2018). The participants in this study emphasized wanting to continue living in the city independently, despite their families moving away, the cost of living increasing, and the loss of long-time neighbors (Versey et al., 2018). They grew up in this community and didn't see why they should have to leave it behind. Thus, many participants embraced efforts to resist gentrification and emphasized the importance of solidarity, activism, and engaging in local politics (Versey et al., 2018). The findings from this study build upon previous research and highlight that gentrification displaces BIPOC residents and causes mental health stress among those who are most vulnerable (Versey et al., 2018).

Safety

Social disorganization is when community members are unable to have shared values or solve problems together. The social disorganization theory posits that crime thrives in urban areas where social control is stunted (Kellogg, 2015). Centralized crime is considered one of the many results of gentrification that brings increased neighborhood surveillance and a lack of understanding of existing cultural behaviors and norms among newcomers to the community (Kellogg, 2015). As White middle- and upper-class residents move to formerly underserved and underinvested areas under the facade of urban renewal, it is common for community members
from both sides to experience cultural friction, where the behavioral and cultural norms of the existing residents are criminalized by the incoming residents (Kellogg, 2015).

In 2013, the city of San Francisco launched Open311, a mobile app that allowed residents to report public disorder (Fayyad, 2017). Over the ensuing years, 311 calls increased throughout San Francisco (Fayyad, 2017). The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project showed that gentrifying neighborhoods saw a disproportionate increase during that same time (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016). In San Francisco, the bulk of 311 calls was related to urban "cleaning" (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016). In the South of Market and the mid-Market regions of San Francisco, the majority of the reports of disorder came from areas where many tech companies had their offices, followed by Chinatown and the Mission, where evictions were commonplace at the time (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016). Much of this resulted in increased policing of the youth of color who lived in these communities (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, 2016).

The Open311 app still exists under the name SF311; however, many other neighborhood watch apps have increased in popularity, such as Nextdoor and Citizen, where something as minute as loud music can be reported so the community can be on alert with the result of ostracizing those who are “reported.” Gentrification brings increased neighborhood surveillance, and zero attempt to understand the local community and local cultural norms. All of this leads to an increase in policing, violence, and criminal activity within gentrifying neighborhoods. This increased surveillance can negatively impact the mental and physical health of those most affected.

In addition to increased neighborhood surveillance, gentrification can encourage class or race-based tensions as more affluent White households move into underserved communities (Barton et al., 2019). These tensions can be associated with fear of residential displacement, and
may prevent local residents from building relationships with newcomers (Balzarini & Shlay, 2016; Brown-Saracino, 2017). Gentrification breaks up concentrations of low-income households by bringing middle-class residents into disadvantaged areas. One may think this would lead to a reduction in neighborhood crime. Conversely, gentrification is associated with increased racial heterogeneity and low residential stability, which are positively associated with crime (Barton et al., 2019). Feelings of being unsafe rise among long-term residents as a result of gentrification. These feelings increase cortisol and adrenaline, which are linked to higher levels of anxiety and depression and increased rates of morbidity (Healthy People 2030).

**Mental Health**

The gentrification phenomena transcends displacement and a lack of social cohesion, and can negatively impact residents' mental health. A study using data from the California Health Interview Survey that focused on Southern California residents found that, for long-time residents who remain in a gentrified neighborhood after their neighbors have been forced to leave, living in gentrified neighborhoods increases the likelihood of serious psychological distress compared to living in a low-income and non-gentrified community (Tran et al., 2020). The researchers found that the negative impacts of gentrification on mental health were most prevalent among residents who rent, are low-income, or are long-term residents (Tran et al., 2020). Gentrification did not have the same negative influences on homeowners, higher-income residents, or newer residents (Tran et al., 2020). The findings from this study underscore how the power of gentrification transcends beyond displacement and can have a lasting impact on the mental health of not only those who are forced to leave but also on those who stay and experience the loss of their former communities, social connections, and sense of belonging. For long-term residents who remain, living in a gentrified neighborhood increases the likelihood of
their experiencing severe psychological distress, which can lead to lower life expectancy (Tran et al., 2020).

**Gentrification in the Bay Area**

The impact of gentrification on Bay Area cities, among other communities, has been briefly touched on in the literature review thus far. It is the focus of the remainder of this paper. The Bay Area Equity Atlas released a report in 2018 that highlights the gentrification risk across the nine Bay Area counties. Among all low-income households, 31 percent live in gentrifying neighborhoods, and 9 percent live in communities at risk of gentrifying. Low-income Black households are more than twice as likely as low-income White households to live in areas at risk of gentrification. This data illuminates how the gentrification crisis is more likely to affect BIPOC households than White households. See Figure 1.

![Figure 1](image-url)
Oakland, California’s Rich, and Vibrant History

In order to understand a community and the problems it faces, it's important to understand the community's history. Before gentrification, Oakland was a thriving community in the Bay Area, home to working-class residents who were the city's heart. Oakland was incorporated in 1852, and by 1869, the town became the western terminus for the Transcontinental Railroad, which led to the steady arrival of Black families and individuals who came for work (Rowen, 2019). The largest influx of Black people into Oakland was during the Second Great Migration. Tens of thousands of Black individuals came to Oakland fleeing harsh discrimination in the Jim Crow South. They were drawn by the promise of plentiful jobs when the region's economy rapidly expanded during wartime (Rowen, 2019). Abundant and rewarding jobs spurred a new Bay Area Black middle class, where many settled in West Oakland to work in the shipyards. As a result, there was a spike in Black residents with disposable income and West Oakland's historic Seventh Street corridor developed as a centerpiece of Black commerce and culture by the 1940s (Rowen, 2019). While the war's end stimulated layoffs and racially charged economic competition across the country, the Black population continued to grow and thrive in Oakland. The expansion of the city's Black population coincided with the Civil Rights era, and Oakland took center stage in the Pan-African Movement (Rowen, 2019). By the 1980s, Black residents made up the majority of Oakland's population at 47 percent, and White residents made up just 39 percent.

The 1980s was also a turning point. The War on Drugs, a racist policy that was specifically created to destroy Black communities, escalated during this time. Between 1982 and 2007, the number of arrests for drug possession tripled from 500,000 to 1.5 million (Alexander, 2010). By 1992, Black individuals accounted for 40% of the arrests, and White people 59%
At the same time, Black people comprised just 12% of the total U.S. population, while White people comprised about 82% (Alexander, 2010). This data reveals how Black people were being arrested at disproportionate rates despite using drugs at similar rates as White people (Alexander, 2010). This is no coincidence. Oakland was a thriving Black community leading up to the 1980s, but the war on drugs led to its disinvestment, which paved the way for gentrification because, as this paper highlights, gentrification is attracted to disinvested communities.

The fledgling tech boom at the turn of the century led to in-migration and a rise in the White population in Oakland. As a result, the Black population began to decline as newcomers created a wave of displacement of the area's long-time residents. By 2000, the Black population dropped to 35 percent (Rowen, 2019). This decline continued. By 2010, the Black population fell below the White population for the first time since 1970. Today, Black residents are no longer the single largest race/ethnic group in Oakland (Rowen, 2019). The out-migration of Oakland's Black residents in the 1990s through 2000s had two primary causes: 1) Black residents began moving out of the city and into the suburbs to escape crime and find better schools and jobs, and 2) newly arrived affluent White and Asian residents who could afford to pay the steep rent costs and home prices forced the involuntary displacement of Black residents (Rowen, 2019).

**Gentrification’s Impact on Oakland, California Neighborhoods**

Oakland has been uniquely impacted by the burdens of gentrification for decades. In the early 2000s, Mayor Jerry Brown of Oakland implemented a project that aimed to build 10,000 units of housing for tech workers who were being priced out of San Francisco. This was the first wave of the city’s more recent history of gentrification that reshaped the area spanning Old Oakland, Chinatown, and Downtown Oakland; the latter is now known to newcomers and
developers as “Uptown” (Poblet, 2014). Between 2013 and 2017, almost one-third of low-income neighborhoods in Oakland experienced gentrification. This was the highest rate of gentrification in the United States (Hansen, 2020). The impacts of gentrification in the Bay Area and in cities like Oakland include heightened housing prices associated with the booming job growth in the tech sector. A report released in 2019 found that as rents increased by 30 percent, there was a near 30 percent decline in low-income BIPOC residents in the Bay Area (Hansen 2020). In contrast, White residents were likely to remain in the Bay Area despite the neighborhoods changing around them (Hansen, 2020). Low-income residents have been slowly priced out and pushed out of the area since 2012 (Hansen, 2020).

Gentrification, if not explicitly racist is implicitly racist and has racist outcomes. Homeownership has long been the way that Black people got out of poverty and created generational wealth; however, this displacement and loss of home ownership is eroding wealth in Black communities. As evidenced across the Bay Area, Black residents in Oakland are considerably and disproportionately displaced from gentrifying neighborhoods, and are more likely to lose their homeownership. Between 1990 and 2011, the proportion of Black residents in all Oakland neighborhoods decreased by nearly 40 percent (Phillips et al., 2014). Black homeowners dropped from being 50 percent of all homeowners in Oakland to just 25 percent during the same period of time (Phillips et al., 2014). Among Black households, homeownership decreased while the share of renting households grew. Today, Oakland neighborhoods in the latest stages of gentrification have the greatest disparity between Black and White mortality rates (Phillips et al., 2014). Since the Great Recession, moves to crowded housing have been concentrated in Downtown and parts of North and West Oakland, while financial instability and
disinvestment have been concentrated in Deep East Oakland and parts of West Oakland, mostly in historically Black neighborhoods (Hwang et al., 2021).

Gentrification in Oakland intersects the six social determinants of health described previously. Housing insecurity and displacement have skyrocketed. Between 2000-2010, the Oakland Unified School District lost over 10,000 students, and the City of Oakland lost 34,000 Black residents—a 24 percent decline (PolicyLink, 2020). This means less funding is going into public schools. This reduces access to quality education early in life, which widens the gap to access higher education.

Spatial inequities have also increased. Complete Streets projects (e.g., Telegraph Avenue) are being created to improve safety and accessibility in downtown areas, where many newcomers reside and can enjoy (City of Oakland). However, at the same time, long-term residents are being pushed out and forced to live in inhumane conditions where their safety and health are jeopardized. As an indicator of displacement, the number of people living in tent encampments in Oakland increased by 130 percent between 2017 and 2019 (Finnigan, 2021).

The wealth gap in Oakland has also widened. Over the past three decades, income in Oakland for full-time workers in the bottom tenth percentile of the income scale declined by 19 percent, while income for those in the top tenth percentile increased by 39 percent (PolicyLink, 2020).

Community members are also experiencing higher rates of social dissolution. For example, Nextdoor users living in gentrifying Oakland neighborhoods who posted between December 2018 and May 2019 most often called the police on their neighbors for non-criminal activity (Zitani-Rios, 2020). This results in an increasing distrust between long-term residents and newcomers, and increasing stress among long-term residents.
Additionally, neighborhood surveillance methods have increased. Amplifying policing mechanisms have become more starkly visible as people are racialized as "illegal" and "criminal" and made to feel increasingly unwelcome in their own neighborhoods (Ramírez, 2019).

Lastly, mental instability is growing among Oakland's long-term residents. Oakland community members strongly link housing instability to impaired mental health; and relate crime, violence, and intentional injury to poorer mental health (Kaiser Permanente, 2019).

Oakland is now tied with San Francisco as the most gentrified city in the United States (Chamings, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic exposed deep economic and social fault lines nationwide and in Alameda County. The impact of the pandemic had profound implications for how we attract investment to our poorest communities and the effect that investment has on low- and moderate-income and minority populations (Chamings, 2020). Gentrification mainly occurs when there is a lack of policies that value the input of long-time community members, offer equitable re-zoning, and provide intentional housing options that promote social cohesion (Chong, 2017). Now more than ever, it is imperative to implement policies that aim to remedy the daunting trends that cause involuntary displacement.; otherwise, gentrification will continue to dismantle and displace our lower-income neighbors. To prepare for the next wave of gentrifiers and combat gentrification head-on, we must recognize the inequitable and disparate effects gentrification has on our communities, and particularly on the health and wellbeing of all residents, and create policies designed to prevent these negative impacts.

**Methods**

This paper’s review of peer-reviewed literature related to gentrification in the United States and the San Francisco Bay Area focuses on Alameda County and Oakland, California. The literature review was narrowed to studies and articles published in 2014 to 2022. Search
strategies focused on peer-reviewed papers and articles published by reputable sources and in
databases known for reliable data, such as U.S. Census databases. The search strategies were
supplemented with a review of the reference lists. A complete search strategy was leveraged to
assess the quality of the search and, thus, the quality of the literature review. This type of
strategy is essential because inadequate searches or errors in search strategies can affect the
quality of the review and lead to bias (Yoshii et al., 2009). A complete search strategy is also
essential when revising or updating a review (Yoshii et al., 2009). After applying these search
strategies and weeding out poor quality studies and articles, 45 studies, articles, and sources were
focused on for the literature review. All met the stringent review criteria.

Keyword searches included *gentrification, homelessness AND gentrification, food insecurity in Oakland, gentrification in Oakland, displacement, gentrification in San Francisco Bay Area, gentrification in Bay Area, Bay Area gentrification, history of gentrification in Alameda County, gentrification in Alameda County, history of gentrification in the Bay Area, why is gentrification bad, what is gentrification, gentrification AND African, gentrification AND health*. In addition to Google search, the search included PubMed, SAGE Journals, and Google Scholar databases. Only articles posted on well-known webpages with a good reputation were used. Reputable webpages are well-respected websites where the credentials of the author(s) meet specific criteria; only these were considered. These included .com, .org, .gov, and .edu webpages. Authors of these publications were willing to stand behind the information presented by attaching their names, and published articles were dated. The webpages and articles included in the literature review were from credible websites and cited the source of information they presented. Only studies that presented findings that could be generalized more broadly and whose findings could be extrapolated to communities experiencing gentrification were included
in this review. Articles that highlighted other communities outside of Alameda County were included in the research to provide additional context and for comparison purposes.

**Recommendations**

The background research and literature review of gentrification and gentrification in Oakland revealed that viable policy change to combat gentrification and its negative impacts urgently needs to be implemented to reduce the prevalence of negative health outcomes among long-time residents. The recommended policies expand current housing policies, enforce corporate social responsibility, funds campaigns to drive awareness and encourage anti-gentrification behaviors, and fund community-based participatory research.

**Expansion of Housing Policies**

For over thirty years, the Affordable Housing Development Program in Alameda County has funded more than 6,000 affordable housing units across the city of Oakland. The Program aims to provide affordable housing for very-low-, low-, and moderate-income Alameda County residents (Alameda County, 2021). However, what is considered "low-income" needs to be redefined. According to Data USA, almost 10 percent of Alameda County's population lives below the poverty line. For a family of four, this is an income of less than $40,000 per year (Covered California, 2020). The median family income in Alameda County is about $108,000. Very low-income families are defined as those with incomes that are less than 50 percent of the area median income (Bay Area Equity Atlas). So, according to the definition, an income of $54,000 for a family of four is considered very low-income in Alameda County (Bay Area Equity Atlas). This means that one in three families in Alameda County is considered very low-income (Bay Area Equity Atlas). Furthermore, low-income families are defined as those with between 50 percent and 80 percent of the area median income. In that case, about half of all
Alameda County residents are very low-income or low-income (Bay Area Equity Atlas). These statistics highlight the need to rethink what is considered low-income and very low-income, and hold ourselves accountable for ensuring that all residents can access affordable housing. The Affordable Housing Development Program needs to be expanded to provide affordable housing for the hundreds of thousands of residents in need.

Over 1,300 homeless people have moved from Alameda County's Project Roomkey hotels, established during the COVID-19 pandemic, into permanent housing (Alameda County, 2022). This achievement results from the work and collaboration between non-profit community providers, the Alameda County Office of Homeless Care and Coordination, and additional partners throughout Alameda County. The initiative was initially put into place to prevent the spread of COVID-19 by providing isolation and quarantine locations for people who are COVID-19 positive or exposed, and providing safe shelter for people who are homeless and at high risk for complications from the disease (Alameda County, 2022). Project Roomkey has assisted people from every city and the unincorporated areas in Alameda County.

Likewise, Project Homekey represents an opportunity for state, regional, and local public entities to develop a broad range of housing types, including but not limited to hotels, motels, hostels, single-family homes and multifamily apartments, adult residential facilities, and manufactured housing, and to convert commercial properties and other existing buildings to permanent or interim housing (Homekey, 2022). By making both Project Roomkey and Project Homekey permanent programs, Alameda County can provide housing to thousands of residents adversely impacted by gentrification and/or who are at risk of homelessness.
Corporate Responsibility

As technology companies move in, local and long-term residents are squeezed out. Frequently, these big tech companies move into neighborhoods where residents are of lower income and where the majority do not have a college degree (Phillips et al., 2014). The influx of new tech companies brings rent increases. Theoretically, this also brings jobs that might support the higher rents; however, existing residents typically do not meet the job qualification of having a college degree that is often required by these organizations' human resources departments. Instead, these residents experience their housing options increase in price while their wages stay the same. Corporations can implement policies to remove the college degree requirement from their application process, partner with community-based organizations to make stronger efforts to hire local BIPOC community members, provide on-the-job professional development opportunities, and create programs within their offices that aim to expand awareness of the negative impacts of gentrification and promote self-awareness of these impacts among "newcomer" employees. However, because working in the tech sector may not be for everyone, these policies need to be accompanied by housing policy reform to ensure local residents have the best opportunity to remain housed in the communities they've lived in for generations.

Current Policies Indirectly Related to Gentrification

There are many policies in place that are not specific to gentrification, but are specific to housing security and tenants’ rights. These include rent control, the current Affordable Housing Development Program, and Section 8. During the COVID-19 pandemic, California Assembly Bill 2179 extended the State's Eviction Moratorium, but this expired on June 30, 2022 (Oakland Rent Adjustment Program). The expiration of the eviction moratorium puts individuals and families in a difficult situation as many are still recovering from the economic impact of
COVID-19 and still cannot afford their rents. Rent control applies only if a building was built before 1983 and there are two or more units in the building. Single-family homes or condominium units and any form of government-subsidized housing do not qualify for rent control. Like rent control, there are rules as to who qualifies for Section 8 as well as confusing and inaccessible paperwork, which can burden families who need the support but may not meet the qualifications on paper or may not understand how to navigate the system and the complex application requirements.

**Increased Government Funding**

In addition, there is a need for funding for campaigns to promote awareness, resistance, and anti-gentrification behaviors. This can begin in the workplace by requiring education on the negative impacts of gentrification and how these can be mitigated as part of the onboarding process, as well as ongoing and periodic education. School systems should also engage in this education as these systems become gentrified. We also need funding for more community-based participatory research that utilizes decolonizing methods, and ensures that local community members are included in proactively addressing gentrification and have a role in the decision-making processes to prevent the negative impacts of gentrification on housing, jobs, and schools.

**Effectiveness: How well the Policy Achieves Objectives**

Effectiveness refers to the likelihood that a policy will meet the objectives of: 1) ensuring residents in Alameda County have access to housing, employment, and resources that address social determinants of health (e.g., food, transportation, medical care, outdoor areas for recreation) that are required to have a quality of life regardless of age; and 2) ensuring that all people have access to these resources that are directly associated with good mental and physical health and wellbeing regardless of income. When evaluating policies, effectiveness would be
measured by how well the policy made housing and employment securable and sustainable among local community residents. Effectiveness could also be measured by examining displacement trends in Oakland and Alameda County data and monitoring this over time.

**Impact: Effect of Policy on Health Outcomes**

Impact refers to whether or not the new policy impacts the community's overall health status. Impact would be measured by how well the recommended policies address the social determinants of health of all Alameda County residents and if residents became healthier overall as a direct result of the policy change – e.g., whether morbidity rates related to chronic conditions including those related to mental health (anxiety, depression) and mortality rates (life expectancy for different demographic segments of the population) declined.

The implementation of the recommended policies would expand affordable housing and enforce corporate responsibility. Corporate social responsibility policies would include creating preference in hiring for local community members, in particular, BIPOC residents and committing to support the success of these employees in their careers, and engaging the corporation in the community through community service and volunteerism. In addition, government funding would be allocated to raise awareness of the negative impacts of gentrification and how to prevent/mitigate them, to promote anti-gentrification behavior, and to fund more community-based participatory research that utilizes decolonizing methods and includes the community in every step of the processes. These policy recommendations take an egalitarian liberalism approach compared to the status quo. They advocate for the wellbeing of all residents regardless of income and would lead to a healthier population, a more prosperous economy, and a better quality of life for all.
Implications and Discussion

If the recommended policies were implemented, the Bay Area would become a healthier community, health care costs would decline, long-term residents would have access to a steady income, and the basic needs of residents would be met (e.g., housing, food, and transportation). In sum, these policies would also provide a platform to support employment and a healthy workforce to foster financial security (National Health Care for the Homeless Council, 2019). Additionally, newcomers would become more aware of the space they take up and their impact on the community and would be encouraged to adopt meaningful methods to co-exist with long-term residents. It is not the job of long-term BIPOC residents to teach newcomers about what gentrification is and how they're contributing to it. It is up to the local government and corporations to educate these newer residents through educational programs at work, in schools, and in the larger community.

The impact of the recommended policy can be projected through statewide and local research. For example, the Alameda County Public Health Department’s research can provide data on impact. The following maps show that the average life expectancy at birth in Alameda County is higher in neighborhoods where more community members have access to health insurance, employment, and sufficient wealth to access the resources necessary to achieve good health status (Alameda County Public Health Department, 2018). For example, residents that live in non-gentrified communities—such as Piedmont, Dublin, and the Berkeley Hills—have a higher life expectancy compared to residents in gentrifying communities—such as North and West Oakland. See Figures 2-5.
Figure 2

Figure 3
Figure 4

Figure 5
By implementing these recommended policies, Alameda County can be the pioneer in slowing or halting the adverse health outcomes that come with gentrification, and improving health and life expectancy in the communities impacted the most. These policy changes would ensure more residents are housed, that corporations and newcomers do not bring harm to the community, that long-term residents have equal opportunity to find employment, and that long-term residents can access affordable housing and resist gentrification.

If documented to be effective, similar policies could be implemented in San Francisco and other cities across California, becoming state policy and making California the example in statewide anti-gentrification, health enhancing policies. This would advance and improve public health by reducing homelessness across California, and ultimately across the country in other cities and states experiencing high rates of gentrification, and would reduce morbidity and mortality rates in gentrifying communities. Such policies could also be implemented to proactively prevent gentrification in locations that are showing warning signs of the negative impact of gentrification before the health of the community begins to weaken.

**Conclusion**

This paper explored gentrification and its impacts on the health and wellbeing of Bay Area residents. By focusing on the city of Oakland, the paper explored the history of the BIPOC individuals who built this city and the broader community, and highlights the negative impact of gentrification on these once thriving communities as long-time residents have their homes taken away from them by wealthier, whiter, and younger newcomers and their families and communities torn apart. The paper analyzed the health disparities gentrification has created among long-term older and BIPOC residents. Several practical recommendations were presented for policies that can prevent and reverse the negative health outcomes gentrification has created.
in these communities in Oakland and the Bay Area, and how long-time residents and newcomers can work together to avoid these negative outcomes during the next wave of gentrification.

To conclude, this paper uplifts and celebrates the voices of lifelong and long-term residents of the Bay Area whose words convey better than any peer-reviewed publication why it is vitally important to overcome the negative impacts of gentrification.

“I’ve been a Bay Area resident my entire life. I grew up in San Francisco and moved to Oakland when I was 12. Being on both sides has made me appreciate the culture, community, activism, and vibrant art of the Bay Area. It’s been hard to see my home change so much over the years, but I love that Oakland has continued to fight to keep its true self.” –Lifelong resident, age 30

“I’m proud to say I’m raised in Oakland and from Oakland because it has shaped me into who I am. Oakland has taught me to be loving, caring, open, and appreciative of the art and culture around me.” –Lifelong resident, age 31

“I am so proud to be from Oakland — from early childhood it has shaped me into someone who celebrates individuality, seeks to understand different viewpoints, and values diversity. The Bay Area is such a special place because people cannot only be themselves, being themselves is encouraged and celebrated.” –Lifelong resident, age 29

“Oakland is a city full of heart and soul. It’s colorful, vibrant, open-minded, and beautiful… a great confluence of cultures, colors, sights, and sounds, surrounded by a fragrant redwood forest. The city is a true feast for the senses!” –Long-term resident, age 62
“The culture and diversity in the Bay Area is like no other place in the world. We have a deep rooted, rich history here that we’re reminded of everyday – from nostalgic childhood memories at Fairyland to the murals of Oakland historical figures painted on skyscraper walls and beneath the freeway underpasses. No matter how it changes, Oakland is the only place I will ever call ‘home.’” –Lifelong resident, age 30

“I love being from Oakland because it’s a melting pot of a loving community and culture. Everyone is always welcomed except those who try to take away our culture by gentrifying the community and taking away our history.” –Lifelong resident, age 29

“The Bay Area is a uniquely magical place that merges all walks of life from all over the world, and as somebody who grew up here it’s hard to imagine living anywhere else. However, with the costs of housing we are faced with that question constantly lingering in the backs of our minds about if we will ever be able to afford to live in and grow a family in a home here. My family are primarily descendants of white colonizers though, and I firmly believe this land should be returned first and foremost to the original stewards of this land, the Lisjan Ohlone people.” –Lifelong resident, age 30

Gentrification is nothing short of modern-day colonization, and it is paramount that we refer to it in that way in order to understand its adverse effects on at-risk communities. COVID-19 may have slowed down the influx of new residents storming to the Bay Area, but as we return to “normal,” it is critical that our communities are armed with the resources to resist and combat future gentrifiers, and that government officials give this issue the attention it deserves. Oakland, and the greater Bay Area, has a unique opportunity to design and implement anti-gentrification policies that the rest of the county can model. The health and wellbeing of current and future generations literally depends on it.
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Modern Day Colonization
Gentrification as a Public Health Emergency and its Impact on Health, Safety, and Wellbeing

Theresa M. Hayes, MPH Candidate 2022
MPH 683 | Integrated Learning Experience | Summer 2022

Agenda

01 Background
Definition and relationship to colonialism

02 The Problem
Gentrification as a public health emergency

03 Methods
Literature review methodology

04 Key Findings
Public health impact in the Bay Area

05 Next Steps
Recommendations and implications

06 Conclusion
Summary and closing remarks
After today you will…

- Have an expanded awareness of what gentrification means
- Develop a greater understanding of the health impacts of gentrification
- Be motivated to call for policy change to combat and prevent gentrification

01 Background
Definition and relationship to colonialism
The term “gentrification” was coined in 1964…

“One by one, many of the working class quarters have been invaded by the middle class – upper and lower … Once this process of ‘gentrification’ starts in a district it goes on rapidly until all or most of the working class occupiers are displaced and the whole social character of the district is changed.” —Ruth Glass

Gentrification as it relates to colonialism…

Gentrification “plays a massive role in neighbourhood disinvestment… Black neighbourhoods are not valued as sites of culture, community, and resistance on their own. Rather, they become sites of colonization, making them unrecognizable and often unsafe for the people who have always been living there.”
Six social determinants of health related to gentrification…

- Housing
- Environment
- Employment
- Social Cohesion
- Safety
- Mental Health
Oakland’s history of prosperity…

1869 – Western terminus for the Transcontinental Railroad

1940 – The start of the Second Great Migration & the Seventh Street Corridor

1955 – Following the Beginning of the Civil Rights Era

1980 – Black residents made up the majority

By the 1980’s, Black residents made up the majority in Oakland…

- 39% White
- 47% Black
- 14% Other Ethnicities

Source: Rowen, 2019
The War on Drugs

Oakland between 1990 and 2011…

- **40%** Decline in the proportion of Black residents
- **50%** Decline in Black homeowners
- **Disparity** Increasing disparities between Black & White mortality rates

Source: Phillips, et. al., 2014
Today, Oakland is tied with San Francisco as the most gentrified city in the United States

Source: Chamings, 2020

03 Methods
Literature review methodology
**Literature review methodology**

**Databases used:**
- PubMed
- SAGE
- Google Scholar
- Google Search

**Years:** 2009-2022

**Main keywords:** gentrification, colonization, displacement, housing, mental health, environment, social cohesion, social determinants of health, Oakland, Bay Area

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**Key Findings**

Public health impact in the Bay Area
Displacement

Between 2000-2010, the Oakland Unified School District lost over 10,000 students, and the City of Oakland lost 34,000 Black residents—a 24 percent decline.

Source: PolicyLink, 2020

Spatial Inequities

Complete Streets projects (i.e., Telegraph Avenue) are being created to improve safety and accessibility in downtown areas for newcomers; however, the number of people living in tent encampments in Oakland increased by 130 percent between 2017 and 2019.

Source: Finnigan, 2021; City of Oakland
Financial Insecurity

Over the past three decades, income in Oakland for full-time workers in the bottom tenth declined by 19 percent while income for those in the top tenth increased by 39 percent.

Source: PolicyLink, 2020

Social Dissolution

Nextdoor users living in gentrifying Oakland neighborhoods who posted between December 2018 and May 2019 most often called the police on their neighbors for non-criminal activity.

Source: Zitani-Rios, 2020
Neighborhood Surveillance

Amplifying policing mechanisms become more starkly visible as people are racialized as “illegal” and “criminal” and made to feel increasingly unwelcome in neighborhoods they live in.

Source: Ramírez, 2019

Mental Instability

Oakland community members strongly link housing and good mental health; and crime, violence, and intentional injury are related to poorer mental health.

Source: Kaiser Permanente, 2019
Next Steps

Recommendations and implications
Recommendations…

1. Expansion of affordable housing policies
2. Enforcement of corporate social responsibilities
3. Funding for educational campaigns aimed at driving awareness
4. Funding for community-based participatory research

Implications…

1. All residents have access to housing, employment, and resources that address all determinants of health, regardless of income
2. Housing and employment is securable and sustainable among long-term residents
3. Displacement trends and morbidity rates decrease overtime
4. Long-term residents feel a sense of cohesion, safety, and stability, leading to a healthier community
Conclusion

Summary and closing remarks

Gentrification is a serious health issue that is heavily burdening BIPOC communities across the United States.

This issue intersects all the social determinants of health.

Neighborhoods most impacted by gentrification have a lower life expectancy.
Thanks!

Do you have any questions?

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