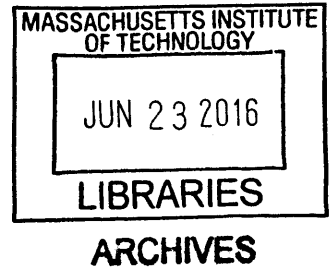


**The Role of Environmental Justice in the Fight Against Gentrification**

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Submitted to the Department of Urban Studies and Planning  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master in City Planning

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

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## **ABSTRACT**

Nationwide environmental justice organizations are involved in campaigns to address gentrification within their communities. This thesis explores the ways in which these organizations connect the issue of gentrification to environmental issues and how they are using community organizing to confront it. This research is based on case studies of six environmental justice organizations with active anti-gentrification campaigns, located in Boston, Oakland, Portland, Austin, San Francisco, and Brooklyn. After years of organizing for brownfield redevelopment, transit justice, food justice, and climate justice they are finding that their community-led initiatives are gaining the attention of profit-seeking developers and gentrifiers. The Principles of Environmental Justice guide these organizations to protect health, preserve culture, and ensure self-determination, however, gentrification erodes each of these goals. They are further called to action because gentrification displaces the constituents whom their initiatives are aimed to support. Environmental justice organizations are using coalition building, partnerships, community engagement, and cooperative economics to challenge the systemic racism and classism within existing land use and environmental policies that promote gentrification. From these organizations, planners can learn to prevent gentrification through measuring the gentrification potential of their projects, creating interagency working groups, and promoting community-based planning.

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*This thesis is dedicated to the people of color, working class, immigrant, and LGBTQ communities that empower me to achieve social and environmental justice as an urban planner.*

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# **Introduction**

## **Background & Motivations**

This past summer, in June 2015, I returned to my hometown of New York City for a climate resiliency internship at the NYC Department of Housing, Preservation, and Development. I was working with staff that was implementing the city's Build it Back Program for residential properties that were damaged or destroyed by Hurricane Sandy in 2012. After living in Massachusetts for the past six years, I was excited to return to NYC to reconnect with the place that shaped me into the person who I am today. I was eager to visit my old stomping grounds: my favorite restaurants, dance studio, and neighborhoods. However, within my first week of being home I discovered that my favorite restaurant and dance studio had closed down. As I moved through different neighborhoods, I was shocked by how many of the shops that I used to frequent had closed down and how different the city felt to me. Neighborhoods that are vibrant cultural epicenters, such as the Lower East Side (where I went to high school), were increasingly being gentrified and the cultural fabric of the city was changing. As I went out with friends, it was almost impossible to meet other people who grew up in New York, with whom I could share in my nostalgia about what the city used to be. At a personal level, gentrification impacted my sense of place and connection to those around me.

As an active member of Alternatives for Community & Environment (ACE) in Boston, MA, I was aware that organizations were beginning to take on the issue of gentrification, but I had not fully grasped the connections between the environmental justice (EJ) movement and the anti-gentrification movement. Within my internship I wondered how the City of New York was reconciling issues of climate justice and gentrification in places like the Lower East Side. Many of the residents who were most severely impacted by Hurricane Sandy were low-income renters

and public housing residents whose properties were flooded and left without power for weeks. As I was researching climate resiliency measures to improve the Build it Back program, I couldn't help but think about the implications of my work for low-income residents who are already struggling to make ends meet in gentrifying neighborhoods... *Would landlords pass retrofitting costs onto their residents?* I wondered if environmental planners were beginning to make the same connections within their work as environmental justice organizations, such as ACE.

As I began to think more deeply about climate resilience, environmental justice, and gentrification, I wanted to know if there are ways to address these issues within municipal planning. My professional experiences, prior to beginning this thesis in January 2016, had shown me that federal and state agencies had a much narrower definition of environmental justice that neglected to make these connections. Most often federal and state environmental justice initiatives focus on the disproportionate environmental burdens and lack of environmental benefits that are present in majority low-income and/or people of color communities. However, they don't often analyze the social implications of these initiatives like environmental justice organizers do. My personal and professional experiences thus planted the seed for my master's thesis topic: to explore the ways in which environmental justice organizers identify gentrification as an environmental justice issue and to highlight the ways in which they're resisting it. I set out to discover ways in which planners may learn how to better work alongside community residents to promote sustainable and resilient communities that address socioeconomic disparities and allow low-income and people of color residents to thrive.

## Research Questions

At the People’s Climate March in 2014, I saw signs made by environmental justice organizations that not only addressed rising temperatures and sea levels, but also called attention to an issue some saw as new to the environmental justice community: gentrification and displacement (Fig. 1). Within urban environmental justice communities, the rising cost of rent and housing is putting pressure on residents to move out of their communities. Environmental justice organizations in rapidly gentrifying cities have begun to fight back. This threat undermines the decades of community organizing work that many environmental justice organizations have been fighting for to improve the environmental quality of their neighborhoods and the wellbeing of their constituents.

This master’s thesis will explore the varied roles that environmental justice organizations are playing in organizing against gentrification. I will identify the ways in which environmental justice organizations and their members are affected by gentrification. I will analyze the ways that gentrification conflicts with environmental justice, and discuss the strategies these organizations are using to challenge gentrification. This thesis will answer the following research questions:

*What is the role of environmental justice organizations in the fight against gentrification?*

- How is gentrification being aligned with the mission of environmental justice organizations?
- What strategies are environmental justice community organizers using to respond to gentrification?

This thesis aims to fill the gap in the literature about the intersection of environmental justice and anti-gentrification organizing. Most of the literature about this topic discusses “environmental gentrification”. Environmental gentrification is the process of a community

becoming gentrified through brownfield redevelopment and/or increasing sustainability or greening initiatives (Curran & Hamilton, 2012; Bryson, 2012; Gamper-Rabindran & Timmins, 2013). This thesis will identify the rationale between integrating anti-gentrification work into environmental justice, the methods that environmental justice organizations are using to prevent gentrification in their community, and the factors that advance and hinder this work. The results of this thesis provide an opportunity for environmental and land use planners to learn how to better prevent gentrification and meaningfully engage with residents in vulnerable low-income and people of color communities.



**Fig. 1.** Sign held up at the Peoples Climate march on September 12, 2014. Photo credit: Right to the City Alliance.

## **Methodology**

Six environmental justice organizations, with active anti-gentrification campaigns, were selected as case studies. Four the organizations were identified through personal communications with environmental justice organizers and scholars, while three were identified through an Internet search using the terms “environmental justice” and “gentrification.” The data for this research study comes from semi-structured, in-person and phone, interviews that were conducted in January and February of 2016. The interviews were conducted with staff members

that work directly with campaigns, including Executive Directors, Political Directors, and Community Organizers. This qualitative method was chosen because it would yield the most information about organizational considerations in campaign decision-making. The geographical representation of case studies represents highly urbanized cities across the United States. The case studies are located in Austin (TX), Boston (MA), Brooklyn (NY), Oakland (CA), Portland (OR), and San Francisco (CA).

All interviews were coded to identify themes that influence an organization's motivation to take on this work, the types of initiatives they are using to combat gentrification, and the factors that assist anti-gentrification work and those that make it challenging. Some of the codes included "organizational structure", "organizational decision-making," "reflections on gentrification", "effects of gentrification", "resisting gentrification", and "drivers of gentrification". The codes were determined after the majority of interviews were complete. The codes were created to capture overarching themes and points of divergence across interviews.

## **Chapter 1. History of the Environmental Justice Movement**

*“We think it more useful to think metaphorically of the movement as a river, fed over time by many tributaries. No one tributary made the river the force that it is today; indeed, it is difficult to point to the headwaters, since so many tributaries have nourished the movement.” (Cole & Foster, 2001)*

### **Birth of a Movement**

Many scholars and activists debate the exact events that catalyzed the environmental justice (EJ) movement. According to Robert Bullard, a sociologist who has dedicated his career to studying environmental justice, there are many early signs of the environmental justice movement emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, before it reached its peak with national headlines in the 1980s (Bullard, 1994).

The national protests in Warren County, North Carolina in 1982 are often described as the moment that catalyzed the environmental justice movement, however, people of color were realizing the impacts of and responding to environmental racism long before this historic event. In 1967, African-American students of Texas Southern University were involved in a campus riot following the drowning death of an eight-year African-American girl in a local garbage dump. The students questioned why the garbage dump was located within the middle of the predominantly black neighborhood in Houston and why this death wasn't preventable. In 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated in Memphis. He was in Memphis to show support for black sanitation workers who were on strike for experiencing unequal compensation and unhealthy working conditions. In 1972, homeowners in Northwood Manor, an African-American suburban community of Houston, filed lawsuit against a waste management company in an attempt to block a municipal landfill from being sited within their community. Just two years prior, the city government barred this proposal when the neighborhood had been predominately

white. These were just three examples that demonstrate that a rise in community-led consciousness of the intersections between environmental conditions, race, and class helped to ignite the spark that was the environmental justice movement on the 1980s.

The Warren County demonstrations in 1982 brought together prominent activists and community leaders across the nation to highlight the disproportionate environmental burdens within communities of color. The nonviolent direct actions, which lasted over six weeks, were an attempt to block the siting of a PCB landfill within the predominantly black community of Warren County. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) organized the civil disobedience, which put the national spotlight on Warren County. More than 500 people were arrested for their involvement with the protests and although the activists were not successful in halting the project, they did gain a lot of attention for the cause. Walter Fauntroy, a Congressional delegate for the District of Columbia, was one of the protesters who was arrested. Inspired by the incident, he accepted the call to action and used his position to initiate a study by the U.S General Accounting Office into the siting of hazardous waste facilities in the southern states under the jurisdiction of the EPA. This GAO study was a precursor to the better-known, community-led study *Toxic Waste and Race* that was released by the United Church of Christ, Commission on Racial Justice in 1987. Both studies provided concrete, quantifiable evidence that people of color bore disproportionate environmental burdens, because they demonstrated that race was the leading indicator for the placement of hazardous waste facilities with the United States (United Church of Christ, 1987; US General Accounting Office, 1983).

What all of these historical events and research studies have in common is that they sought the elimination of environmental racism. The term, coined by civil rights leader Benjamin



Chavis, refers to the institutional rules, regulations, and policies, of governmental or corporate entities that target low-income and people-of-color communities for locally undesirable land uses and that leave these community members underrepresented within decision-making processes (Chavis, 1994; Holifield, 2001; Bryant, 2003). What the environmental justice movement aims to do is not only undo environmental racism, but to vision the ideal characteristics of low-income and people of color communities. Environmental justice “refers to those cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, and behaviors, policies, and decisions that support sustainable communities where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing, and productive (Bryant, 2003).” This will be the working definition of environmental justice used throughout this paper because it reflects the need to ensure environmental health alongside cultural preservation and community development.

### **Origins and Foundation of the Movement**

The environmental justice movement is a multi-dimensional social movement that incorporates multiple issues and diverse stakeholders. The all-encompassing nature of environmental justice can be traced back to its roots within the civil rights movement, the anti-toxics movement, academia, Native American struggles, the labor movement, and divergence from the traditional environmental movement. As Cole & Foster (2001) explains, within each of these origins lie many foundational anchors that continue to guide the environmental justice movement today.

Many environmental justice leaders came out of the civil rights movement and were well versed in issues impacting communities of color as well as valuable tools such as power analysis and civil disobedience. The anti-toxics movement challenged the structures that upheld the production of toxic waste and fought to prevent its production all together. What the anti-toxics

movement brought to the environmental justice movement was the skill of integrating scientific and technical information to shape policy goals. Unexpectedly, academics have played a major role in shaping the environmental justice movement. Many researchers, such as Robert Bullard, Bunyan Bryant, and Charles Lee, provided scholarly evidence to support community claims of the disproportionate environmental burdens within communities of color. Within the United States, the Native American community has had the most experience enduring land and environmental exploitation. Native Americans brought to the environmental justice movement, “centuries of struggle for self-determination and resistance to resource-extractive land use (Bryant, 2003).” The labor movement, particularly the migrant farmers and the occupational health and safety movement, further demonstrated a need to have control over decision-making that impacts the lives of people of color within the workplace. Lastly, the traditional environmental movement had a less direct impact on the environmental justice movement. Mostly white staff and members led many of the large environmental organizations, such as the Sierra Club. They were disconnected and unconcerned with issues impacting people of color, focusing most of their work on nature preservation and conservation. Environmental justice emerged out of a necessity to bring attention to the unique environmental issues facing people of color.

The First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit in 1991 is an event that is exemplary of the origins of the environmental justice movement. The summit was a three-day convening in Washington, D.C. organized by Charles Lee, the former Program Director of the UCC Commission on Racial Justice. The participants were diverse, representing Black, Latino, Indigenous, Asian, and migrant communities across urban and rural geographies. Over 700 people were in attendance, with over 400 acting as delegates representing various

environmental and community groups of color in the United States. “[P]articipants made conceptual linkages between seemingly different struggles, identifying common themes of racism and economic exploitation of people and land. Many there came to understand their issues in the context of a larger movement, and on a deeper level than before (Cole & Foster, 2001).” The summit set the stage for a collaborative movement to tackle the issues of systemic oppression and environmental degradation from 1991 forward. One of the lasting outcomes of the summit was the drafting of The Principles of Environmental Justice (Fig. 2) to guide people who are interested in continuing to promote and advance environmental justice within their community. The principles highlight that the vision for environmental justice revolves around political, economic, and cultural empowerment, while advancing environmental quality and health.

### **Environmental Justice...**

- 1)** affirms the sacredness of Mother Earth, ecological unity and the interdependence of all species, and the right to be free from ecological destruction.
- 2)** demands that public policy be based on mutual respect and justice for all peoples, free from any form of discrimination or bias.
- 3)** mandates the right to ethical, balanced and responsible uses of land and renewable resources in the interest of a sustainable planet for humans and other living things.
- 4)** calls for universal protection from nuclear testing, extraction, production and disposal of toxic/hazardous wastes and poisons and nuclear testing that threaten the fundamental right to clean air, land, water, and food.
- 5)** affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.
- 6)** demands the cessation of the production of all toxins, hazardous wastes, and radioactive materials, and that all past and current producers be held strictly accountable to the people for detoxification and the containment at the point of production.
- 7)** demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making, including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.
- 8)** affirms the right of all workers to a safe and healthy work environment without being forced to choose between an unsafe livelihood and unemployment. It also affirms the right of those who work at home to be free from environmental hazards.
- 9)** protects the right of victims of environmental injustice to receive full compensation and reparations for damages as well as quality health care.
- 10)** considers governmental acts of environmental injustice a violation of international law, the Universal Declaration On Human Rights, and the United Nations Convention on Genocide.
- 11)** must recognize a special legal and natural relationship of Native Peoples to the U.S. government through treaties, agreements, compacts, and covenants affirming sovereignty and self-determination.
- 12)** affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and provided fair access for all to the full range of resources.
- 13)** calls for the strict enforcement of principles of informed consent, and a halt to the testing of experimental reproductive and medical procedures and vaccinations on people of color.
- 14)** opposes the destructive operations of multi-national corporations.
- 15)** opposes military occupation, repression and exploitation of lands, peoples and cultures, and other life forms.
- 16)** calls for the education of present and future generations which emphasizes social and environmental issues, based on our experience and an appreciation of our diverse cultural perspectives.
- 17)** requires that we, as individuals, make personal and consumer choices to consume as little of Mother Earth's resources and to produce as little waste as possible; and make the conscious decision to challenge and reprioritize our lifestyles to ensure the health of the natural world for present and future generations.

**Fig. 2.** The Principles of Environmental Justice reproduced from the Delegates of the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991).

## **Environmental Justice Organizations and Issues**

Since its inception, the term environmental justice has become more widely known understood as an important subject area. The environmental justice agenda continues to be advanced through community-based non-profits, while also being addressed in the public sector, and in private sector consulting firms. These entities approach environmental justice using different tools, for example community organizing, research, policy-making, law, and urban planning. In addition, environmental justice can be organically woven into other organizations that focus on economic development, human rights, and community development. This thesis will focus primarily on grassroots environmental justice organizations that are led by people of color, whose work is guided by input from residents of environmental justice communities. An environmental justice community is a geographical area with a high percentage of racial minorities, individuals living below the federal poverty level, and/or non-English speakers. Even though EJ organizations continue to lead environmental justice efforts, multi-sector collaboration is needed to ensure that justice and equity remain at the core of environmental and land use policies that impact EJ communities.

The disproportionate impacts of pollution on communities of color is what launched environmental justice into the academic and policy area, however grassroots environmental justice organizations focus on a wide range of issues within their communities. There are often many systemic forces, such as disinvestment, residential segregation, and chronic unemployment that impact the experiences of residents, so environmental justice organizations must be dynamic and holistic in their campaign work. Within environmental justice communities, “environmental degradation is just one of the many ways their communities are under attack (Cole & Foster, 2001).” In addition to continuing efforts to reduce toxic burdens on communities of color, the

environmental justice community is tackling issues such as climate justice, transit justice, food justice, green jobs, and housing affordability/community displacement (Bullard, Mohai, Saha, & Wright, 2008). The breadth of issues addressed by EJ organizations demonstrates that all issues that affect low-income and people of color individuals in the places that they live, work, and play are welcomed under the environmental justice umbrella.

## Chapter 2: Introducing the Case Study Organizations

There are many grassroots environmental justice (EJ) organizations across the country that differ based on the demographic they serve and the campaigns that they fight. Although these organizations share similar values when it comes to confronting environmental injustice, they differ in their organizational structure and local context. The organizations that are being studied in this thesis were chosen because they have decided to actively confront the issue of gentrification within their communities. In order to fully grasp the impact that each organization has on the communities that it serves, one must understand its constituency, history of environmental justice struggles, and what guides their active community organizing. These organizations underscore the important role that grassroots organizations have played in improving their local communities, with far reaching benefits into the regions in which they are situated.

### Alternatives for Community and Environment (ACE)



**Fig. 3.** Youth from the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project build raised beds for their Grow or Die campaign. Photo credit: Andrew Phelps.

## **Membership**

Located in Boston, MA in the neighborhood of Roxbury, the mission of ACE is to build “the power of communities of color and low-income communities in Massachusetts to eradicate environmental racism and classism, create healthy, sustainable communities, and achieve environmental justice (Alternatives for Community & Environment, n.d.)” The organization has a dues-paying membership base of approximately 950 people. ACE breaks their membership structure into two tiers: primary constituents and sponsors. ACE’s primary constituency consists of members who identify as a person of color and/or low-income. Demographically, the primary constituency is largely of African-American or Caribbean descent. In addition, youth make up a significant portion of the organization’s primary constituency and play an active role in community organizing through the Roxbury Environmental Empowerment Project (REEP). On the other hand, sponsors represent people who may not be directly impacted by environmental injustice but want to support the work of ACE. Many sponsors include environmental professionals, attorneys, people working in social justice sectors, and other allies.

## **Organizational Structure & Programs**

ACE was founded in 1993 by two lawyers and organically grew into community organizing because the founders acknowledged that leadership from the community was necessary to address the underlying issues that they were seeing through their legal work. From its modest beginnings, ACE has grown into a member-led organization, where members guide the work of the organization and work directly with staff. The organization has approximately nine full-time staff and several interns. Active members work with staff through a variety of teams: Food & Land, T Riders Union, REEP, and Environmental Justice Legal Services. ACE’s



approach to organizing is focused on community engagement, youth leadership, legal services, and community-based research. Although it has strong ties to environmental justice work in Greater Boston, the organization has also supported EJ efforts throughout the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. The organization is highly collaborative in seeking environmental justice throughout New England and has partnered with over 40 neighborhood groups. In addition, the organization is a member of several regional and national coalitions specializing in environmental justice, green jobs, grassroots organizing, transit, and youth.

### **History & Victories**

By harnessing the power of people directly impacted by environmental injustice in Massachusetts, ACE has been able to address many different environmental issues through their work. ACE's campaigns have improved air quality, food access, transit access, and governmental accountability to environmental justice communities. ACE has worked with community members across Massachusetts to defeat proposals for the siting of diesel power plants and asphalt plants within EJ communities. In addition the organization has helped to clean up many local brownfields and established an air quality monitoring station within Roxbury. Most recently in 2015, ACE played a pivotal role in the passage of Boston's Diesel Reduction Ordinance, Massachusetts's Executive Order No. 522, and Boston's Youth Pass Pilot Program. These policies have retrofitted city-owned diesel vehicles to reduce air pollution and associated health risks, required an integration of environmental justice positions into all branches of Executive Offices, and provide equitable and affordable transit access to young people in Boston.

## **Current Campaigns**

ACE has many active campaigns that speak to their primary constituency within Roxbury. As reflected in ACE's membership, Roxbury is a community with a predominately Black and Latino population. Within Boston, race is a strong social determinant of health with the Black and Latino population suffering from higher rates of asthma hospitalization, diabetes, heart disease hospitalizations, hypertension, and obesity than the white population. Residents of Roxbury have the highest chronic disease hospitalization and death rates in Boston (Boston Public Health Commission Research and Evaluation Office, 2015). In addition, approximately 36.2% of people living in Roxbury are living below the poverty level, and approximately 16.8% of the total non-student labor force is unemployed (Boston Redevelopment Authority, 2014). ACE is helping to address some of these disparities by confronting systemic racist policies that influence these negative outcomes and by empowering residents to take ownership over their communities. ACE's three active campaigns are around transit justice, food justice, and anti-gentrification. As a working class community, many residents are transit-dependent and the T Riders Union promotes equity in the transit system through affordable fares and protecting accessibility of public transit for dependent communities. ACE's food justice work is led through the youth of REEP in the Grow or Die campaign. REEP works with local community members to reclaim vacant land for the use of urban agriculture. Lastly, many ACE members have identified housing affordability and the risk of a displacement as a major concern. In 2013, ACE began forming the Right to Remain Campaign to explore these issues and to increase community participation and governance in local land use decision-making.

## Communities for a Better Environment (CBE)



Fig. 4. CBE members rally for climate justice. Photo credit: Communities for a Better Environment.

### Membership

CBE is a California-based organization with offices in Wilmington, Huntington Park, and Oakland whose mission is “build people’s power in California’s communities of color and low income communities to achieve environmental health and justice by preventing and reducing pollution and building green, healthy and sustainable communities and environments (Communities for a Better Environment, 2016).” Within Northern California, the organization serves a predominately African-American and Latino population, and, in Southern California, it serves a majority Latino population. While the members in Northern California are predominately adults, there is a large youth contingency in Southern California. For this research, there is a focus on the organization’s operations within rapidly gentrifying Oakland<sup>1</sup>. Within

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<sup>1</sup> From 1990-2011, Oakland has lost over 50% of its African-American population and over 53% of Oakland’s low-income households are living in neighborhoods at risk of or already undergoing displacement/gentrification (Causa Justa, 2014; Zuk and Chapple, 2015).

Oakland, there are approximately 700 members. The organization's work within Oakland focuses primarily on the neighborhood of East Oakland.

### **Organizational Structure & Programs**

CBE was founded in 1978 and has since gone through a significant shift in organizational structure in order to incorporate environmental justice philosophy of having people of color within leadership roles. Up until 2006, CBE was mostly white-led, and, with the hiring of a Latino Executive Director, began to focus on increasing racial diversity within the workplace and aligning campaigns within communities of color. Now, the 22-person staff is approximately 95% people of color and in 2007 began doing work in the San Francisco Bay area. CBE's membership structure consists of financial supporters and core leaders. Within East Oakland approximately 70% of members participate regularly in trainings and events, while approximately 25 members are core leaders who take leadership roles in organizational decision-making. CBE's approach to change consists of community organizing, legal action, and community-led scientific research. CBE offices work in collaboration with one another on statewide initiatives and the organization also works with about 20 other regional and national environmental justice collaboratives and coalitions.

### **History & Victories**

CBE's organizing efforts focus on confronting environmental racism and promoting a green economy, clean energy, climate justice, and community-led sustainable development. In the past, CBE's campaigns have successfully prevented the expansion of a Chevron oil refinery in Richmond, blocked a proposal for a mega-power plant in a suburb of Los Angeles, and organized for the redevelopment of brownfields across the state. When it comes to changing policy, CBE has been influential in creating environmental justice recommendations for the

California Environmental Protection Agency, passing a statewide ban of the carcinogenic gasoline additive MBTE, and adopting strict statewide anti-flaring policies for oil refineries.

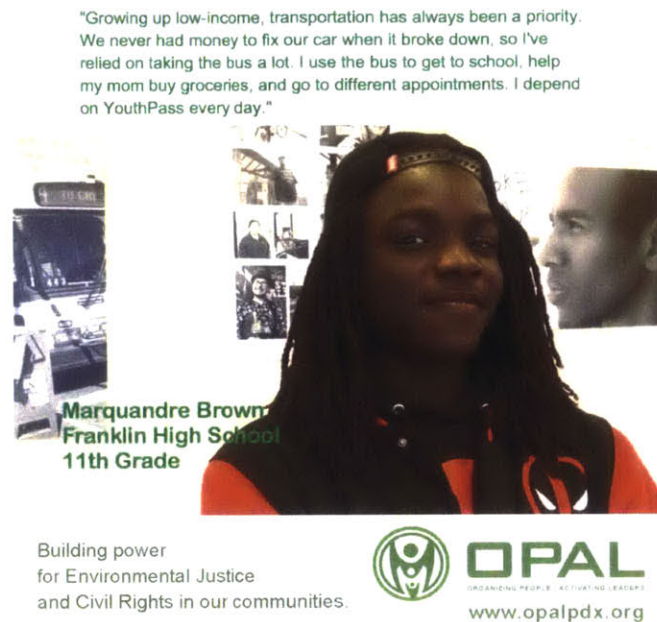
### **Current Campaigns**

CBE's Oakland-based work focuses on land use decision-making, redeveloping vacant lots for community use, enhancing community resiliency, and food justice. The population of East Oakland is 53% Latino, 26% Black, and 18% Asian/Pacific Islander with 18% being unemployed and 51% of households being low-income<sup>2</sup> (UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, 2012). East Oakland is located near the Port of Oakland, and CBE's research has shown that this leaves residents living with environmental burdens such as toxic fumes, particulate air pollution, and noise pollution (Communities for a Better Environment, 2010). In Oakland, CBE has successfully been able to organize against the siting of a crematorium in East Oakland through lobbying elected officials and the Planning Commission, but this struggle continues. CBE is also working with residents to envision a plan for their community that improves both health and economic outcomes through boosting the number of locally owned businesses and converting city-owned vacant lots to community gardens.

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<sup>2</sup> Low-income considers household income below 200% of the federal poverty level.

## Organizing People/Activating Leaders (OPAL)



**Fig. 5** Image used for the YouthPass to the Future Campaign. Photo credit: OPAL.

### Membership

OPAL is located in Portland, Oregon and was founded in 2005. As stated on their website, “OPAL Environmental Justice Oregon builds power for Environmental Justice and Civil Rights in our communities. We organize low-income communities and people of color to achieve a safe and healthy environment where we live, work, learn, play and pray. We strive to create opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making (OPAL, 2016a).” OPAL is not a member-based organization and instead refers to the people they serve as their constituents. OPAL focuses its work on low-income and poor residents of Portland including white, people of color, and refugee communities. Unique to most environmental justice organization, the majority of their constituents are poor white people. OPAL convenes Bus Riders Unite! (BRU) which has approximately 175 dues paying supporters. In addition, OPAL is in its first year of piloting the Youth Environmental Justice Alliance (YEJA) with approximately 35 participants.

## **Organizational Structure & Programs**

OPAL has a small staff of five that implement their three programs, BRU, YEJA, and Organizer-In-Training (OIT) in addition to their work with affordable housing. BRU is a multi-lingual and multi-racial membership organization that started in 2010 to represent transit-dependent people in Portland. According to OPAL ( 2016b) “BRU doesn’t only address transportation, but rather brings the perspective of transit-dependent people to the decision-making that affects all matter of policy related to the built environment” including sustainability, affordability, and accessibility. YEJA is a youth-led program that develops the leadership of low-income youth and youth of color through political education, campaign organizing, and skill building to address issues of environmental justice. OIT is similar program, but instead focused on intensive programming in the summer to further develop the skills of young low-income or person of color organizers. OPAL is most involved in local and regional coalitions, rather than national. The organization has around 17 community partners, mostly based in Portland, with some convening states in the Northwest.

## **History & Victories**

OPAL’s community organizing is situated in response to the environmental and health consequences of the built environment. OPAL’s founders had experience as community organizers that addressed the environmental health issues impacting public housing residents in North Portland. They created OPAL to respond to the environmental justice implications of gentrification/displacement in the predominately low-income and people of color communities in North and Northeast Portland. OPAL’s campaign work started with addressing the poor indoor and outdoor air quality of people living along the I-205 highway. However, the majority of their campaign victories are from transit justice initiatives, such as securing a \$1.3 million low-income

rider mitigation fund, protecting the YouthPass program from budget cuts, and establishing a Transit Equity Advisory Committee in the transit authority.

### **Current Campaigns**

OPAL's current work is very focused on the impacts of gentrification within the City of Portland. Portland has been named the most gentrified city in the United States in several news and magazine articles (Maciag, 2015; Njus, 2015; Wile, 2015). Since 2000, more than 58% of Portland's eligible census tracts have gentrified, measured by percentage change of the white non-Hispanic population, population size, and poverty rate (Maciag, 2015). The (City of Portland (2013) conducted a study that showed that the majority of Portland's census tracts had 3-4 risk factors for gentrification including a high percentage of renters, people of color, people with less than a college education, and people under 80% of area median income (AMI). OPAL is currently leading a coalition to repeal Oregon's prohibition on Inclusionary Zoning and promote rent regulations. OPAL has won updates to increasing the density of affordable housing in the City of Portland. They continue to lead in campaign work to ensure that gentrification does not undo some of their campaign victories and that the needs of low-income and people of color within Portland continue to be met.



## People Organized in Defense of Earth and her Resources (PODER-Austin)

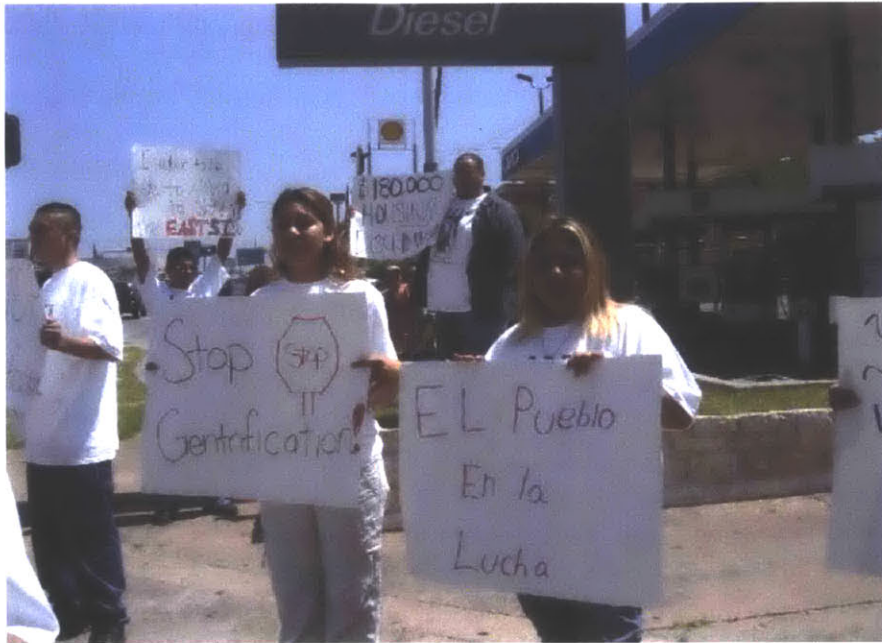


Fig. 6. PODER-Austin members rallying against gentrification. Photo credit: PODER.

### Membership

PODER-Austin is located in Austin, Texas and their mission is to “redefine environmental issues as social and economic justice issues, and to collectively set [the] agenda to address these concerns as basic human rights” (PODER, n.d.-a). PODER-Austin’s membership base is primarily low-income to lower middle class people of color. PODER is located in East Austin, an area where there is high unemployment, low educational attainment, and pockets with a high concentration of poverty (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). There is also a large immigrant population within East Austin that is served by the organization. PODER-Austin does not track the exact number of people who are served by their work but estimate that it is in the magnitude of hundreds or thousands depending on the issue and the neighborhood.

## **Organizational Structure & Programs**

Chicano activists and community leaders of Austin founded PODER-Austin in 1991. Currently, PODER-Austin has two staff members and relies heavily on the support of volunteers and student researchers. The organization has a very unique structure for their Board of Directors. The majority of board members are chairs of different neighborhood associations, including the Executive Director. This allows for PODER-Austin to get input and information directly from Austin residents to guide their work, while also allowing different neighborhoods to see how they can work together across issues. PODER has two main programs: Transportation & Quality of Life (TQL) and Land Use Community Health Action (LUCHA). The TQL program focuses on uplifting the voices of low-income communities of color in transportation planning and decision-making and ensuring that the transportation system is accessible to all members of the population. The LUCHA program advocates for sustainable development and spreads awareness about the environmental and public health impacts of industries seeking to locate in Austin. PODER-Austin also works in partnership with local schools and community groups to empower residents to be leaders and stewards of their community. They are also connected to regional and international environmental and social justice networks.

## **History & Victories**

The campaign work of PODER-Austin has historically responded to racist land use policies. When highway I-35 was built through Austin it displaced many low-income people of color and created a barrier segregating the demographics of the east and west (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). The city zoned East Austin to be the region where industry could locate and PODER has fought several battles to hold industry accountable for violations of the Clean Air and Water Act. Tank Farm was a 52-acre site with above ground fuel storage tanks

owned by Exxon, Mobil, Chevron, Texaco, and CITGO that operated for 35 years. In 1993, PODER-Austin won the relocation and remediation of the Tank Farm site. In March 2003, PODER worked with a coalition of community groups to fight for the rezoning of industrial land to a lighter use and successfully won the rezoning of 600 properties in a residential community. The Young Scholars for Justice led the efforts to close down the Holly Power Plant in 2007. PODER-Austin continues to ward off harmful land use changes while advocating for low-income people of color to have a say in land use decisions in their communities.

### **Current Campaigns**

PODER-Austin's current campaign work is highly focused on combatting gentrification and displacement in Austin. They are noticing the impact that displacement is having on families of color and the disproportionate burden of increasing property taxes on low-income people. In 2014, Austin was described by Forbes magazine as the fastest growing city in the United States (Carlyle, 2014). Approximately 40% of Austin's census tracts have gentrified and on average this phenomenon is correlated with an increase in a wealthier and white population (Maciag, 2015). PODER-Austin is exploring a variety of tactics including affordable housing bonds, overlay ordinances, and community education to engage community members and city officials in preventing gentrification.

## People Organizing to Demand Environmental and Economic Justice (PODER-SF)



Fig. 7. PODER-SF members rally against gentrification in San Francisco City Hall. Photo credit: PODER.

### Membership

PODER-SF is located in the Mission District of San Francisco, CA. Their mission is to “organize with Latino immigrant families and youth to put into practice people-powered solutions that are locally based, community led, and environmentally just (PODER, n.d.-c).” Their Latino constituency is ethnically mixed with most members representing Mexico and Central America and a smaller percentage representing South America. The organization has a significant youth contingency of about 200 youth members. The organization focuses its effort on neighborhoods in southeast San Francisco with a high or growing percentage of Latino residents including the Mission, the Excelsior, and the Tenderloin.

### Organizational Structure & Programs

PODER-SF currently has a five-person staff. Their campaigns focus on environmental justice, economic justice, and immigrant rights. Throughout the organization, community members are engaged through workshops, direct service, and grassroots organizing. PODER

works closely with local networks to advance immigrant rights such as the San Francisco Immigrant Legal and Education Network, the Language Access Network, and San Francisco Rising (voter engagement). They strive to break down the barriers between staff and members and believe in the sharing of “cultural traditions, personal journeys and collective struggles” (PODER, n.d.-d). PODER-SF members further engage with the organization through biannual membership meetings, monthly skill shares, peer-to-peer mentorship, and social events. The organization has about 23 California-based and three national/international partners. They have two youth programs, Common Roots and Urban Campesinos that help to develop youth’s critical thinking and organizing skills. The Common Roots program is a partnership with the Chinese Progressive Association to build cross-cultural solidarity amongst southeast San Francisco Chinese and Latino Youth. The Urban Campesinos program is a food justice program that employs young people and increases community access to healthy foods in the Excelsior district.

### **History & Victories**

PODER-SF was founded in 1991 to respond to environmental injustice facing Latino communities in San Francisco. The organization has done a mixture of campaigning against toxic industries and started very early work against gentrification with the dot com boom of the nineties. In the 1990s, the organization helped to pass a citywide Environmental Lead Poisoning prevention law, establish permits for affordable housing at Juan Pifarre Plaza, and block a proposal for youth curfews. In the early 2000s, PODER-SF created community playgrounds, and halted the proposed expansion of a gas station in the Excelsior district. In many of these initiatives and campaigns, coalitions with local community based organizations were very important.



## Current Campaigns

PODER-SF's community organizing focuses on community-based planning, affordable housing, and collective economics to promote sustainable and healthy neighborhoods in Southeast San Francisco. In 2013, the name of the organization was changed to include "economic justice" and mission was changed to reflect their belief in people-powered systems. Much of their current work focuses on increasing political power within low-income Latino communities. Through PUEBLOTE campaign, they've been working with the City of San Francisco to transfer city-owned vacant land for the use of community-led initiatives including parks, an urban garden, an urban farm, and affordable housing. The campaign is meant to significantly increase green space while providing jobs for local residents. They further hope to advance economic resilience in their communities through the Working Together campaign. The program helps to teach community members about starting worker cooperatives and social enterprises. They hope to develop a network of non-profits, city agencies, and small businesses that support cooperative initiatives throughout the city.

## UPROSE



**Fig. 8** Each year UPROSE hosts the Climate Justice Youth Summit. Photo credit: UPROSE.

## **Membership**

UPROSE is located in the Sunset Park neighborhood of Brooklyn, NY. The mission of UPROSE is “to strengthen intergenerational and indigenous leadership, empower young people to set their own agendas and organize, facilitate community-inclusive practices & policies in environmental and land use decisions, address environmental neglect and mitigate environmental harms, enhance environmental amenities, advocate and bolster sustainable and just development, address and mitigate social inequities, promote and preserve the diverse cultures and traditions of Sunset Park residents, and to increase government accountability and transparency (UPROSE, n.d.).” The membership of UPROSE reflects the community demographic of Sunset Park and is majority Caribbean Latino, Mexican, and Central American. There is also a significant Chinese, Palestinian, and working class Polish population. Youth, as young as twelve, comprise about one-third of the member base. Elders also make up a large portion of the organization and play a critical role in supporting the underlying infrastructure of the organization.

## **Organizational Structure & Programs**

UPROSE has a staff of nine people who work on a variety of programs including climate resiliency, transit justice, brownfields redevelopment, and youth organizing. The organization engages with members through community visioning, workshops/trainings, grassroots organizing, and social events. The Youth Justice program teaches young people about environmental and social justice and community organizing, as well as media skills to share their own narrative. The At the Table Leadership institute is a seven-week training program for young people that further develops leadership skills through field trips and prompts young people to initiate their own campaigns or get involved in existing campaigns around New York City. In the wake of Hurricane Sandy, UPROSE received funding to start the Climate Justice Community Resiliency

Center. The Center will help train low-income residents and residents of color how to effectively respond to future severe weather events, coordinate the allocation of community resources, and mitigate the impacts of future severe weather through community-based research and adaptation planning.

### **History & Victories**

UPROSE was founded in 1966 and is Brooklyn's oldest Latino-serving community-based organization. UPROSE originally began as a social service organization but grew into environmental justice work organically. Sunset Park is New York City's largest walk to work community. When members and staff realized how close residents were living to environmental hazards, they decided to do something about it especially since environmental justice was a void not being filled by other local community-based organizations. Along the way, they've worked with several industrial businesses on the waterfront to retrofit and run more efficiently and cleanly thus protecting both the health and financial security for community members. UPROSE has fought for the redevelopment of several brownfields in the community and was instrumental in the creation of Bush Terminal Piers Park in 2014. In addition, they have fought for improved street design to protect employees walking to work, youth walking to school, and elders. In 2013, after a community-led transportation planning process, the NYC Department of Transportation implemented UPROSE's safety plan to improve lighting, sidewalks, and medians along 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue. They also launched a successful campaign to return a crucial bus line, the B37, which was cut by the transit authority from 2010-2016. UPROSE has worked with many community partners and city officials to ensure that the vision of long-time residents are implemented into decisions regarding the built environment.



## **Current Campaigns**

UPROSE is currently involved in facilitating numerous community-based visioning projects including climate resiliency and waterfront development. As a grant-recipient of the State of New York's Brownfield Opportunity Area Program, UPROSE released a community-based plan for the redevelopment of the waterfront. It prioritizes climate adaptation and community resilience. UPROSE is currently advocating to ensure that this plan is seen to fruition and that the neighborhood's waterfront development remains culturally relevant to long-time residents and that the needs of newer gentrifiers are not prioritized. In addition, UPROSE continues to push for accessible and equitable transportation planning in Sunset Park that improves storm water management and that connects the inner parts of the neighborhood to the waterfront. UPROSE's current campaigns are focused on the intersection of gentrification and climate adaptation planning and ensuring that the needs of working class and people of color are prioritized.

## **Chapter 3: Connecting Environmental Justice to Gentrification**

### **Conceptualizing Gentrification**

As most people are familiar, gentrification is a phenomenon that has social and economic implications. A lesser-discussed component of gentrification is its environmental implications. This chapter will discuss how environmental justice (EJ) organizations are connecting the issue of gentrification to their work towards environmental justice. In order to understand these connections it is first necessary to understand the causes and consequences of gentrification.

### **Definitions of Gentrification**

The term “gentrification” was first coined by Ruth Glass (1964) to define changing dynamics in London neighborhoods. She used the term to describe the conditions that led to the displacement of London’s working class residents by middle class residents. She described it as a “complex urban process that includes the rehabilitation of old housing stock, tenurial transformation from renting to owning, [and] property price increases” (Glass, 1964). Throughout the years, scholars and practitioners have observed subtle differences in the way that gentrification looks at the community level.

Scholars and practitioners have expanded upon the definition of gentrification to address some of the spatial and temporal differences in its characterization since the 1960s. Clark (2005) provides a holistic definition that can be upheld under different contexts: “gentrification is a process involving a change in the population of land-users such that new users are of a higher socio-economic status than the previous users, together with an associated change in the built environment through a reinvestment in capital.” This expanded definition of gentrification allows for a shift in focus from discussing its attributes to discussing its root causes. Community

organizers continue to add value to the definition of gentrification by contributing an analysis of power and economic systems. Causa Justa (2014), in *Development Without Displacement*, define gentrification as:

“a profit-driven racial and class reconfiguration of urban, working-class and communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment. [Gentrification] is characterized by declines in the number of low-income, people of color in neighborhoods that begin to cater to higher-income workers willing to pay higher rents.”

Although people have defined the phrase differently throughout the years, the cumulating definitions demonstrate our growing sophistication in analyzing gentrification in many dimensions.

### **Mechanisms of Gentrification**

There are many theories regarding the conditions that cause gentrification. The two main categories of theories are known as production explanations and consumption explanations. Production explanations focus on the economic conditions that produce gentrification, while consumption explanations focus on the consumption patterns that drive gentrification. Both sets of theories are most powerful when considered together; production and consumption explanations must be analyzed simultaneously in order to see the big picture of gentrification and put forth policy to combat it.

In production theories, gentrification is caused by economic factors that drive changes in the physical use and characteristics of land. The difference between the land value prior to gentrification and the land value after gentrification is referred to as a “gap.” The most commonly referred to gap is the rent gap. In gentrifying neighborhoods, “ground rent capitalized under an existing land use... falls farther below the growth- and technology-driven increasing potential that could be captured under the optimal, highest, and best use.” This difference in

actual rent and potential rent is the rent gap. The presence of the rent gap incentivizes developers and landlords to capitalize on an opportunity obtain a higher return on their investments. Policymakers are also incentivized to close the rent gap, as this would bring in more capital into the neighborhood.

The factors that contribute to the presence of a rent gap in low-income urban neighborhoods are linked to historic disinvestment and systemic inequality. The presence of the rent gap has been associated with the movement of people away from the city through white flight and suburbanization. As Smith (1979) summarizes:

“[c]apital flows where the rate of return is highest, and the movement of capital to the suburbs, along with the continual depreciation of inner city capital, eventually produces the rent gap. When this gap grows sufficiently large, rehabilitation (or, for that matter, renewal) can begin to challenge the rates of return available elsewhere, and capital flows back.”

Community organizers have added to the understanding of the rent gap as being linked to growing wage inequality in the United States:

“the rent gap refers to the growing potential for rental profits in buildings with low rents and increasing property values, alongside a pool of wage earners willing to pay higher rents. In short, the rent gap represents the incentive for the eviction of low-wage renters in order to tap into the rental profits of high-wage residents and inflate the rental market rate (Causa Justa, 2014)”

These explanations of the causal mechanisms of gentrification call attention to the need to address political factors and economic systems that lead to the disinvestment of low-income communities and the reduced quality of living of the people who live within them.

Consumption theories take a more sociological approach to explain the drivers of gentrification. These theories analyze changes in cultural values that contribute to people gentrifying a neighborhood. They explore questions such as: *Who are the gentrifiers? Where do they come from? What draws them to living in central-city neighborhoods?* Two of these

theories are the post-industrial and professionalization theses that link gentrification to changing economic systems and changes in sectors of employment (Hamnett, 1994; Ley, 1980). Ley (1980) and Hamnett (1994) identify the transition from a majority of manufacturing jobs to a majority of service jobs in cities. In addition, to a shift to a service-based economy, the workforce has also professionalized, demanding more skilled labor. This creates a tension between working class residents who are often in the low-paying service jobs and middle class residents who often hold more professional jobs. What can be observed in many gentrifying cities are “more middle-class professionals with a propensity for central-city living and a rejection of suburbia.” They can afford to pay higher rents and mortgages and outbid low-income residents.

Many people within majority people of color neighborhoods discuss the role that that white supremacy plays in the gentrification of their neighborhoods. White supremacy is defined as “a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege (Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, n.d.).” After the historic redlining of communities of color, many residents in gentrifying communities identify gentrification when they begin seeing white residents in their neighborhood. Organizers from ACE and PODER-Austin noted that many long-term residents within their communities of color may not know the term gentrification but they see the fabric of the community changing with the increase in “young white professionals” (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016; S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). Almanza from PODER-Austin stated, “Everybody is really aware and some of them see it as the white man coming to take their land. They don’t

know the word gentrification but they know it's the white man coming to take their land (personal communication, January 19, 2016).” Within the context of gentrification, white supremacy is the prioritization of the needs of white people who demand space and land within the city. It is also privileging the requests of white newcomers in gentrifying people of color neighborhoods.

### **Types of Gentrification**

Gentrification is a context-specific phenomenon that varies due to regional and local characteristics. Academics have coined new terms to illuminate these nuances such as rural gentrification, new build gentrification, super/hyper gentrification, studentification, commercial gentrification, global gentrification, and provincial gentrification to name a few (Dutton, 2003; Lees, 2000; Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008; Parsons, 1980; Smith, 2002; Zukin, 1991). These terms have complicated the original definition of gentrification by capturing greater specificity regarding where gentrification can happen, the types of development processes that can occur, and the types of properties that can be gentrified. Neighborhoods that are served by the case study organizations are experiencing new build gentrification, super/hyper gentrification, environmental/green gentrification, and commercial gentrification, as defined and explored in more detail below.

New build gentrification refers to a change in development processes that promote gentrification. Pioneer gentrifiers, who bought property and rehabilitated existing housing stock using their own sweat equity, drove classic gentrification. Nowadays, the majority of gentrifiers are moving into newly built or renovated buildings that were created in large part by real estate developers, some executed with financial and/or regulatory support by local government (Lees, Slater, & Wyly, 2008). New build gentrification highlights that gentrification has gone beyond

being jump started by individuals and is now being facilitated more by industry. Super gentrification, also known as hyper gentrification, refers to an enhanced rate and magnitude of gentrification. Neighborhoods that experience hyper gentrification are neighborhoods that have undergone previous gentrification during other time periods. It is characterized by a gentry that moves in with a higher socioeconomic class than the previous gentrifiers (Lees, 2000). No longer is it just poor residents that get displaced by the incoming class middle class, but a wealthier class displaces the middle class, as well as remaining lower income residents, during a second wave of gentrification.

Environmental gentrification illuminates the gentrification that is a consequence of brownfield redevelopment and sustainability initiatives. It used to be referred to as new build gentrification, but scholars began more appropriately categorizing it as environmental gentrification or green gentrification during the 2000s. Researchers have provided evidence of the correlation between greening initiatives and gentrification. The presence of green space increases property values and the redevelopment of formerly polluted sites attracts developers to low-income neighborhoods (Checker, 2011; Gould & Lewis, 2009; Pearsall, 2010; Gamper-Rabindran & Timmins, 2013). Additionally, research has shown that the Superfund program has aided the process of gentrification with federal assistance (Gamper-Rabindran, Mastromonaco, & Timmins, 2011; Gamper-Rabindran & Timmins, 2011).

Commercial gentrification demonstrates that gentrification is not restricted to residential areas. Commercial gentrification traditionally occurs when business owners establish new businesses to cater to the desires of gentrifiers. Often these businesses, such as boutiques, offer highly specialized goods for which wealthier gentrifiers can afford to pay higher prices than the neighborhood's shrinking population of working-class and poor residents. Researchers have

discovered that commercial gentrification is associated with a rejection of mass consumption, with most gentrifiers preferring small-specialized shops to one-stop shops that are common in working class communities (Bridge & Dowling, 2001; Ley, 1996; Zukin, 1991). The presence of these businesses can lead to speculative rental price increases for commercial properties. In addition, the influx of gentrifiers to a community can cause these newly established businesses to outcompete the long-time businesses.

### **Effects of Gentrification**

Depending on who you speak with, a person that profits from gentrification or a person who experiences a loss due to gentrification, they will speak of the positive or negative consequences of gentrification. As described below, there is overwhelming evidence that the negative effects of gentrification on community cohesion far outweigh any positive effects (Abu-Lughod, 1994; Atkinson & Bridge, 2005; Blomley, 2004; Lees et al., 2008). This is because the positive effects of gentrification serve a small percentage of working class people within gentrifying neighborhoods and often cannot be leveraged by most low-income individuals to elevate their socioeconomic status.

Some scholars argue that the underlying processes of gentrification are beneficial to the municipality and low-income neighborhoods in decline. Atkinson & Bridge (2005) summarize that the positive effects of gentrification include stabilization of declining areas, increased property values, reduced vacancy rates, increased fiscal revenues, increased viability of further development, reduction of suburban sprawl, increased social mix, and rehabilitation of property. These are all things that are of concern to city officials and that can be facilitated by housing developers, however it is difficult to imagine that these measures would be identified as of most concern to residents in low-income communities. There is a mismatch in the long-term arc of



the benefits of gentrification for the municipality, the near-term benefits for the real estate and construction industries, and the near-term and long-term socioeconomic effects on longtime residents of low-income communities. The manufacture of positive gentrification narratives lacks this power analysis, while encouraging the process of gentrification.

There may be some benefits of gentrification for low-income residents that remain within a gentrifying community. Low-income homeowners are often resilient to displacement pressures (Freeman, 2006; Glick, 2008; Pearsall, 2012; Sullivan, 2007). When homeowners remain within their community their property value increases, which can provide a valuable boost in income when they are ready to sell. Remaining low-income residents may also have more access to neighborhood amenities, such as sit-down restaurants. Gentrification has been correlated with a reduction in violent crime and increased perceptions of safety (O'Sullivan, 2005; Papachristos, Smith, Scherer, & Fugiero, 2011). The influx of development into gentrifying areas increases the local tax-base and can provide necessary funding to improve public resources, such as schools.

As explained by the EJ organizers, the benefits mentioned above are capitalized by a small percentage of longterm residents and the benefits often have corresponding negative impacts. Almanza explained that low-income homeowners are often unaware of the competitive housing market and the difficulty of buying a new affordable home upon selling their home (personal communication, January 19, 2016). Organizers from ACE, PODER-Austin, PODER-SF, & UPROSE discussed the inability to use new neighborhood amenities, such as restaurants, in a gentrifying city due to the unaffordable goods that are sold within these businesses (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016; S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016; A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016; E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). Matsueda of ACE described that older residents of Roxbury

often perceive the neighborhood as safer, but in order to improve the neighborhood's image the police harass homeless individuals and young people (personal communication, February 12, 2016). Yeampierre from UPROSE and Almanza exposed the negative impact that gentrification can have on the school system when young and highly mobile gentrifiers displace families (personal communication, January 15, 2016; personal communication, January 19, 2016).

In addition to the inequitable distribution of benefits, described above, the negative effects of gentrification outnumber potential benefits and have more severe consequences on quality of life and health. Atkinson & Bridge (2005), list the following negative effects of gentrification: displacement, worsened mental health, increased conflict, loss of affordable housing, unsustainable speculative price increases, homelessness, commercial/industrial displacement, change of local services, increased displacement and housing demand pressures on surrounding low-income areas, loss of social diversity, and population loss in gentrified areas. Gentrification is a violent act because it challenges low-income people's access to basic resources such as housing, while also increasing financial burdens that can have negative impacts of health (Whittle et al., 2015; Causa Justa, 2014). In addition, gentrification has been associated with increased policing and racial profiling (Atkinson, 2003; Roschelle & Talmadge, 2003).

The positive effects of mixing high-income groups with lower-income groups have been debunked. "There is no significant increase in social capital to low-income groups from being around higher-income groups...because of their transient nature and the spatial segregation of the space (Davidson, 2006)." Even though occupying the same physical space, gentrifiers tend to stay within their own social groups (Davidson & Lees, 2005; Rose, 2004; Walks & Maaranen, 2008). In some cases they are also less rooted in place due to their increased mobility. Particularly, younger generations may dedicate less time in trying to connect with their neighbors.

The main problem with the theory of social mixing is that it “promises equality in the face of hierarchy” (Blomley, 2004). In other words, the privilege that is internalized within gentrifiers reflects how they move through space and the relationships that they choose to build with their neighbors.

### **Gentrification as an Environmental Justice Issue**

For all of the case study organizations, it became necessary to confront gentrification head-on, as gentrification-induced displacement prevents their constituents from experiencing the successes of their community organizing efforts. For ACE, they are working on the Grow or Die Campaign to take over vacant land for the use of community gardens. The campaign was created to address a lack of affordability and access to healthy foods within Roxbury, but as residents are displaced, they no longer have access to this resource. In Portland, OPAL fights for transit access and affordability for low-income riders, but residents get pushed out from the urban core, they often face even worse transit access. At UPROSE, organizers created a community-based climate resiliency plan in the wake of Hurricane Sandy. It emphasizes local green jobs creation to lead in the resiliency efforts, however, commercial displacement threatens the viability of this plan. These three examples show that EJ organizations were propelled into anti-gentrification work. Gentrification is an environmental justice issue because it prevents EJ organizations from ensuring that their efforts improve the quality of life of low-income and people of color residents of EJ communities.

Gentrification is also an environmental justice issue because its causes and effects conflict with the vision of environmental justice as outlined in the Principles of Environmental Justice. The Principles of Environmental Justice highlight not only the need to be free of environmental burdens, but also the need to preserve culture and practice self-determination within EJ

communities (Fig. 9). However, within the professionalization of environmental justice this connection is often left out. For example, the EPA’s definition of environmental justice reads, “Environmental Justice is the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies (US EPA, 2016).” This definition, used to guide federal and state environmental policy, is disconnected from the foundations of environmental justice in respecting culture, identity, and autonomy. Through semi-structured interviews, the organizers at ACE, CBE, OPAL, PODER-Austin, PODER-SF, and UPROSE demonstrated how gentrification conflicts with the vision of environmental justice in the areas of economic development, residential displacement, land use planning, and organizational sustainability.

**Principle 5)** Environmental justice affirms the fundamental right to political, economic, cultural and environmental self-determination of all peoples.

**Principle 7)** Environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement and evaluation.

**Principle 12)** Environmental justice affirms the need for urban and rural ecological policies to clean up and rebuild our cities and rural areas in balance with nature, honoring the cultural integrity of all our communities, and providing fair access for all to the full range of resources.

**Fig. 9.** Selections from The Principles of Environmental Justice that address the importance of culture and self-determination. Source: Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit (1991).

**Economic Development & Commercial Displacement**

As Smith (1996) proclaims, “[g]entrification is no longer about a narrow and quixotic oddity in the housing market but has become the leading residential edge of a much larger

endeavor: the class remake of the central urban landscape.” This class remake is further driving socioeconomic disparities across the nation. Solnit and Schwartzberg (2000) illustrate this in the following quote: “[G]entrification is just the fin above the water. Below is the rest of the shark: a new American economy in which most of us will be poorer, a few will be far richer, and everything will be faster, more homogenous and more controlled or controllable.” This class remake or emergence of a new American economy of the urban landscape conflicts with environmental justice’s vision of economic and cultural self-determination as a fundamental right (Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991). Each community organizer that was interviewed made reference the impacts that gentrification is having on the local economy and resident’s access to employment. Gentrification creates a crisis of affordability that hinders the quality of life of people living within environmental justice communities and limits their access to economic and cultural opportunities that used to sustain them.

Affordability itself is an environmental justice issue because it impacts people’s access to basic needs and limits their mobility and sovereignty. Within Portland, Brooklyn, Austin, San Francisco, Oakland, and Boston affordability of housing is placing pressure on the financial security of residents. ACE identified affordability of housing, transportation, and food as an area of concern by surveying their Roxbury constituents. Both PODER-Austin and UPROSE highlighted the cultural repercussions of declining affordability in environmental justice communities. They spoke of the cultural impact that gentrification has on families that have lived within their community for generations, that are now being negatively impacted when their children can no longer afford to live there. As Almanza remarked, “[her members] come from traditions where family members were close and community provides for you (personal

communication, January 19, 2016).” She further explained how social cohesion has been frayed and culture eroded through the lack of affordable gathering spaces.

“Culture is changing because they're making new rules for how communal and gathering spaces can be used for festivities. Reserving space for traditional festivities is getting costly and local community members now can only afford to do cultural events once or twice a year (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016).”

Restrictive policies like these, which are aimed at increasing revenue, diminish cultural sovereignty and prompt a call to action by the environmental justice community.

Each organization identified ways in which gentrification is placing pressure on local businesses and their members’ ability to access secure employment and preserve their cultural resources. Jose Lopez of CBE mentioned that their members in Oakland are finding it harder to find jobs locally and are travelling greater distances to work (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016). Almanza spoke about the increased pressure being placed on local businesses to keep afloat when their primary customers are moving away and their commercial rents are increasing (personal communication, January 19, 2016). ACE, OPAL, PODER-Austin, PODER-SF, and UPROSE highlighted that newly emerging businesses are not catering to the needs of long-term residents. They are providing services, such as food and boutique retail, at higher prices and are dissolving the cultural fabric of the neighborhood. As Matsueda from ACE reflected, “In Dudley, residents used to be able to take care of all of their cultural needs, however, there are newer and different types of businesses that don’t reflect the existing culture and their needs (personal communication, February 12, 2016).” Vivian Satterfield of OPAL commented on a similar feeling:

“In Northeast Portland, the Black community once had a niche in terms of businesses that supported black culture. Now there is only one black business in Northeast Portland. The loss of these stores is a cultural loss. Not being able to

access hair care or your church is a cultural loss (personal communication, January 25, 2016).”

Yeampierre discussed the cultural appropriation of Latino food in high-end restaurants and boutique shops and how this competes with local businesses (personal communication, January 15, 2016).

New commercial development is often advocated for within these communities as a tool to spur economic development and create jobs. However, the commercial development projects often provide retail and service jobs that do not pay a livable wage. The residents of gentrifying communities are unable to keep up with the increased rent if they aren't earning a livable wage. Yeampierre and Diaz of PODER-SF discussed their work within Brooklyn and San Francisco, protecting the industrial sectors of the economy, which provide high wages to residents (personal communication, January 15, 2016; personal communication, February 24, 2016). For PODER-SF, gentrification during the dot com boom of the '90s and the current hyper gentrification of the tech era are eroding the light industrial sector which specializes in production, distribution, and repair. This formerly industrial land is being converted to office space and lofts and is negatively impacting the community's access to the blue collar jobs that used to support them. The struggle for UPROSE is similar as they are fighting development along the waterfront that will displace current industrial businesses and provide low-wage jobs. Gentrification is in direct conflict with the livelihoods of residents living within EJ communities, but with the guidance of EJ organizations economic development can be used to promote high-paying green jobs and curb displacement.

### **Residential Displacement**

Many of the organizers that were interviewed named displacement as the most prominent impact of gentrification. Diaz remarked that he uses the term “displacement” interchangeably

with “gentrification” because “some have made the argument that gentrification is good, but it’s hard to make a debate that displacement is good and that people that have been living in their home for generations and are forced out is a good thing (personal communication, February 24, 2016).” For Yeampierre, the displacement that comes from gentrification and the real estate and media portrayal of romanticized versions of gentrifying neighborhoods is analogous to processes of colonialism. She asserted, “There is nothing innovative about displacement. This is our history and [they] are contemporary colonizers (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016).” Displacement, whether a threat or actualized, has long-lasting impacts, especially severe in predominantly renter communities. The interviewees illuminated the impacts that residential displacement has on health, accessibility, transportation, and on their local community organizing efforts.

Public health within environmental justice communities has been the foundation of the fight against environmental racism. Organizers from ACE, OPAL, and PODER-SF made reference to the impact that gentrification is having on the health of residents. Lee Matsueda mentioned that ACE members, who have been displaced, are traveling farther distances to reach their healthcare centers (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

Gentrification may be taking away from the effectiveness of community health centers that were strategically located in Roxbury to best serve low-income residents. Reduced access to health care, as well as direct emotional distress from displacement negatively impacts health outcomes of an already vulnerable population. Vivian Satterfield mentioned that Portland residents who have been displaced are experiencing “root shock” (personal communication, January 25, 2016). The phrase was coined by Dr. Mindy Fullilove (2009) to describe the impacts of displacement from urban renewal on health and determinants of health such as increased stress, worsened



mental health, and disruption to early childhood development. “There is fundamental stress that people are exposed to in making ends meet and being able to survive (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016).” This suggests that the impacts of displacement can be even more significant on displaced individuals who already may have been facing hardship. Furthermore, Diaz explained that many people who are displaced are moving into unsafe and unhealthy living conditions. PODER-SF is working with families that move into single-room-occupancy units (SROs) and live in overcrowded conditions that impact health (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). For EJ organizers who have always been concerned with health, the displacement that is caused by gentrification is an environmental health issue.

Residential displacement also has negative impacts on displaced residents’ access to resources and has consequential impacts on infrastructure. Displacement impacts transit justice as displaced residents face increased travel burdens to get to work, school, or other resources. Diaz spoke of a family of members that have to travel from Oakland to San Francisco every day to get to school and work (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). For transit systems that are priced based on distance travelled, displacement can significantly increase an individual’s travel costs. In addition to affordability, accessibility is also a transit justice issue caused by gentrification. “When people are displaced they lack access to their needs because the system then focuses on the dense urban core (V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016).” Displaced individuals may be forced to move to places without sufficient transit access and with less political power it can be difficult to garner support for expanding this infrastructure to the periphery. Displaced residents may be forced to drive more, having negative consequences on travel costs, greenhouse gas emissions, and air quality. PODER-Austin and

UPROSE organizers mentioned that displacement is having an impact on the school system (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016; E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). They are noticing that as families are displaced, and more single young professionals move-in, schools are in jeopardy of shutting down due to low enrollment. For the families that are able to remain within their community, this added stress on the school system can have negative consequences for childhood development, access to education, and transportation.

### **Land Use Planning**

The Principles of Environmental Justice state that “public policy [be] based on mutual respect and justice for all people” and that “environmental justice demands the right to participate as equal partners at every level of decision-making including needs assessment, planning, implementation, enforcement, evaluation (Delegates to the First National People of Color Environmental Leadership Summit, 1991.” However, all of the interviewees noted that current power structures and land use decision-making processes promote gentrification without taking into account the needs of existing low-income and people of color residents. OPAL, began doing anti-gentrification work over 10 years ago noticing the connection between gentrification, land use, the environment, and their members. As Satterfield explained, “Land use has always been the root of environmental justice issues” (personal communication, January 25, 2016). The interviewees provided numerous examples of the ways in which gentrification occurs through environmental initiatives, the co-opting of campaign successes by EJ organizations, and the lack of meaningful community engagement with their constituents.

Within the case study neighborhoods, gentrification is being accelerated through environmental initiatives such as transit-oriented development, climate resiliency, and

brownfield redevelopment that does not fully incorporate community needs into plans. Diaz shared a campaign victory that PODER-SF had in blocking a luxury condo development from being located in The Mission (personal communication, February 24, 2016). The developer was arguing that the project would have positive environmental benefits because it contributed to transit-oriented development; however, PODER-SF was able to block the development by articulating that the negative impacts of gentrification would negate these benefits. He also shared the results of a study, conducted with UC-Berkeley, which demonstrates that rent within close proximity to GoogleBus stops is significantly higher than in adjacent areas. The GoogleBus is aimed at reducing car travel for their employees travelling from the Bay Area, however it is contributing to gentrification within the city. Yeampierre spoke of the redevelopment of the Sunset Park waterfront for climate resiliency. She described that the redevelopment design team is using an outreach strategy caters to newcomers, while not attracting long-time residents because engagement methods are centered on culturally insensitive events (personal communication, January 15, 2016). CBE discussed the environmental gentrification of brownfield redevelopment:

“There are brownfields and superfund sites and then when the feds use grants that are supposed to transform the community... they end up gentrifying them. With improvements residents are concerned and want to make sure that they can still be there to enjoy all of the benefits. They don't want to be displaced to other communities where there will be the same environmental problems (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016).”

Throughout each interview, it was apparent that these community-based groups have put in tremendous effort to improve their communities and that they continue to strive for environmental justice within their communities. However, long-term residents are finding that their service and needs are not being recognized within the context of gentrification. UPROSE, PODER-Austin, and PODER-SF are all experiencing the communities that they serve becoming

more ripe for gentrification due to the successes of their environmental initiatives. Yeampierre remarked, “when we green it up, developers start using these successes as a way to promote displacement” (personal communication, January 15, 2016). Diaz expressed concern that as they begin to bring in amenities, such as urban parks and farms, that the neighborhood becomes an attraction to further development that does not benefit local residents (personal communication, February 24, 2016). Within these statements the underlying message is that there are insufficient checks and balances to keep developers incentivized to respond to community needs. Almanza further explained that some residents also believe that gentrification is occurring as a punishment from people in power “for speaking up and changing their dynamics” (personal communication, January 19, 2016).

In order to ensure that disenfranchised residents continue to have a say within the development of their communities, community groups are calling for governmental accountability to all of their constituents, not just ones with political and economic power. Both Almanza and Yeampierre shared stories of fighting to improve their local communities, but only seeing these changes come to light as gentrification changes the communities’ demographics.

Almanza reflected:

“For decades people have been crying foul about unsafe signage, sidewalks, and appropriate lighting. Now that gentrifiers are moving in it gets improved and they get their own bike lanes, traffic signals, and bike racks. While the POC communities have waited for decades just to get sidewalks and they get all of this ahead everyone else (personal communication, January 19, 2016).”

She spoke of the negative impacts that prioritizing gentrifiers’ needs is having on families and elders who are car-dependent.

“Transportation is one-sided and now they’re putting in miles and miles of trails for gentrifiers to hop from one side of town to the next when people still don’t have basic needs like sidewalks. They’re also taking away lanes in communities and it’s having an impact on families and elders and how they get around on

transportation in a car-dependent city (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016).”

Yeampierre spoke of the juxtaposition of space between struggles that UPROSE has fought for, such as increasing green space and brownfield redevelopment, and emerging amenities, such as electric turbines and the greenway, that are luring pioneer gentrifiers into Sunset Park. The tension between community empowerment, sustainable development, and gentrification is visible and sentient. “It makes your heart sink because it’s sending a message that you can afford to live here as long as it’s killing you, but the minute that the community that is from here invests in its own community to clean it up, they can’t afford to live here anymore (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016).”

These environmental justice activists are seeing that gentrification is a complex issue that stems from land-use planning and current processes that aren’t guided by long-term residents. All of the organizers who were interviewed view gentrification as an environmental justice issue that is consistent with their mission. Diaz explained that environmental justice has evolved from its first generation of reacting to polluting facilities that cause public health problems, to a second generation that is “addressing issues of racist land use policies”, “confronting issues of the built environment”, and focusing on “social determinants of health” (personal communication, February 24, 2016). Lopez highlighted that by addressing gentrification, organizations are also promoting environmental justice because the two are interconnected through land use policy:

In Oakland poor land use decisions [are] what lead to displacement. Land use and zoning decisions were made to make these cities polluted... We can’t really clean up our communities and we also can’t address health issues of land use or land use decisions when you can’t connect the two (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016).

Matsueda explained that members are bringing issues of gentrification to the organization and that staff cannot ignore it.

The foundation of EJ is the connection to what our environment is, how it's changing, and justice. EJ is about how decisions are being made and who is a part of it. Currently the city and real estate companies are moving in a direction other than what residents want. This is similar to classic EJ issues in questioning how the city can be more accountable to its residents (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016).

These groups are calling for responsible city planning that addresses social, economic, and environmental inequities and promotes justice.

### **Organizational Sustainability**

Although the organizers focused on the impact of gentrification on their constituents and the communities in which they serve, the interviews showed that gentrification is also having a negative impact on the organizations themselves. Some of the organizers have mentioned the exorbitant cost of rent as a challenge to the work and services that they provide (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016; V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016; E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016; S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). Some, including ACE and CBE, have already relocated due to increasing costs. "ACE has had five different office locations in the Dudley area. It's difficult to find affordable office rental space that will ensure that enough money can be used for programming" (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). While some are feeling the pressure to relocate, with staff of UPROSE experiencing landlord harassment and OPAL considering moving in order "to better serve constituency and situate the budget" (V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016). Environmental justice remains one of the most underfunded social movements, with less than 5 percent of all environmental funding going to EJ groups (Faber & McCarthy, 2001). As funding decreases and operational costs rise,

most businesses would look to balance their budget through adjusting programming costs.

However, for non-profit organizations with a mission to serve EJ communities, this is not a viable solution.

Organizers from ACE, OPAL, and UPROSE discussed the negative impact that gentrification is having on staff and programming. Lee Matsueda noted the effect that gentrification has on the turnover of staff and members who hold leadership positions. He spoke of the disruptive effect that this turnover has on relationship building, which is at the core of community organizing (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). Yeampierre reflected on the time when all UPROSE staff lived and worked in Sunset Park, however many staff members have moved and are moving deeper into Brooklyn (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). She further reflected on the emotional toll that gentrification has on community organizers:

“You spend your entire life struggling with your loans and doing all the things we do and sacrifice for your people and that sacrifice benefits the privileged. On a very personal level, that hurts like crazy. That you were working to create a healthier place for people, who have been literally dying, and these people push you out (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016).”

In order to have the most effective community organizing it is important to be well situated within the local community. This research shows that the people fighting for environmental justice in gentrifying communities are not exempt to the trauma of gentrification.

PODER-SF was the only organization that seemed to be more resistant to the impacts of gentrification. PODER-SF holds office space within a community space called, Centro del Pueblo. Centro del Pueblo is co-operatively owned by five community-based non-profits that are located in the building. Diaz explained that this model helps to prevent unsustainable rent increases and that gentrification is less of a worry due to the community-based process of raising

rent (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). PODER-SF provides unique insight into an anti-gentrification strategy that has worked for them and that could be applied to other community-based organizations whose sustainability may be threatened by gentrification.

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## **Chapter 4. Confronting Gentrification through Environmental Justice**

The environmental justice (EJ) organizations that were interviewed for this study all believe that it is important to integrate anti-gentrification campaigns within their community organizing work. The amount of time that they have been working on anti-gentrification work varies from incorporating it since the day of their founding or taking on the issue within the past few of years. Each organization tailors their strategy to their local needs while tapping into a larger movement for environmental justice that challenges global processes such as neoliberalism and capitalism that degrades the environment, erases culture, and displaces their residents. They identify gentrification as not only a housing issue, but also a human rights issue, labor rights issue, and environmental justice issue. We learn from these organizations that the scale of this issue is so large that we must work together across fields if we are to challenge the powerful forces that promote and profit from gentrification.

### **Strategies to Confront Gentrification**

Environmental justice organizations that are choosing to respond to the threat and consequences of gentrification are on the forefront of a new movement within environmental justice organizing. This movement, tapping into the foundations of the Principles of Environmental Justice, demands that solutions to environmental problems come from the people who live within environmental justice communities and that residents have more ownership and control of what development occurs within their community. When organizers decide how they will respond to gentrification within their community they take several factors into consideration including what are the root causes of the issue, which other community-based organizations are working on these issues, which community stakeholders need to be engaged, and which

responsible parties will their efforts focus on. Resisting gentrification is difficult and there is no one formula that can calculate exactly what these groups need to do in order to win. The case studies demonstrate how the organizations are leveraging coalitions, partnerships, cooperative economics, community engagement, and to resist gentrification and displacement.

### **Coalition-Building**

ACE, CBE, OPAL, PODER-SF, and UPROSE are engaged in coalitions for their anti-gentrification work. The organizations have chosen this strategy as a way to give their movement strength and efficiency. As stated by Satterfield, OPAL has “chosen to work in coalition because gentrification is multi-tiered and complex. To address root causes we need to work in coalition to articulate tactics and demands as a whole” (personal communication, January 25, 2016). Lopez explained that CBE’s coalition was “formed in attempt to break the reactionary cycle of actions and develop the power of residents to create and push forward a vision (personal communication, January 21, 2016).” For ACE, working in coalition with the national Right to the City Alliance has allowed the organization to expand its expertise into housing issues. Matsueda also explained that working in coalition enhances efficiency because the organization is “building off of an existing network of people and groups interested in anti-gentrification work” and that it “better expose(s) the true story of gentrification” (personal communication, February 12, 2016). ACE’s involvement with Right to the City Alliance allows them to hear about other anti-gentrification efforts across the country. All of these coalitions are convening multi-sector participants to discuss gentrification. They are not only engaging with the environmental community and residents, but also the housing, labor, real estate, faith, social services, urban planning, small business, and industrial sectors as well (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016; A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016; V.

Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016; E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). By being a part of a coalition, it provides for a powerful exchange of knowledge, agenda setting, and consensus building, to create a diverse and unified force to combat gentrification.

Coalitions are being used to enhance community engagement, create community-based plans, advocate for policy solutions, and organize for workforce development. PODER-SF, for example, is involved in a few different coalitions because their work encompasses many neighborhoods within the city of San Francisco. They use their coalitions to enhance community engagement by increasing the number of community members that can attend visioning sessions and charettes. Through these community-based processes they have created the People’s Plan campaign that advocates for community-led development. Within coalitions, groups are also unifying around policy recommendations to address gentrification and displacement. As shown in Table 1, there are a range of policy options that groups are exploring including rent control, community benefits agreements, zoning reform, eviction regulations, and a right to return policy. The policies that they advocate for are context specific and tailored based on municipal/state regulations.

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Public Policy Options</b>
ACE	Just Cause Eviction
CBE	Community Benefits Agreements
OPAL	Inclusionary Zoning Right to Return <sup>3</sup>
PODER-Austin	Zoning Reform
PODER-SF	Zoning Reform
UPROSE	Zoning Reform

**Table 1.** List of policy-based solutions that case study organizations are advocating for.

<sup>3</sup> If an individual can prove that they themselves or someone in their family used to live in a neighborhood and have been displaced due to urban renewal or construction, they have a right to return through subsidized housing.

Within these coalitions, organizations such as PODER-SF and UPROSE are putting forth ideas that integrate workforce development to address economic factors that contribute to displacement. PODER-SF began an affordable housing coalition in the Excelsior District and due to the concerns expressed by affiliates will be opening a workforce hub to provide support to people looking for jobs (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). UPROSE has convened the Protect Our Working Waterfront Alliance (P.O.W.W.A) in Sunset Park to discuss how to preserve the industrial jobs of the waterfront, while planning for the future effects of climate change. As Yeampierre remarked:

UPROSE is bringing industry into the conversation because they are a part of the community that is in harms way because of extreme weather events. We need to build in a way that's carbon neutral and climate adaptable. In addition to pushing back and politically strengthening ourselves, we are also looking at solutions, like how to slow-down gentrification. How do you make sure that this sector that is being commercialized, that this industrial sector is building for New York City 5 years from now, 10 years from now, 50 years from now, is stabilized? How do you make sure that these jobs are union jobs and that they pay \$60,000 a year with benefits so that our communities have livable wages and that people can work locally? (personal communication, January 15, 2016)

These cross-sector coalitions are providing innovative solutions that address multiple community needs by connecting the environment (where people live, work, and play) to economic opportunity and community vitality.

Working in coalition with other community organizations also provides long-lasting benefits. As CBE discovered, working in coalitions allowed for the organization to teach other community members about environmental justice while building long-lasting relationships that have allowed them “to be at many different tables and gain different perspectives” (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016). As Lopez reflected:

It's been helpful to engage with other organizations and partners and be able to teach them what environmental justice really means. It's allowed CBE to be a part of other work that residents are also impacted by. It gives CBE more

leverage to build knowledge and power as an organization, and at a citywide level it's helped to develop more power and engage the whole community in having a unified vision to transform the community of Oakland by those most impacted by gentrification and displacement (personal communication, January 21, 2016)

Although working in coalition is nothing new for environmental justice organizations, working in coalition for anti-gentrification work means further enhancing the vision of environmental justice, as it allows these organizations to reach new audiences.

### **Progressive Partnerships**

ACE, PODER-Austin, and PODER-SF discussed the ways in which they worked in partnership with other sectors to confront, prevent, and curb gentrification. Partnerships vary from coalitions in that they occur on the shorter-term and have less time dedicated to community building practices and agenda setting. Partnerships, in contrast to coalitions, are less focused on creating a long-term visioning and are often centered on designing and implementing a specific project.

ACE is currently working with local health centers in Roxbury to study the impacts of displacement on access to healthcare. They are “drawing connections between people who have been displaced from their health centers and the struggle to return to them” (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). In addition, they're looking into creating a community land trust within Roxbury. Community land trusts (CLT) are a strategy of separating land from the speculative housing market by holding land in trust, governed by a non-profit Board of Directors. Since the organization currently does not have the capacity to implement a CLT on their own, they are looking into partnerships with existing local CLTs to secure their guerilla gardens for long-term community benefit (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). PODER-Austin is working in partnership with the Texas RioGrande Legal

Aid to provide legal support for their members who are experiencing tenant rights issues and housing violations (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). PODER-SF has been working in partnership with local CDCs and with municipal agencies. They have submitted joint requests for proposals with a local CDC to bid for the right to purchase and develop city-owned parcels. They have been awarded two projects through this strategy, one where they will provide community/tenant organizing space on the ground floor of an affordable housing complex and the other in which they will create an urban farm with a cooperative business model (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

Within these partnerships, organizations are providing progressive ways to confront the contribution of poverty and the job market in enhancing gentrification. They are a part of a growing movement to return to cooperative economics and to enhance community ownership and wealth. ACE demonstrates this by being a member of the Greater Boston Area Community Land Trust Network, and working in partnership with other local groups to implement community land trusts. They are discussing the strategy with their membership “to talk about how to further land takeovers and how to make sure the [Grow or Die gardens] stay in community ownership in the long run” (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). PODER-SF is creating worker cooperatives to ensure that community members can generate wealth and have more control over their wages. By challenging capitalist economic systems, they are providing the opportunity to remove the amount of land that has the potential to undergo gentrification and creating high-paying jobs where local residents can have a chance to resist displacement in a system where rent burden increases and wages are stagnant.

These partnerships demonstrate that this strategy can provide more evidence of the impacts of gentrification and unique ways to address the economic causes of gentrification. EJ

organizations are using health impact assessments to expose the consequences of gentrification and displacement on health. This strategy is useful to appealing to policy makers as it provides quantitative information that is often privileged within the sector. Health is also a useful framing mechanism because it is a topic that everyone can understand and relate to, regardless of socioeconomic background. The community land trust and worker cooperative initiatives by ACE and PODER-SF demonstrate that EJ organizations are also putting for creative solutions to prevent and slow the pace of gentrification. Through partnerships, they are resisting gentrification by enhancing community ownership over land use decisions to protect affordability and by providing economic opportunities for local wealth generation.

### **Community Engagement**

Community engagement has always been at the core of grassroots community organizing and the case study organizations are continuing to use this strategy to build momentum to stop gentrification. They “believe in the leadership development of those most directly impacted” and “build upon the expertise of residents” to guide their anti-gentrification work (V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016; L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). Community engagement allows for citizens of EJ communities to be informed and empowered when challenging city officials on gentrification. PODER-Austin “encourage(s) members to be a part of ... governmental planning processes, whether it’s a public meeting or filing a complaint” (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). The residents themselves are best equipped to speak to the challenges and improve their community. As explained by Diaz, “those most impacted need to speak truth to power at development meetings and at City Hall so the folks making decisions understand how people are being affected by decisions that are being made” (personal communication, February 24, 2016). The case study

organizations are using a variety of methods to engage community members in their anti-gentrification work including community-based research, leadership development, grassroots outreach, and art.

### ***Research***

ACE, CBE, and PODER-SF spoke exclusively of the ways in which they are using participatory research to determine the strategic direction of campaign work, quantify the extent of gentrification and its effects on the community, and to identify community member's needs and visions for community development. Research allows EJ organizations to gain information from a larger sample of individuals than active members. This data is helping to provide a baseline that communicates the current issues that residents face and to provide a forecast for how a neighborhood can develop without gentrification, while addressing its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Surveys have been used by ACE and CBE to identify topics and geographic areas of concern for residents in gentrifying communities. ACE conducted a survey with Roxbury residents to gather their impressions on neighborhood change. The survey was used to gauge how familiar they were with the term "gentrification" and its effects. The survey has been useful in guiding ACE's Right to Remain campaign by identifying affordability and cost of living as priority areas. The results have led ACE to be more intersectional in their environmental work to address jobs and housing (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). CBE is conducting participatory research to identify sensitive sectors that are vulnerable to gentrification. They have identified schools and community spaces as being particularly sensitive in Oakland. They have also done some research to study the effects of gentrification on neighborhoods that are sandwiched between major development projects. They are hoping to continue this research,



with support from the city, to provide community-driven recommendations for zoning reform (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016).

ACE, CBE, and PODER-SF are also conducting research to identify locations where their organizations can intervene to prevent gentrification. ACE has been investigating the number of large city-owned parcels that lie within Roxbury. These are vacant and/or tax foreclosed properties that are ripe for development. They collect information on the location of the parcel, what stage of development it is in, and any community benefits agreements the developer has agreed to (if applicable). From this organization-led research, they have created fact sheets to summarize this information and share with community members at workshops (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). CBE mentioned working with UC-Berkeley students to conduct an economic analysis of revising zoning laws, so that they can both benefit residents and the city, without promoting gentrification (J. Lopez, personal communication, January 21, 2016). PODER-SF will be launching a participatory mapping project this spring in the Excelsior and Mission Districts. Their aim is to “engage everyday people in having a say.” Through the project they will identify priority sites for community development (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). These organizations are using research to enhance the community’s awareness of local planning processes and to keep residents engaged in the improvement of their communities.

As demonstrated in UCC’s Toxic Wastes and Race, research has been and continues to be an important tool for the EJ movement. Often in academia, research is depoliticized. The EJ movement has used research to politicize environmental issues. In order to do this, community-based organizations must work with researchers that understand the political nature of their work. Matsueda discussed the need for organizations like ACE to work with researchers that are able to

“elevate voices of leadership within the community” and further called on research institutions to provide data that is accessible to community-members (personal communication, February 12, 2016). Research is an important resource for EJ organizations because it helps to fill the void of data on the issues that plague EJ communities. They provide a valuable resource that both empowers community residents and provides more access to information. The results of this research can also be shared with city officials to demonstrate disproportionate impacts and to communicate community-based solutions for addressing them.

### ***Leadership Development: Workshops and Trainings***

All of the case study organizations conduct workshops and trainings for their members to enhance leadership development. These workshops and trainings engage a diverse group of stakeholders across age, language, and race. They serve a variety of purposes and are used to provide tools for engaging with planning processes, to empower residents to take action, and to determine the organization’s strategy for combating the issue. Leadership development is important for community organizing because it provides popular education, in a shared language, that allows for community members to have a dialogue with others in positions of power. As explained by Yeampierre:

You can’t begin to have conversations with your elected officials or with people who play a role in permits and ordinances if you do not have a base. You have to have a base... and the base has to be knowledgeable. You can’t just have people holding banners and posters. You have to do the education piece because people talk about issues, sometimes from a place of passion, but without information they get taken down in a second. It’s really important that they understand what the implications are for them and the future of [the] community (personal communication, January 15, 2016).

EJ organizations make investments into the leadership development of community members so that they are prepared to answer the call to action within their communities.

Workshops and trainings are being used by both PODER-Austin and UPROSE to teach community members about various planning processes. The tools that they learn within these workshops are used to empower residents to stay within their communities and gain skills to resist displacement. PODER-Austin has run a series of workshops with their members on how to protest your property taxes, how to document violations in land use, and how to read zoning notices. Within East Austin, about 70% of residents are homeowners (City of Austin, 2014). The mechanism through which these long-time residents are displaced is through increasing property taxes, so PODER-Austin prepares residents to protest these increases so that they have a chance to remain within their neighborhood (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). UPROSE further conducts trainings to teach their members how to navigate planning processes. They've conducted trainings on New York City's Uniform Land Use Reform Process (ULURP) and zoning laws (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). ULURP is the process by which major land use decisions get reviewed and approved within the city. This training helps to ensure that community members know all of the actors and the various points in which they can intervene to influence land use decisions. It also prepares them to testify at city hall hearings. UPROSE has even partnered with local schools to run the training for concerned parents and teachers (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016).

Another important component of workshops and trainings is to empower residents to take action within their communities. This workshops and trainings differ from the ones mentioned in the previous paragraph because they are focused on enhancing political participation. ACE has been organizing workshops and discussions at least once a week for the past year and a half to keep residents up to date on the Right to Remain Campaign (L. Matsueda, personal communication, February 12, 2016). OPAL has been leading monthly workshops to share

organizing opportunities and to promote political education. They have included EJ 101, Transit Justice 101, and a “Know Your Rights” training. The workshops are open to the public and free. The organization provides bus passes, childcare, translation, and food to enhance accessibility and turnout. Satterfield stated, “Community forums and political education has been effective in engaging and teaching community members about the extent of the issue. Participants are shocked at the rate of gentrification and its reach into middle incomes” (V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016). UPROSE mentioned the importance of ensuring that young people are empowered to contribute to their community and sustain the movement. UPROSE youth have led anti-gentrification workshops for their peers. They’ve trained approximately 120 youth on the issue of gentrification during climate justice teach-ins (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). These workshops work well in conjunction with workshops/trainings that share information about planning processes by ensuring that residents in EJ communities are empowered to take action from a position of knowledge and power.

Lastly, EJ organizations are using workshops to guide campaigning strategy. PODER-SF mentioned how they are convening residents to set the vision for what they want to see within their community. Through community organizing, they are putting pressure on city officials to convert city-owned vacant land into affordable housing. They will likely be holding a series of workshops to engage residents to create a vision for what they want on these sites (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). UPROSE has used a similar strategy in the past when organizing to create the Sunset Park Waterfront Park. The struggle to create the park took 15 years but came out of series of community visioning workshops (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). The organization continues to advocate for community-based plans and workshops will continue to be a valuable tool. Everyone who gives their input

within these workshops is a leader within their community. As shown by the #BlackLivesMatter movement, community organizing is moving away from movements led by a single leader and are moving towards a leader-full model (“11 Major Misconceptions About the Black Lives Matter MovementBlack Lives Matter,” n.d.; Martin, 2015). This means that there is enough work to be done to confront oppression that every individual contribution counts.

### ***Grassroots Outreach***

Grassroots outreach is another fundamental part of EJ organizing that continues to remain important for anti-gentrification organizing. Grassroots outreach means meeting your constituents where they are. Instead of sending materials or inviting them to come to a meeting, organizers are out in the streets distributing important information, polling residents about their opinions, and inviting them to get involved in the movement. PODER-Austin and UPROSE shared stories about how grassroots outreach has been influential in preserving community cohesion and enhancing civic engagement.

PODER-Austin used door knocking to block a large luxury condo development and to communicate the extent of the housing crisis in Austin. They worked with the churches to go door-to-door asking residents to sign a ballot petition to block a half-million dollar luxury condo development. They were able to get a significant number of homeowners who live around the infamous Poverty Island to sign the petition and make it legal (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). In addition, to prevent the reach of speculative real estate developers, they decided to do grassroots outreach to teach homeowners about the lack of affordable housing in Austin. They created a brochure that demonstrated how to look for new housing and how difficult it is to do so in a gentrifying city. It asked community members: “If you were to sell your house where would you move to? Will you be close to your school, church,

and doctor? Do you know that you're going to be impacting your neighbor? Will you be making enough money?" (S. Almanza, personal communication, January 19, 2016). This tactic provided a way to humanize the issue of gentrification, neighbor-to-neighbor, and to provide a reality check for homeowners who may be unfamiliar with the current state of the housing market.

UPROSE has begun increasing their grassroots community organizing to ensure that residents of Sunset Park understand the high stakes of gentrification. They have been protesting against the development of high-end retail within their community, like Industry City, a 6 million square-foot retail shopping center and creative-economy hub that opened in April 2015. Industry City gained support from the city in its development by promising thousands of new jobs, some of which would go to Sunset Park residents. However, Yeampierre warns that many of these entry-level positions cannot compete with the current high-paying union jobs of the industrial waterfront. She is concerned that Industry City, appeals to the tastes of gentrifiers and will draw newcomers into the community to displace longtime residents (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). Industry City hosted an event in April 2015 to gain the support of the local community and passed out free gifts, like pencils and balloons, which shocked Yeampierre and motivated her, to better communicate the dangers of displacement in her community. "What we've found is that people will give up their land for trinkets because that's our history. We found that people in the community didn't know was going on. This told us that we needed to ramp up our visibility and organizing on the streets (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016)." With grassroots outreach, she hopes to gain enough momentum to create and advocate for a community-based plan for the industrial waterfront.

### ***Media & Art***

UPROSE identified the use of visual media as one of the ways in which they are resisting gentrification. The organization is using a variety of tools to communicate with the greater public about the negative impacts of gentrification. As Yeamiere stated, “we’re using photos and memes in organized protest against leaders of displacement” (personal communication, January 15, 2016). At the People’s Climate March in September 2014, UPROSE brought the issue of gentrification to the largest environmental demonstration in US history. During the march, UPROSE dropped a banner from a building in Time’s Square that made a clear statement about gentrification to the national climate movement (Fig. 10). They’ve also used banners more recently, in October 2015, during a rally for Indigenous People’s Day. The group displayed a banner with a picture of Christopher Columbus arriving to the Americas and raising a flag with the Industry City logo (Fig. 11). Within their outreach materials, UPROSE is using visual media in print and through social media to empower local residents to act.



**Fig. 10.** UPROSE banner drop during the People's Climate March. Photo Credit: UPROSE.





**Fig. 11.** Top- UPROSE staff & members at Indigenous People’s Day Rally, 2015. Bottom- Close-up of banner image. Photo Credit: UPROSE

PODER-SF is using art as a tool for resistance to gentrification. Although, this was not discussed during the semi-structured interview, there is section of their website that explains their use of art in community organizing.

As we fight to keep San Francisco affordable and safe for our families, we also search for outlets to express our outrage and frustration in a positive way. In

2014, PODER created a space to express ourselves using the love we have for our community at our Arts and Resistance gatherings (PODER, n.d.-b).

The organization works with migrant artists to run art workshops with their members. One of the products of these workshops that was displayed within the heart of The Mission on the wall of the Galeria de la Raza (Fig. 12). Both PODER-SF and UPROSE demonstrate that art has an important role within community engagement to educate, to provide a way to heal, and to resist.

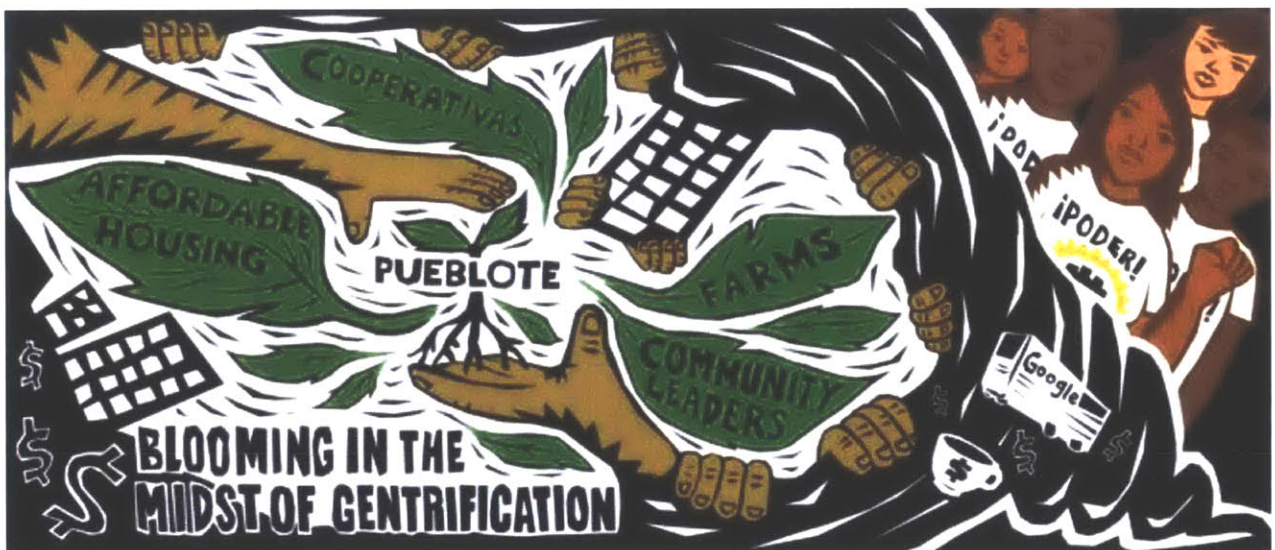


Fig. 12. PODER mural, created in partnership with CultureStrike. Photo credit: Galeria de la Raza.

### Overview: Strategies in Context

Although not unique strategies, the use of coalition building, partnerships, and community engagement demonstrate that EJ organizations are using their strengths to confront gentrification. The range and breadth of work that is occurring within each of these strategies indicates that EJ organizations are operating on multiple scales. For instance, each organization is communicating with multiple audiences: their constituency, the greater EJ community, community-based stakeholder groups, and city officials. In addition, the organizations are intervening at various levels of the issues by studying the impacts of gentrification, preventing

gentrification through policy proposals and alternative land use models, and slowing the rate of gentrification through improving local economic opportunities.

As gentrification is a large and complex issue, community-based organizations are still working towards identifying solutions. Solutions to gentrification will need to address the systemic and structural causes of gentrification, such as capitalism. The range of solutions that are being deployed show that there is tension within the movement to provide urgent solutions that are still within the dominant economic system, while other solutions are paving the way for the creation of another economic system that works in harmony with the earth and addresses the needs of low-income and people of color communities. When visioning for a gentrification-free community, EJ organizations should also vision what success looks like for each of these strategies. EJ organizations should evaluate the success of the strategies in which they are using, to ensure they are using resources effectively.

### **Benefits of the Environmental Justice Lens in Anti-Gentrification Work**

Housing advocates and tenants' rights groups have typically led the anti-gentrification movement. However, the case study organizations demonstrate that there is growing opportunity for other organizations to play a role within the movement. Organizations such as PODER-Austin, OPAL, and UPROSE are taking the lead within their communities to spearhead local activity to confront gentrification. Other organizations including ACE, CBE, and PODER-SF, have joined forces with existing anti-gentrification networks to further the cause. Within these spaces, environmental justice organizations bring a collection of strengths to the anti-gentrification movement. Environmental justice organizations are a valuable contribution because of their understanding of the root causes of injustice and how multiple systems interact to disproportionately burden low-income people of color.

For environmental justice organizing, the root causes of social issues are the systemic causes of problems that have visual references. If a tree is used for this metaphor the leaves are the visual data that signify that gentrification is happening, the roots are the systems that drive the process of the developing leaves. The roots remain hidden and it is often difficult to see and/or remember their role in the phenomenon at play. With gentrification, some of the visual cues of neighborhood change include shifts in the racial demographic, business composition, housing market, and public infrastructure. While root causes would be classism, racism, capitalism. As Satterfield explained, “For OPAL, the response to address anti-gentrification comes from EJ frame that always prompts understanding root causes of injustice (personal communication, January 25, 2016).” Almanza noted that what’s been helpful in organizing against gentrification is “understanding the root of gentrification, how the wealthy are using it, and are changing land use policies in order to gentrify our communities. When you understand root you can begin to organize effectively” (personal communication, January 19, 2016). EJ organizations are well equipped to dig past the surface causes —production theories, consumption theories, and public policy— to challenge these large “isms” and are poised to increase the effectiveness of solutions to prevent gentrification.

Environmental justice brings an intersectional analysis to the movement that prompts participants to discuss the ways in which different systems are interrelated in one issue. This approach helps organizers to identify the multiple layers of problems and identify multiple strategies to address them. Almanza described this process in campaign work:

When we look at an issue we don’t look at it as a single issue, we look at it like a web that tells you which way to go. With gentrification you have to look at the root issues. Land use and zoning...is how the issue gets into our community and is what makes gentrification legal. Then you have to look at policy, then education, which is how you inform your community about what this means; and you have to translate the zoning guide into Spanish to be able

to break it down to community members. You need to look at churches, popular education, like art and murals. You need to address the issue at different levels county, city, state, and federal. You need to look at housing and you need to look at health. Can you still have your health services and making sure it reaches the targeted demographic? Then you need to look at all of the dynamics and all of the different entities such as policymakers, boards, commissions, the media, and community members. There are different ways for people to understand the issues. It's not just one thing it's everything (personal communication, January 19, 2016).

Within this quote she addresses the ways in which EJ organizations put forth strategies that reach diverse populations, work with various sectors, and create strategies for EJ issues that are comprehensive. With their intersectional lens, EJ organizers strive to not only address one aspect but should strive to address as many as possible. ACE and UPROSE mentioned making connections between climate justice and anti-gentrification organizing. While all of the organizations mentioned how they are connecting environmental issues to those of housing, transit, and employment. By using intersectional analysis, EJ organizations can help to protect against unintended consequences of land use policies.

### **Limitations and Needs to Support EJ-Organizations in Anti-Gentrification Work**

EJ organizations are well poised to contribute to the growing grassroots movement to address gentrification. They are helping to provide the people-power to address this issue, while also educating community members and city officials about the intersections between environmental justice and community development. Over decades, EJ organizations have shown their strengths and power to confront critical environmental issues that impact low-income/communities of color. However, the work that they do has many real constraints. If EJ organizations are to continue to address gentrification (and win) they need the financial resources to continue to enhance organizational capacity and an intentional effort to address the power structures that uphold gentrification itself.

## **Funding**

When interviewing all of the organizers, it became very clear that financial resources limit the amount of work they. They have the tools necessary to take on gentrification, but rely on funding to be able to pay organizers and provide community members services that will enhance their leadership development and participation. There limitations in funding have negatively impacted organizational capacity, community building, and the scope of their potential impact.

ACE, CBE, PODER-Austin, PODER-SF, and UPROSE all mentioned that they rely heavily on volunteers and interns to help with their anti-gentrification work. This has positive implications as noted by Matuseda, “having a lot of people interested in volunteer work, internships, and fellowships helps to build organizational capacity. They help to carry out other behind the scene functions” (personal communication, February 12, 2016). However, this also has negative implications because it creates high turnover within the organization, which impacts organizational learning and community building with residents. It also may impact organizational sustainability because if volunteers/interns are not fully invested in the work, the quality of programming/campaigns may be reduced. Almanza and Matsueda mentioned that a decline in funding has contributed to the loss of paid staff positions, which used to play critical roles within the organization (personal communication, January 19, 2016; personal communication, February 12, 2016). Matsueda, Lopez, Almanza, and Yeampierre mentioned that their anti-gentrification work would be strengthened if they had the resources to hire more full-time staff (personal communication, February 12, 2016; personal communication, January 21, 2016; personal communication, January 19, 2016; personal communication, January 15, 2016).



Another specific funding limitation has to do with the heavy reliance on grant funding for environmental justice work. Both Almanza and Yeampierre mentioned the barriers that many women of color-led organizations face when seeking funding (personal communication, January 19, 2016; personal communication, January 15, 2016). These organizations are consistently underfunded in comparison to their non-profit counterparts. Satterfield brought up the issue of being constrained programmatically based on grant specifications:

Because grassroots groups are primarily foundation-funded this causes limitations and barriers in the work that can be done. Sometimes people in these networks are afraid of pushing too hard and bucking people with too much power. Especially in the West Coast culture, there is a relaxed vibe and people don't want to rock the boat. They're more into the idea of incremental change (personal communication, January 25, 2016).

With issues such as gentrification, it is difficult for EJ organizations to strive for incremental change when their constituents face the imminent danger of displacement. Matsueda discussed that a major challenge for EJ organizations is “figuring out how to get resources to flow to communities that are trying to step up to these issues” (personal communication, February 12, 2016). On the part of the organization they have to articulate the connections between gentrification and topics that get funded often (climate justice, food justice, brownfields) but on the other hand, foundations need to be receptive of the connections between these issues and think open-mindedly.

In order to break the cycle of the reliance on funding from foundations, it is important for other sectors to step in to help fill the void. Particularly, organizers would like to see more support from the federal level for urban initiatives. Diaz remarked:

There has been a clear statement that cities have not been a priority at the federal level as seen in the cuts to HUD (US Department of Housing and Urban Development) funding. We need to support cities in a way that addresses housing challenges and, in innovative ways, the growing gap in income inequality. There is something to be said about a broad-based urban

movement to push for policy priority at the national level (personal communication, February 24, 2016).

In addition to HUD, there may be opportunities to address environmental gentrification at the federal level through agencies, like the US EPA. States' municipal budgets are stretched and will need support from the federal government to create deeply, permanently affordable housing. I attended the Third Annual Gentrification Conference organized by CASA Settlements on January 10, 2016 where the commissioner of the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development spoke as a panelist. She urged concerned citizens to bring their community organizing efforts to the federal government as the agency is struggling to build deeply affordable housing (in which all of the units are subsidized) due to a lack of financial support from the federal government. Thus further calling attention to the need for a broader show of support for justice-oriented work at the federal level.

### **Politics and Power**

Many of the organizers mentioned that the biggest challenge to addressing gentrification is the people within systems of power that implement policies that create and/or incentivize gentrification. EJ organizers do not feel as though current land use planning practices integrate community concerns enough. They discussed the large power structures that made their work difficult. They discussed who currently has power within land use policymaking and envisioned ways of balancing the scales to better integrate meaningful community engagement and ownership.

The entity that has the ultimate power over land use decisions is the city government, however there are additional stakeholders that have influence over a decision in most zoning decisions. Satterfield discussed the unequal playing field that community-based groups have to provide influence during planning processes when up against a development firm. "Developers



have much more financial power and EJ groups are always going to be out resourced” (V. Satterfield, personal communication, January 25, 2016). They have the financial power to draft well-designed plans and RFPs. They also have paid staff who are well versed in law, land use policy, and economics that can be persuasive when getting city officials to approve a project. Other organizers point out that the issue more has to do with who the elected officials are. Ideally, organizers want “political support that understands community voices and their perspectives around gentrification and displacement. They want people in City Hall that understand and are responsive to community issues” (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Furthermore, Yeampierre suggested that government-led initiatives to organize coalitions that advise land use planners should have an elected component (personal communication, January 15, 2016). Instead of the government appointing coalition members to represent the community, the community members should elect their representatives.

In order for community-based perspectives to be considered and integrated towards addressing gentrification there needs to be intentional community engagement. Arnstein’s Ladder of Participation is a tool that can be used to gauge the quality of an engagement process (Fig. 13). One thread that ran through the interviewees was the general theme that land use processes be more oriented towards citizen control, which is characterized by decision-making and managerial power (Arnstein, 1969). The organizers discussed the imbalance of power present in tokenizing engagement methods, which Yeampierre calls “false methods of engagement” that educates the public about a land use policy or plan without asking for input or having community members engage in the design. “What they do is create these stakeholder groups but you as a planner have done all of the design and you’ve done all of the thinking and then the community gets to put the rubber stamp on it. That’s radically different than what

UPROSE does” (E. Yeampierre, personal communication, January 15, 2016). She explained that community engagement should be culturally relevant and should avoid using community engagement with people of color as a means to secure funding without giving community more agency over the design. Diaz discussed the ways in which bringing community members into city-facilitated planning processes can be a disempowering experience based on tokenism. When planners use arcane and technical language within these engagement processes it becomes inaccessible to the average person and they spend much more time trying to understand what’s happening than providing meaningful feedback and suggestions (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016).

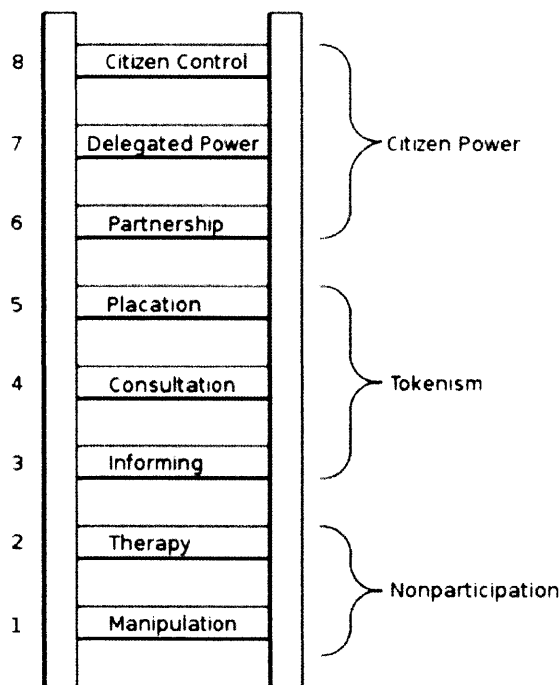


Fig. 13. A Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969).

EJ organizers are advocating for more ways to hold city officials accountable to the unintended consequences of land use policy. “There is still a need to have strong organizing on the ground, coupled with civic leaders, to make policies not only good on paper but effective

when implemented” (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Only one of the organizations, PODER-SF, specifically mentioned the ways in which they are working with city government to address gentrification. This may be a representation of the deep distrust the EJ organizations and community members have for the government due to the historic disinvestment and polluting of their communities. If city officials are to regain this trust and answer the call to justice, it is important to climb up the ladder of participation and address the concerns that these organizers have raised.

The way in which PODER-SF is working with municipalities, provides insight that gentrification may be best addressed at a regional scale. They are participating in a convening held by the Municipal Transportation Commission and the Association of Bay Area Governments, to connect housing, employment, and transportation patterns to gentrification (A. Diaz, personal communication, February 24, 2016). Municipalities may be best positioned to address gentrification, by taking the lead from EJ organizers and working collaboratively with other regions. This could also help to address financial concerns that arise when municipalities act independently.

## **Chapter 5. Incorporating Anti-Gentrification into Environmental Planning**

Gentrification is occurring within environmental justice (EJ) communities where residents have resisted toxic land use decisions and have organized to improve services within their community to address environmental burdens and enhance environmental benefits. Through their anti-gentrification organizing, EJ organizations reveal a lack of governmental accountability within communities of color to respond to the needs of low-income and people of color residents. They have witnessed policy-led initiatives, such as brownfield redevelopment, transit-oriented development, and climate resiliency planning that stimulate development that does not match the existing needs of their constituents. These improvements that EJ organizations have fought long and hard for have caught the attention of real estate developers, who see these improved neighborhoods as an opportunity to turn a profit. In response, they protest development that does not serve existing needs and that has the potential to displace longtime residents. They are organizing to have more control over land use decisions to further their self-determination and preserve culture. From the resistance of EJ organizations, environmental planners can learn about the unintended consequences of sustainable development and methods to improve land use and environmental planning that can preserve the cultural fabric of a neighborhood, curb displacement, and promote equity.

### **Recommendations for Planners**

#### **Shift to Community-Based Planning Approach**

This research suggests that the best way to prevent gentrification is to engage community members in the development processes that occur within their neighborhood. This work requires

a shift from top-down planning processes to bottom-up planning that engages residents as experts who know best what their community needs based on lived experiences. This approach challenges the racist, classist, and elitist attitudes that have often neglected or ignored low-income people of color's involvement within planning processes. Community-based planning can help to reconcile the deep distrust that low-income/people of color residents have for the city government and allow both groups to collaboratively work towards equity.

City planners should engage EJ organizations, as well as other local community-based organizations, as consultants. Many municipalities already work with consulting firms to design plans and conduct assessments. City planners can look to EJ organizations as consultants to take the lead on assessing the needs of a neighborhood and promoting strategies to address them. As consultants, EJ organizations would receive funding from the government to do this important community-based work. The organizations can provide their expertise in convening and facilitating community forums. In addition, they bring more local knowledge than the average consultant because they've been working within the same context for years. They know the community's history and laws intimately. In addition, the staff of many EJ groups has technical expertise to fulfill the consultant relationship because of their prior experience in law, planning, and policy.

Municipalities can also work in partnership with community-based organizations to enhance the quality of civic engagement. They can explore partnerships with community-based organizations to transfer ownership of city-owned parcels for community control and oversight. EJ organizations, continuing to work collaboratively with their partners, would jointly ensure that the residents stay actively engaged in development and programming that addresses environmental and socioeconomic concerns in culturally appropriate ways. Community-based

planning would continually empower residents and improve community cohesion. This approach would unite community members, increase their sense of belonging, and build positive relationships between neighbors. It gives community members the momentum and support to improve their own community rather than waiting for gentrification to provide any trickle down effects after the majority of longtime residents have been displaced.

This shift in municipal planning towards a more community-based process is already starting to take shape. The City of New York is currently working on a manual titled “Neighborhood Planning Playbook” which aims to guide city planners through creating community-based plans (City of New York, 2016). Various NYC agencies have begun making organizational changes to incorporate this new approach. Apart from NYC, other cities are also beginning to spearhead the development of community land trusts, one of the cooperative economic approaches to preventing gentrification. The City of Irvine in CA started a CLT in 2006 to preserve housing affordability (Irvine Community Land Trust, 2013). The city works in partnership with a local non-profit for programming and the two entities work collectively to meet their goals. These examples demonstrate that community-based planning is feasible. However, for it to be a success, city officials must be weary of replicating oppressive systems that don’t actually transfer more control to citizens. To break this cycle, municipal planners should be required to undergo anti-oppression trainings that teach them about systems of oppression and how to prevent perpetuating these systems within their work.

### **Incorporate Anti-Gentrification Measures into Environmental Planning**

The harsh reality is that there are not currently enough resources within EJ organizations to lead all planning initiatives within EJ communities, so there will be environmental justice work that needs to be carried out by city officials. Environmental planning is necessary within EJ

communities where there are many vulnerable populations. These are communities that face disproportionate health and economic consequences from brownfields, air and water pollution, food insecurity, lack of public transit, and climate change. These communities have the right to exist free of environmental burdens and hazards, and sustainable development is an important remedy for these environmental inequities. It is crucial for environmental planners to understand the socioeconomic context of people who live within EJ communities when putting forward sustainable development and climate resiliency initiatives. Environmental planners can find ways to promote sustainable development that does not promote gentrification and subsequently, displacement.

Planners regularly use tools to analyze the potential environmental, economic, and health consequences of proposed development projects, however, these existing tools lack an analysis of the social impacts of development. The effects of cultural erasure and social conflicts that are caused by gentrification are not included within environmental impact assessment, cost benefit analysis, or human health risk assessments. Furthermore, there are no mandated guidelines within health impact assessments to specifically address the health impacts of displacement. Planners must take additional steps to quantify the potential for environmental initiatives to contribute to gentrification/displacement. The Metropolitan Area Planning Council, based in Boston, has released a “Managing Neighborhood Change” toolkit that can be a starting point for planners who would like more information on how to prevent gentrification in their work. The toolkit provides access to planning-focused gentrification studies, resources for quantifying neighborhood change, and analyses of long-term affordability strategies that have been implemented across the country (Metropolitan Area Planning Council, 2015). Once planners are cognizant of these connections, they can put forward comprehensive environmental solutions

that prevent and mitigate gentrification. Furthermore, planners can measure the displacement potential of a project or plan by carefully assessing neighborhood demographics. Some factors that should be taken into account include median household income, percentage of the residential population that is rent-burdened, and percentage of business owners that are rent-burdened. For example, The City of Portland (2013) study identifies areas within the city that are vulnerable to gentrification using this approach.

After analyzing social impact and displacement potential, planners must then put forth solutions to mitigate potential negative impacts. The City of Portland (2013) discussed the need to have context-specific mitigation measures based on the level of vulnerability of a neighborhood and its current rate of gentrification. They highlight that potential mitigation strategies may include community engagement, community benefit agreements, and inclusionary housing. Many of their recommendations highlight the need to assess impacts of new investments on vulnerable populations and assess whether benefits are reaching vulnerable populations. However, I do not believe that this is a wise use of municipal resources, as community-based groups are already assessing the local impacts of development and gentrification within their communities. Unfortunately, three years after this study was released, gentrification and displacement continues to happen within Portland. To me this suggests that the city's approach isn't centering the systemic issues of socioeconomic inequity within their solutions. The solutions rely too heavily on the capitalist market to improve economic conditions through workforce development and incentives for the real estate market to preserve affordability. These approaches are still profit-driven while providing a small number of opportunities for low-income people to flourish. More meaningful solutions to prevent gentrification will involve partnering with EJ organizations and other community-based groups to address socioeconomic



inequities. Organizations like PODER-SF and ACE demonstrate that there are cooperative economic solutions that can secure affordability and enhance economic stability. City officials can further work to promote these solutions rather than solely focusing on the capitalist market to fill financial deficits in the public sector.

### **Create Interdepartmental Working Groups**

Planning agencies that are working on issues of land use can borrow some of the strategies that are being implemented from EJ organizations to prevent gentrification and work collaboratively to address the issue. From EJ organizations we learn that coalition building provides opportunities for shared learning and comprehensive problem solving.

Interdepartmental working groups can provide a mechanism for municipal agencies to work and learn together to create planning initiatives that minimize gentrification and address community needs.

Interdepartmental working groups allow for planners representing different agencies to share their area's expertise and communicate the goals of each agency. The agencies have the opportunity to become more familiar with each other's work and concerns. An interdepartmental working group can help to mitigate potential conflicts of interest. For example, if an Affordable Housing Department's goal is to preserve housing affordability and an Environment Department's is to implement a flood-retrofitting program, the goals of the two agencies can potentially be in conflict. However, if they're working collaboratively they can find ways to prevent the increased cost of resiliency measures to fall upon the cost of low-income tenants or homeowners. An interdepartmental working group provides the opportunity for governmental agencies to align their goals, share resources, and increase efficiency.

The planners that are a part of these working groups must still be accountable to community members in EJ communities. Under the community-based planning approach residents would need to be a part of this process so that planners do not privilege academic expertise over indigenous knowledge. It will be important to democratize planning and make this process equitable. Cities should make an effort to employ planners who live or have grown up in low-income communities of color and are personally aligned with residents from these communities. Second, community representation should be nominated and elected by community residents, prioritizing participation of low-income residents who have had less participation within city-led community engagement initiatives. The city should provide a stipend for participation to enhance accessibility for low-income participants. A skilled facilitator, trained in anti-oppression, should facilitate these sessions and ensure equitable participation amongst participants. As Diaz warned, planning processes can be very draining and inaccessible to the staff and members of EJ organizations due to their use of arcane and technical language (personal communication, February 24, 2016). This neutral facilitator will help to mitigate uneven power dynamics within the working group sessions, and uplift the voices of community representatives to drive the city's collaborative efforts.

### **Conclusion: Advancing Environmental Justice and Preventing Gentrification**

The organizing efforts of ACE, CBE, OPAL, PODER-Austin, PODER-SF, and UPROSE demonstrate the growing movement to address the negative consequences of gentrification. The environmental justice community is bringing our attention to the ways in which gentrification is created by land use and environmental policy that does not engage and respond to the needs of low-income and people of color communities. They highlight the ways in which gentrification negatively impacts culture, health, and self-determination. Although, EJ organizations are not

the actor that most people think of when they hear the term “anti-gentrification” they are showing that our perceptions of gentrification need to be broadened if it is truly to be challenged.

City planners can learn from these organizations and begin to incorporate environmental justice strategies into our work. We must strive to look for all of the intersections between environmental issues, social issues, economic issues, health issues, and human rights issues. We must actively prevent the separation of environmental issues from their socioeconomic consequences. We must challenge the belief that gentrification is inevitable. If we are to improve historically disadvantaged communities and make them more sustainable and resilient, we need to work collaboratively with those directly impacted and across planning fields. We need to break down systemic oppression within our planning practices to respond to the needs of and threats to low-income/people of color.

This research highlights the importance of responding to gentrification on multiple scales, by balancing short-term and long-term strategies while addressing gentrification’s root causes. Combatting gentrification will require a systems change that places people over profit and will require a large-scale economic restructuring. From the grassroots, EJ organizations and their partners will need to mobilize their constituents and place pressure on powerful institutions. From within the public sector, city officials will need to better represent the diversity of their citizens by improving community engagement and enabling community control. Both community-based organizations and governmental institutions will need to democratize their planning practices to ensure accountability to residents of vulnerable communities, as the non-profit industrial complex and structural racism and classism poses challenges internally. In the short-term, reactionary steps need to be taken to prevent development that will lead to

displacement, but in the long-term there needs to be a vision of EJ communities that centers the experiences of the disenfranchised to achieve justice in all of its dimensions.

*“The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization. The freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves is, I want to argue, one of the most precious yet most neglected of our human rights.”*  
–David Harvey

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## **Appendix A. List of Interviewees**

### **Susana Almanza**

Executive Director  
People Organized in Defense of Earth & her Resources  
Austin, TX

### **Antonio Diaz**

Organizational Director  
People Organizing to Demand Environmental & Economic Rights  
San Francisco, CA

### **Jose Lopez**

East Oakland Community Organizer  
Communities for a Better Environment  
Oakland, CA

### **Lee Matsueda**

Political Director  
Alternatives for Community & Environment  
Boston, MA

### **Vivian Satterfield**

Deputy Director  
Organizing People / Activating Leaders  
Portland, OR

### **Elizabeth Yeampierre**

Executive Director  
UPROSE  
Brooklyn, NY

## **Appendix B. Core Interview Questions**

1. Could you describe your membership base? How, if at all, has your membership changed in the past decade?
2. What are the neighborhoods in which you work? How have these neighborhoods changed, if at all, in the past decade?
3. What is your organization's mission? Has that mission changed over time? If so, how?
4. What do you see as your members' most important concerns?
5. Do you see a relationship between gentrification or displacement in environmental justice communities?
6. Is gentrification impacting members of your organization? If so, how?
7. Have you engaged with your members around the issue of gentrification? If so, how?
8. Is gentrification impacting the organization itself? If so, how?
9. Is your organization actively organizing against gentrification? Why or why not?
  - Has your organizational structure been changed to support this work?
10. How is your organization actively organizing against gentrification (programs, campaigns, advocacy)?
  - Why did you choose this method to address the problem of gentrification?
11. What has been helpful in doing community organizing against gentrification?
12. What has been limiting in doing work against gentrification?
13. What would be helpful to support your organizing efforts against gentrification?
14. Is there anything else you want to tell me about this issue?
15. Is there anyone else it would be useful to talk to?