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ABSTRACT

Some historice aspects of Chinese settlement in the San Francisco Bay area are examined in this document and the impact of inner city development on ethnic neighborhoods, particularly in Oakland's Chinatown is discussed. Some developmental side effects are noted, as well as the benefits of ethnic concentration when the latter is the result of choice. Also presented is the challenge of providing neighborhoods with a stronger voice in land-use decisions and insuring that the community leaders who wield political influence actually defend the interests of residents they claim to serve. Finally, it is suggested that residents, public officials, and private investors take a new look at Chinatown. It is concluded that new legislation and innovative programs may not be needed and that the crucial element necessary to enhance the vitality of Chinatown is a clearer vision of its role in inner city revitalization. Since the decision of key actors such as lenders, landlords, realtors, appraisers, city planning staff, community leaders, and other combine to determine the market value, attractiveness, and livability of a neighborhood, the task of neighborhood preservation and rehabilitation involves the cooperation, persuasion, and sharing of a common vision of the future among these parties. (Author/AM)

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Reviving the Inner City: The Lessons of Oakland's Chinatown

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Introduction

Misconceptions about the role and value of ethnic communities continue to blur attempts to understand the American city's past and cloud perspectives on its future. Such misconceptions can thwart efforts to cure the ills of the central city, regardless of the nobility of intentions or the size of expenditures.[1] This paper examines some of the major confusions and offers an alternative way of viewing a central city like Oakland, California, by evaluating the significance of Oakland's Chinese quarter, one of the city's oldest areas of ethnic settlement.

Sequestered in the heart of Oakland for nearly a century, the 40-block area generally known as Chinatown dramatizes the plight of many historic inner city communities that await re-awakened perceptions by residents, public officials and private investors. Both Cantonese and English are spoken in the quarter, and about half the area's population is Chinese. Other residents are white, Black and Filipino, predominantly single males.

Sidewalk delicacies, exotic scents, ornate gates, and venerable buildings clustered in a few blocks in the western half of the quarter give the area a flavor distinct from that of the surrounding townscape. The Victorian style of some of the area's dwellings dates back to the days of Jack London, when the Madison Square (eastern) half of the district was an elegant neighborhood.

During the past decade, the city's ambitious revitalization efforts have begun to disturb the quarter's equilibrium. New high rise offices, part of Oakland's City Center Project, have emerged at its northwest corner. Warehouses and factories still dominate to the south, where railroad, freeway, and waterfront facilities converge. Along the eastern edge of Chinatown is Laney College, built during the late 1960's on what was previously an industrial site, and designed by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill in a style reminiscent of a medieval walled city. Oakland's Civic Center, an expanding complex of offices and public institutions, stands on the northeastern fringe of the Chinese quarter. In the northwest corner is the four-block portion designated as the redevelopment area.

To the Chinese in Oakland, Chinatown is more than geometric space, real estate or a decorative landmark. Like other places, it is also a "construct of experience... sustained not only by timber, concrete, and highways, but also by the quality of human awareness."[2] To those Chinese who have had no other home for much of their lives, Chinatown has served as both a refuge and a stepping stone. The Chinese junk on which children play at Lincoln Playground symbolizes the heritage and hopes of four generations of Chinese-Americans.

Rents are lower in Chinatown than elsewhere in the city, and mothers with young children can work in the nearby sewing factories that became numerous after 1965, when many working class immigrant families settled in Oakland. Help for newcomers and older residents is available from churches and social agencies like the Chinese Community Council, the Chinese Community Center, Asian Health Services, East Bay Asians for Community Action, and Lincoln School. For those residents particularly, Chinatown is not simply a place to eat, sleep and work; it is also their principal "connection" with the job market, the public bureaucracy, and the political arena. A place to turn to in time of need, Chinatown continues to offer its residents assistance within the complex urban systems of Oakland and Alameda County.

Ethnic Neighborhoods: Ambiguities and Choices

Much of Chinatown's timeworn exterior is plainly visible, but the causes of its blight, like those of many ethnic districts, are less apparent. The physical condition of ethnic neighborhoods hinges on the expectations and decisions of lenders, property owners, and public officials as well as residents. The location of transit facilities and other public services, zoning and code enforcement, and the presence or absence of local capital improvements have all affected the well-being of inner city neighborhoods. Significantly, many urban conflicts have centered on the issue of who is to control the development of inner city residential communities.[3] The depressing effects of past discrimination in housing, including the use of

racially restrictive covenants, have continued to be reinforced by the practice of "redlining," whereby the flow of private financing into certain neighborhoods has been blocked or diverted.

As confinement to ghettos came to be recognized as a social evil, the alternative of ethnic dispersal and residential integration were generally accepted as desirable goals. But the benefits of dispersal included certain ambiguities, since social well-being could not be defined exclusively in terms of space.[4] It became clear that the quality of life also depends on a complex of expectations and aspirations[5] that might or might not be best served by dispersal, and that accordingly some people might not choose dispersal.

Since freedom of choice in housing can be assured only when ethnic groups have a wide range of alternatives, it follows that if members of ethnic communities are to be able to live where they wish, they must have access to housing both within the inner city and outside it. Yet residential opportunities in Oakland's Chinatown have been increasingly restricted during the past two decades. Publicly funded projects, such as the Nimitz Freeway and the Bay Area Rapid Transit District, have reduced the housing stock. It has become more difficult for Chinese newcomers to find a home in Chinatown and for long-time residents to remain there, despite the efforts of the Oakland Redevelopment Agency to build new low and moderate rent housing at the northwestern corner of the quarter in the four-block redevelopment area.

The following discussion examines some historic aspects of Chinese settlement in the San Francisco Bay Area and discusses the impact of inner city development on ethnic neighborhoods, particularly in Oakland's Chinatown. Some developmental side effects are noted, as well as the benefits of ethnic concentration when it is the result of choice. Also presented is the challenge of providing neighborhoods with a stronger voice in land use decisions and insuring that the community leaders who wield political influence actually defend the interests of the residents they claim to serve.[6] Finally, it is suggested that residents, public officials, and private investors should take a new look at Chinatown. Thus it is not so much new legislation but rather better understanding that can save Oakland's Chinatown and other ethnic neighborhoods.

The writer holds these views: (1) the preservation and rehabilitation of stable inner city neighborhoods is a desirable goal; (2) stable communities with responsive institutions, neighborhood ties, and a sense of common destiny, like Oakland's Chinatown, take years to build and much effort to sustain; (3) the dynamic equilibrium these communities have struggled to achieve can be upset by the changing expectations and collective actions of private investors and public officials; but (4) such actions and decisions often go unchallenged because no single planning agency is willing or able to accept overall responsibility for the cumulative impact of development.

Chinese Settlement in the Bay Area: Some Comparisons

For most Chinese living in American cities, ethnic institutions and subcultural ties to Chinatown have persisted despite a growing emphasis on civil rights and occupational mobility. The experience of the Chinese may well apply to other more recent immigrant groups, such as the Chicanos, Puerto Ricans, and Filipinos, who also tend to cluster in certain districts.[7] For newly arrived Vietnamese sponsored by American families, however, community bonds will be more difficult to sustain.

Chinese enclaves developed as immigrants came to the United States during the last half of the 19th Century. Ousted from most of the rural West by racial harassment and violence during the 1870's and 1880's, thousands of Chinese miners, construction laborers, farm workers, fishermen, and factory workers sought refuge in San Francisco, where clan, district, and community organizations had become exceptionally powerful.

The extraordinary resilience of San Francisco's Chinatown stems from the strength of institutions forged during a period of intense racism and discrimination. Restrictive housing practices favored landlords, while discriminatory hiring gave employers the advantage. Poor Chinese immigrants were exploited by unscrupulous Chinese as well as non-Chinese landlords and employers. Responding to external pressures and pressing social needs, San Francisco's Chinatown became the strongest and largest Chinese community in the United States.

In contrast to San Francisco's Chinatown, most typical Chinese communities in the United States functioned simply as housing, employment, and social centers for Chinese laundrymen, peddlers, laborers, and shopkeepers. Chinese communities like Oakland's provided less security against racial violence than did San Francisco's, but life there appeared to be less congested and less competitive, and allowed residents a measure of freedom from the norms, obligations, and economic constraints that had become entrenched in San Francisco's merchant-dominated quarter.

City ordinances restricting (Chinese) steam laundries from certain sections of downtown Oakland and banning (Chinese) peddlers from the streets were passed in 1880 and 1891, to protect the interests of local businessmen. This pattern of restricted occupancy was common to most Chinatown communities in the American West. Modesto's 1885 ordinance prohibiting (Chinese) steam laundries from residential areas has been cited as the first example of zoning in the United States.[8]

In San Francisco the Chinese quarter flourished in a relatively desirable part of the city. But squeezed between the city's burgeoning financial, hotel, high class retail, and Italian districts, it also won the dubious distinction of having the city's highest population density and tuberculosis rate. Repeated attempts to dislodge San Francisco's Chinatown have proven unsuccessful. The most striking attempt occurred after the 1906 earthquake, with efforts to relocate the Chinese at Hunters Point. Other Chinatowns, less well organized and thus less powerful, have not fared nearly as well.[9]

Oakland's loosely knit Chinese community, for example, was far more vulnerable to competing land uses than San Francisco's, which was fortified by its interlocking institutions and large population. Although the Chinese began to settle in Oakland by the 1860's, they were periodically displaced until 1880, when Chinatown's present site was finally established. Chinatown in Oakland, as in many other American cities, was confined to the light industrial and wholesale district. Racial segregation was widely practiced, and the presence of the

Chinese quarter was tolerated as long as it was located in an area that others considered undesirable for residence.

Oakland: The Reemergence of an Inner City

The Chinese in Oakland became concentrated in an area that was neglected by capital improvement programs, overlooked by code enforcement practices, and zoned primarily for commerce and industry until the early 1960's. The community did not develop into an attractive residential district, but it managed to survive and community spirit remained strong. Churches, clans, and fraternal associations responded to the needs of residents. Racial discrimination in hiring continued to hinder Chinese social mobility until World War II, but the community remained responsive and cohesive.

During World War II, however, Oakland's inner city entered a new era. The influx of many Black workers, recruited primarily from the South, raised the demand for low and moderate rent housing. Most were channeled into "unrestricted" areas of the city near the central business district, where the overcrowding and undermaintenance of older housing led to deterioration during the 1950's. Despite such decay in other parts of Oakland's inner city, Chinatown's housing remained in relatively sound condition. Of the 246 Chinatown parcels appraised in 1953, only one was considered to be in "poor" condition. About 12 percent were rated "fair," 70 percent "average," and 17 percent "good," with two properties classified as in "excellent" condition.

By no means blighted, the Chinese quarter was not initially slated for urban renewal. Official attitudes began to shift by the mid-1960ls, reflecting growing concern by Chinese businessmen and property owners about the future of the residential district. The "Oakland Chinatown Redevelopment Project," a preliminary plan prepared by consultants and financed mainly by Chinese businessmen, launched the quest for redevelopment in 1965, when community leaders presented it to the city council.

Racially restrictive housing covenants had been ruled unenforceable in 1948, but it was only after passage of California's Rumford Act in 1963 that racial discrimination in housing was outlawed, and fair housing policies began to change residential patterns in Oakland. Ironically, new problems were created as minorities moved to more attractive homes in newly opened neighborhoods. Opportunities for minorities were also increased as new housing in the suburbs helped to accelerate the filtering process.

Property values in the inner city sagged as the supply of housing available to minorities expanded. Furthermore, suburban growth in the East Bay promoted the development of regional shopping centers that cut into retail sales in the central business district of Oakland, as in most central cities. Beset by lower property values and lower sales, many central cities looked to the federal government for help. Like most cities, Oakland embrated slum clearance and transit programs as instruments of civic progress and central business district revitalization. Urban renewal in Oakland, however, was smaller in scale than in most American cities. Aimed at West Oakland, the most deteriorated section of town, urban renewal left Chinatown unscathed.

The Challenge of Inner City Development

Nationwide efforts to redeem the central city began with the Housing Act of 1949, but the problem was not addressed systematically until the early 1960's, when community organizers and academic critics focused attention on the fact that slum clearance had destroyed low-cost housing while ignoring important human values. Community action and comprehensive planning programs were established in order to involve the poor in the redevelopment process. Such changes heightened the expectations of the poor and helped strengthen their voices in discussions with federal agencies, but they did not significantly alter the balance of power in most American cities. Resistance by the poor to the transformation of the inner city mounted during the 1960's, as thousands of low income residents in Oakland were displaced by freeway and mass transit projects.[10]

Oakland's Chinatown exemplifies an historic district that is being displaced in the name of inner city revitalization. The Bay Area Rapid Transit District facilities and the Oakland Museum, while not classified as redevelopment projects, were financially connected with the Laney College redevelopment project. Since both BART and the Museum were supposed to be beneficial to the redevelopment project, part of their costs were credited to Oakland's share of the project's net expenses. The direct impact of these three public investments has been to reduce the housing stock. The indirect effect will depend upon the kinds of changes that follow on nearby property.

Of the city's 12,000 Chinese residents, fewer than 2,000 now live in the quarter. The majority of Chinese in Oakland are foreign-born, whereas most of the Chinese in the East Bay suburbs were born in the United States. Recent immigrants, including many who came to join relatives in Oakland after a partial relaxation of immigration restrictions in 1962, have had little choice but to disperse into East Oakland. Thus even though the city's Chinese population doubled from 1960 to 1970, the Chinese population of the quarter itself declined slightly in the same period.

Consistent efforts by the Oakland Redevelopment Agency to secure redevelopment assistance in low-cost housing from HUD (U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) finally bore fruit in July 1972, after four previous applications had been rejected. Those displaced by ambitious public projects found the promise of more low cost housing through redevelopment unfulfilled in many communities across the country. Widespread complaints about the inefficiency and inflexibility of numerous categorical federal programs heightened the struggle for reform.

Under the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974, bloc grants replaced categorical federal programs such as urban renewal, model cities, code enforcement assistance, open space, water and sewer facilities. Although more flexible than the previous categorical approach, the bloc grants unleashed a new wave of legal, administrative, and political uncertainties. Inner city communities, caught in a grueling struggle for inadequate federal grants, will almost certainly suffer. Conflicts have heightened as more players, representing

newly eligible, marginal or moderate income neighborhoods and new private investors, have joined the competition.[11]

Pressures on Oakland's Chinatown

Although new high-rise condominium-apartments have been privately built on Chinatown's western front, and more are planned for the four-block Chinatown Neighborhood Development Project, the situation on the eastern flank is more precarious. Construction of mass transit facilities, BART headquarters, and the Lake Merritt Station has begun to generate changes in the Madison Square section of Chinatown. These indirect effects will have lasting impact on much greater areas than the specific housing the facilities themselves have replaced.

Concern about underutilization of BART's Lake Merritt Station, for example, has prompted efforts to turn part of the section into a regional center for government agencies, even though funding is unlikely and the project appears to be about a decade away from realization. Lake Merritt-Coliseum Development Project (LMCDP), a prime mover behind these efforts, has nonetheless held community meetings to involve citizens in the planning and development process. The project was created in 1973 by the City of Oakland, the regional Metropolitan Transportation Commission, and BART. While LMCDP holds that new housing units (at rents similar to those of demolished units) should be built before any housing is torn down, the demolition of older housing in adjacent blocks may be an indirect consequence of development. New office buildings may trigger more demolition on adjacent properties than within the development area itself.

Bringing about change in a neighborhood requires new perceptions and expectations. But once these are widely accepted, the balance of confidence and risk that keeps neighborhoods in equilibrium can be easily disturbed. If an area is expected to change dramatically, property owners may be reluctant to maintain structures, and lenders may be hesitant to finance such investments. The mere prospect of conversion even without loss of existing housing in a development area, may be sufficient to transform the surrounding neighborhood, especially if most owners are investors and not residents. Earmarking certain blocks as being suitable for either development or rehabilitation by an official planning agency, such as LMCDP, may become a self-fulfilling prophecy, unless the evaluation is effectively challenged.

Assigning the credit or blame for the indirect impact of publicly funded planning and development activities is difficult, particularly since agencies are naturally eager to take responsibility for the "good" changes but not the "bad" ones. Assessing the indirect import of such activities depends on judgments as to what would have happened in the market without public intervention. The public and private sectors are, however, integrally related, as are the planning and development activities of local, regional and federal agencies. As suggested before, no single agency is willing or able to take responsibility for the cumulative impact of inner city development.

How Much Community Control?

It may be difficult for Oakland's Chinatown to sustain organized opposition to further development of the Madison Square section; many Chinese would prefer development and an appreciation of land values. Conflict has erupted over selection of the Project Area Committee (PAC), which was appointed and funded by the Redevelopment Agency to advise it concerning redevelopment within the four-block area. Although PAC lost its funds when the agency's funding ended, the committee is still in operation. Even if a community consensus could be reached, however, it is doubtful that residents in neighborhoods like Chinatown would wield much power. Community involvement requires time, patience, commitment, and the ability to communicate well (in both English and Cantonese). Power in Chinatown has traditionally been concentrated in the hands of community "elders." But their leadership has been questioned recently by those who would like to retain the quarter's stock of low cost housing.

The fate of Chinatown and other inner city communities in Oakland may be contingent upon whether federal community development bloc grants ($62 million over six years) will be used to preserve neighborhoods or to stimulate change. Although Chinatown redevelopment is supposed to receive a large portion of bloc funds, apparently little will be used to rehabilitate the quarter's older housing.

Neighborhood control over the way these funds are to be spent is a major issue in Oakland. The city council, for example, has insisted that its seven designated community development district boards be staffed with experienced Oakland Redevelopment Agency personnel. Community groups, supported by the Oakland Citizens' Committee for Urban Renewal, argue that district board staff would remain loyal to the city council in the event of conflict between the neighborhoods and the city. For all participants, the issue is not simply a matter of how much money is spent in each district; it is also a matter of what kinds of changes will be induced.

The future of Oakland's Chinatown as a residential community for the city's disadvantaged Chinese population is now uncertain. The overriding questions are: (1) to what extent will residents be able to exercise control over development? and (2) who should represent the Chinese community? As we have seen, the decision on whether or not Chinatown will be whittled away may soon be made. Meanwhile conflicts within the community undermine its solidarity. If Chinatown is to survive, its wide variety of community organizations must join in stating common needs and strengthening the physical as well as social identity of the quarter.

Chinatown Housing and Neighborhood Preservation

The need for more housing is widely accepted, but controversies continue over where housing investments ought to be located, and what kind of housing should be made available. New single-family and condominium housing in the suburbs have been in great demand, and have thus been relatively profitable for builders and lenders. Moreover, higher rates of residential mobility

that follow new construction mean increased commissions on sales.

In contrast, the alternative of "slow growth" in the suburbs and rehabilitation of the inner city involves a narrower and riskier market. It appears that the option of rehabilitation would encourage residential stability, resulting in less turnover of property, and thus lower sales activity in the real estate market. Proponents of slow growth in the suburbs have been branded elitists, racists, or preservationists. Moreover, advocates of inner city rehabilitation have been accused of "ghetto gilding" and encouraging inefficiency. Nevertheless, both strategies could produce a steady expansion in housing stock, with a minimum of demolition and dislocation.

Providing inexpensive housing in Oakland's Chinatown is essential for neighborhood preservation. The destruction of low rent housing in the quarter has multiplied problems for both young and old, and has also created a dilemma for officials responsible for meeting residents' needs within budgetary constraints. Many elderly Chinese learned to rely on the quarter during periods of blatant racism, and still need many of Chinatown's services. They must now travel long distances for the information, health care, bilingual assistance, and social companionship available in Chinatown. Those in Chinatown with limited mobility would be particularly unfortunate if displaced into East Oakland, where most of the Chinese are now dispersed.

For Chinese immigrant families, perhaps the most acute problem is in the schools, where youngsters often have difficulty with the English language. Special educational programs and bilingual assistance have usually been available in Chinatown, but such programs are often lacking in East Oakland schools, where the Chinese constitute a much smaller portion of the total enrollment in each school. Further dispersal would make such special assistance more difficult to provide and expensive to support than in schools with greater concentrations of Chinese students, although it could be done through busing and other devices.

Thus revitalization and relocation in outlying areas have made special education programs more difficult for both school officials and minority students who need help. The problems of Chinese youngsters in school do not stem from lack of motivation, but rather from lack of institutional awareness of their needs and responsiveness to them. The United States Supreme Court, ruling that San Francisco's public schools must give instruction to minority students in the language that they use, has recognized the necessity for special bilingual education. How promptly, efficiently, and effectively can this be accomplished in the face of increasing ethnic dispersal?

Stable neighborhood communities provide much more than housing. They perform services that benefit the city as a whole. Thus for nearly a century Chinatown has offered information, training, welfare assistance, direction, and hope for the unemployed. Buffeted by regional adjustments and technological shifts, the unemployed and underemployed must often be retrained, re-qualified, and made aware of opportunities before they can be absorbed or reabsorbed into the mainstream of the economy. Minorities, for example, usually need help in overcoming union employment restrictions. Thus employment programs for ethnic minorities have been much more effective where bilingual staff is available and activities can be adapted to particular needs. Erosion of the inner city base that supports such a mobile labor force has consequences extending far beyond the boundaries of Chinatown itself.

A Reappraisal of Costs and Benefits

Advocates of publicly funded inner city development cite the expected benefits of increased tax revenues and receipt of federal or state subsidies. Project costs that spill over or affect areas beyond the designated development, as suggested earlier, may escape careful examination. The costs of disrupting stable communities, although difficult to calculate, will nevertheless be paid in the increased expenses of various public agencies or in the intangible human losses associated with dislocation, isolation, and loneliness.

Examples of such costs may be found in Oakland. Although property values in the inner city have risen, public outlays have also escalated. The increases have not been due to an upsurge in social programs for the city's disadvantaged, but instead reflect higher costs of police and fire protection.[12] Increased demand for these services may be stimulated in part by loss of stability in Oakland's now scattered low-income districts, where neighborhood ties and communal aspirations have weakened during the past decade.

Moreover, even the benefits of development may fall short of expectations. It was hoped that federal subsidies would lure new private investors into Oakland, but so far the results have not been encouraging. Unless functional problems can be resolved, it is doubtful that ambitious plans for reviving the central business district will succeed. Stable working class communities may play a more significant role in maintaining retail activity than has been generally realized.

Making Oakland More Attractive

In terms of convenient access and parking, suburban regional shopping centers are more attractive for most retail needs than Oakland's downtown shops and department stores. In terms of limited appeal (specialty) retailing, San Francisco and Berkeley have much wider selections of goods and services and more distinctive surroundings. Downtown Oakland serves mainly local residents and its own employees. Even with BART and linkage with the Grove-Shafter freeway, its market is not likely to expand dramatically, at least as presently envisioned. If Oakland is to compete, it must achieve some sort of functional distinction.

Oakland presently lacks the pageantry, local color, variety, and identity that make San Francisco such an exciting attraction for visitors and shoppers. Oakland's city fathers have favored the development of Chinese shops and restaurants in order to bolster the city's nighttime activities. But in the writer's view they have shown little enthusiasm for preserving and strengthening the Chinese community by rehabilitating its older housing. Such a policy could foster the residence of stable working-class and middle-class families, whose presence in turn could help make the inner city a much more active and interesting place, probably a good deal

safer after dark, and surely a lot less sterile than unrelieved offices or condominium apartments. Shoppers and visitors might be much more attracted to a Chinatown with kids and their grandparents on the streets than one dominated by office buildings with no social character or special activities other than housing a daytime workforce that leaves for the suburbs when the workday is over.

It is becoming clear that intensive, narrowly focused commercial development can have dehumanizing consequences. San Francisco's Dianne Feinstein and George Moscone, for example, have observed the monumental scale of much building in San Francisco and noted that the structures impose social costs on the city residents.[13] High-rise office buildings alone lack the socializing warmth provided by small shops, businesses, eating places, and other establishments that cater to the needs of neighborhood residents as well as people who work downtown.

With respect to Oakland's inner city, planners have recognized the advantages of mixed commercial and residential development for a safe, attractive, and lively community. But what kind of housing should be encouraged? Exclusive focus on new apartment complexes and high-rise condominiums will foster a typically self-contained pattern of activities, marked by electronic gates and sophisticated security systems. In contrast, the rehabilitation of old housing can instill or strengthen a sense of community pride and cooperation among residents, especially in working class neighborhoods.[14] In the writer's view, the benefits of rehabilitation are more likely to spill over than those of brand-new apartment-condominiums. The "balanced approach," combining rehabilitation of old housing and building anew as advocated by many planners in Oakland, is sound provided that it applies to the entire quarter and not just those blocks within the boundaries of the redevelopment project.

Conclusion

Efforts to increase the availability of low cost housing in the inner city are already under way in many cities, and promising neighborhood preservation programs, like Neighborhood Housing Services, have already started.[15] Private attempts to convert obsolete industrial and commercial areas into new luxury apartment housing in Oakland — such as Portobello — have been remarkably effective, despite the difficulties involved. These developments suggest that radical reform may not be necessary, if public support and private capital can be drawn back into the rehabilitation of inner city housing and the construction of new housing on obsolete industrial and commercial property. If this is to occur, the practices of lending institutions and the policies of government agencies will have to be retooled to recognize the functional value of inner city communities like Oakland's Chinatown.

As we have seen, the decisions of key actors — lenders, landlords, realtors, appraisers, city planning staff and commissioners, elected local representatives, state and federal officials, and community leaders — combine to determine the market value, attractiveness, and livability of the neighborhood. Fresh paint, home repairs, and minor renovations may be within the grasp of Chinatown residents. But the final risks and payoffs of such investments are usually determined in the financial and real estate market, not at home by members of the resident household. Just as both neighborhood decline and preservation result from a series of decisions, so the task of neighborhood preservation and rehabilitation involves cooperation, persuasion, and sharing a common vision of the future among lenders, public officials, property owners, and residents.

In short, new legislation and innovative programs may not be needed; they are already available. The crucial element necessary to enhance the vitality of Chinatown is a clearer vision of its role in inner city revitalization. If residents can exert meaningful influence over the development of their own neighborhoods, then they may begin to see the familiar streets and buildings as a means of realizing communal aspirations, rather than as monuments to social injustice. If public officials recognize the value of stable working class communities like Oakland's Chinatown, then they may regard neighborhood preservation as a way to reduce social costs, rather than as roadblocks to the expansion of municipal revenues. If lenders understand that the risks of financing inner city housing can be reduced through the organized efforts of concerned residents, local officials, and their own staff, then they too may cooperate.

Thus the preservation of inner city neighborhoods can serve their own residents and also help to save the city as a whole. The viability of working class ethnic communities, whether in Chinatown or elsewhere, may encourage middle class residents to stay in a city whose districts and streets are occupied by people who are proud to be there. Preserving these communities may keep the human spirit alive in the heart of the American city.

NOTES

This paper is based on Willard T. Chow's unpublished Ph.D. dissertation. "The Re-emergence of an Inner City: The Pivot of Chinese Settlement in the East Bay Region of the San Francisco Bay Area," Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, 1974.

[1]See Michael A. Goldberg and Michael Y. Seelig, "Canadian Cities. The Right Deed for the Wrong Reason." *Planning. the aspo Magazine*, 41(3):8-13 (March-April 1975).

[2]Yi-Fu Tuan, "Place: An Experiential Perspective," *Geographical Review*, 65(2):151-165 (April 1975). See p. 165.

[3]I am indebted to Allan Jacobs, Professor of City Planning, U.C.B., for this point.

[4]David M. Smith, *The Geography of Social Well-Being in the United States* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973) pp. 139-141.

[5]See Eleanor Bernert Sheldon and Robert Parke, "Social Indicators," *Science*, 188(4189):693-699 (May 16, 1975). See p. 697.

[6]See three monographs on this topic:

(a) Julian Wolpert, Anthony Mumphray and John Seley, *Metropolitan Neighborhoods: Participation and Conflict Over Change* (Washington, D.C.: Association of American Geographers, Resource Paper No. 16, 1972).

(b) Roger Kasperson and Myrna Breitbart, *Participation, Decentralization, and Advocacy Planning* (Washington, D.C.. Association of American Geographers, Resource Paper No. 25, 1974).

(c) Michael P. Brooks, *Social Planning and City Planning* (American Society of Planning Officials, Planning Advisory Service Report No. 261, September 1970).

[7]See Andrew Greeley, "In the Neighborhood," *Human Behavior*, 4(6):40-45 (June 1975).

[8]Mel Scott, *American City Planning Since 1890* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), p. 75.

[9]See Rose Hum Lee, "The Decline of Chinatowns in the U.S.," *American Journal of Sociology*, 54(5):422-432 (March 1949). See also Calvin Lee, *Chinatown, U.S.A.* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965).

[10]See Judith May, "Struggle for Authority: A Comparison of Four Social Change Programs in Oakland, California," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, University of California, Berkeley, 1973. See also Edward C. Hayes, *Power Structure and Urban Policy. Who Rules in Oakland?* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1972).

[11]Anthony Downs in a speech at the HUD/RERC (Real Estate Research Corp.) Urban Renewal and Neighborhood Preservation Workshop in San Francisco (June 26, 1975).

[12]See a series of articles by Bill Martin in the Oakland *Tribune* (May 12-15, 1974), which begin with "Oakland is on the Brink of Bankruptcy," May 12, 1974, p. 1.

[13]Speeches at the annual conference of the San Francisco Planning and Urban Renewal Association, March 19, 1975; see the San Francisco *Chronicle*, March 20, 1975, p. 6.

[14]For statements on the importance of working class neighborhoods see: Suzanne Keller, *The Urban Neighborhood: A Sociological Perspective* (New York: Random House, 1968); and Annette Buttimer, "Sociology and Planning," *Town Planning Review*, 42(2):145-180 (April 1971). See especially pp. 154-168.

[15]*Neighborhood Preservation: A Catalog of Local Programs* (Washington, D.C.: February 1975). Prepared for the Office of Policy Development and Research, Department of Housing and Urban Development, by [the] Real Estate Research Corporation, with the assistance of [the] Center for Urban Policy Research, Rutgers University.

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While reading recent issues of the *Public Affairs Report*, have you thought of questions, suggestions, criticisms or comments that you might like to consider sending in to the editors? Do you have any observations about the choice of topics, or their treatment in the pages of the *Report*? Do you have advice or suggestions regarding future issues?

Letters from readers and requests for copies arrive regularly, but by including this note, we hope to open a "readers' window" that will give us a better sample of what subscribers think about the *Public Affairs Report*, and what directions it might take.

Your comments may also provide substantive observations that could be acknowledged or excerpted in future issues.

—The Editors

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