

Introduction

THE MOST SIGNIFICANT political, economic, and spatial transformation in the postwar United States was the overdevelopment of suburbs and the underdevelopment of cities. As ostensible signifiers of this transformation, “white flight” and “urban decline” mask volatile and protracted social and political struggles over land, taxes, jobs, and public policy in the thirty years between 1945 and the late 1970s. Such struggles dominated postwar Oakland, California, and its nearby suburbs, ultimately giving rise to two of the nation’s most controversial political ideologies: a black power politics of community defense and empowerment and a neopopulist conservative homeowner politics among whites. In 1945 boosters in Oakland envisioned their metropolis in the tradition of California urbanism as a verdant, interconnected garden that combined suburban growth and urban vitality. Thirty years later the Black Panther Party and other African American activists viewed Oakland as an exploited colony that was controlled from the suburban perimeter. The postwar garden had become, in their view, an “urban plantation.” At the same time, suburban homeowners worked to monopolize and segregate the assets of postwar prosperity, efforts that culminated in 1978’s Proposition 13, the nation’s first and most influential tax limitation measure. As the home of both the Black Panther Party and the tax revolt, California’s story is postwar America’s story—black and white, urban and suburban, rebellion and backlash—narratives that are inextricably linked and demand to be told as one.¹

Histories of the postwar United States typically tell separate stories. Civil rights was the great freedom movement. Suburbanization was driven by affluence and “white flight.” Urban history was characterized by deindustrialization and ghetto formation. These stories stand side by side, but we are left with a surprisingly impoverished analytical language for thinking of them relationally. To consider them in relation is not just to recover their deep connections but to rethink the stories themselves. Civil rights in places like Oakland was a vibrant and dynamic dimension of postwar metropolitanization that cannot be reduced to an epilogue of the southern movement. Furthermore, the tropes of crisis, ghetto formation, and black violence that have guided postwar urban historiography can lead us to overlook the essential fact that African Americans as a whole constituted the group in national life most deeply engaged in challenging urban decline and imagining remedies to the urban crisis. Black communities nationwide were not merely the victims of the “second ghetto.” They articulated and pushed for political and economic alternatives. For their part, suburban

whites did not merely or only “flee” the city. They were drawn into suburban city building by material and ideological incentives. The metaphor of flight, though accurate in many respects, shifts focus away from the complicated political production of suburban communities in place. Furthermore, it fails to capture the essential political-economic issue in suburban development: taxation and its relationship to the provisioning of a welfare state and the distribution of social costs. Telling urban and suburban histories together moves us beyond generalizations like “white flight” and “black power” to the specific context in which each was embedded. Telling them together demonstrates the centrality of metropolitan history to postwar American history.²

The politics that produced segregation and the politics that fought it are the story of this book. In Oakland and the East Bay, as the tax revolt and black power evolved together, in tension, they faced off over how the region’s assets and prosperity would be distributed. Suburban city building drew homeowners, almost exclusively white and Anglo, into political battles to shape their new communities. In conflicts over land, taxes, and housing, a combination of federal policy, homeowner self-interest, and the real estate industry’s profit-driven embrace of racial exclusivity encouraged suburban residents to take narrow views of their social responsibility. When black Oaklanders undertook the postwar struggle for racial equality, they challenged the inequities of this suburban city building and accompanying signs of urban underdevelopment: residential segregation, job discrimination, urban renewal, and deindustrialization. Over time, those challenges grew increasingly urgent and militant, precipitating among many East Bay African Americans a break with liberal assumptions and strategies in favor of community empowerment. African American–led political movements thus interpenetrated with a suburban politics focused on homeownership, taxes, and a retreat from connections to a larger social collective. These critical postwar developments were not abstractions of national politics. They were grounded in urban space, in the particular metropolitan distribution of wealth, opportunity, and resources of the second half of the twentieth century.³

In these local contexts, the struggle for the postwar city began with the challenges facing working-class movements in the 1940s and ended with the challenges facing black-led political movements in the 1970s. Thirty years apart, organized labor and African American activists stood at center stage in setting an urban reform agenda for their generation. In the 1940s Oakland labor’s political leaders called for a social democratic city, with union wages, inexpensive health care, affordable housing with low taxes, and public transportation available for all. Their program made mention of civil rights, but African Americans were implicitly junior partners, and there was little critique of white privilege. Thirty years

later African American radicals and reformers, first in contest, then in alliance, called for a remarkably similar social democratic city with renewed demands for racial equality. But much had changed since the 1940s, and once in positions of authority black leaders faced a new set of problems: entrenched poverty, deindustrialization, a weak urban tax base and a strong suburban one, and all of the social consequences of four decades of segregated development. They had to contend with the failure of the postwar political economy of growth liberalism to deliver either social mobility or economic security to black Americans as a whole.⁴

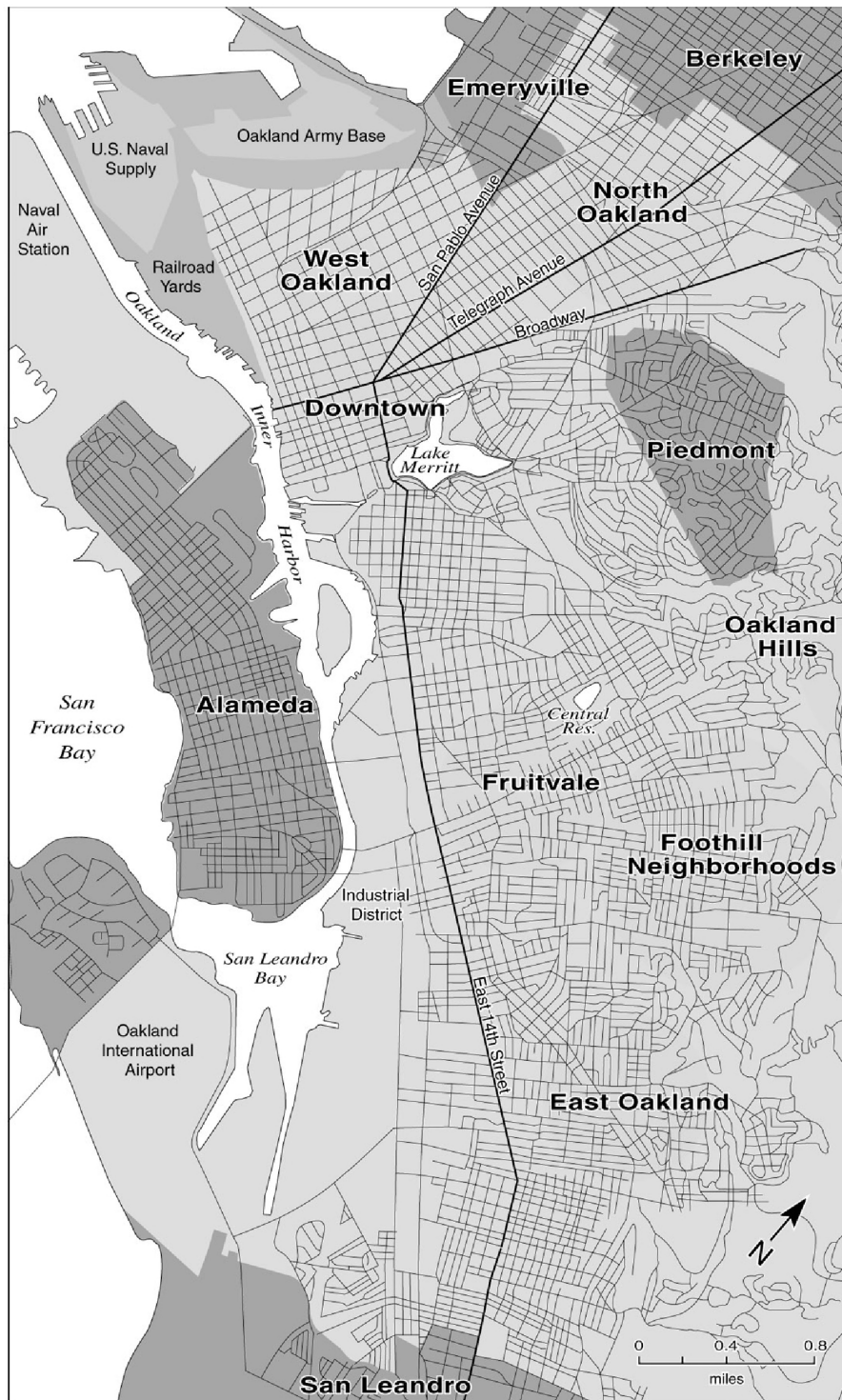
Even as cities and suburbs became battlegrounds over racial segregation and economic power in local places like the East Bay in these years, metropolitan spatial development and the national state shaped one another. “We are not engaged in a local or provincial issue,” Oakland NAACP President Clinton White explained. After World War II the federal government moved aggressively to define urban and suburban forms, a remarkable turnaround from the minimalist state urban policy of the first half of the century. An enormous array of federal programs, agencies, subsidies, and incentives now played as important a role in metropolitan development as private corporations and municipal governments. Local politics in places like Oakland and the East Bay thus ultimately became contests over the nature and expression of the American welfare state, in both New Deal and Great Society variants. Across the postwar United States, as cities were remade by two of the most extensive internal migrations in the nation’s history—the migration of southern African Americans to the cities of the Northeast, Midwest, and West and the mass suburbanization of whites—the federal government did not stand idly by. It gave contour and direction to these migrations. Its housing policies helped to develop some places and underdevelop others. Programs like urban renewal subsidized the accumulation of wealth and other resources among some groups—primarily white property holders—and denied those subsidies and protections to other groups—primarily African Americans. Further, in the remapping of postwar American capitalism, the commerce and manufacturing that drove consumption grew increasingly mobile, while the nation as a whole gradually shifted toward a service economy. In this process, too, the federal state exerted a heavier hand than at any other time in the nation’s history.⁵

The focus of this book thus moves from contests over how to distribute the benefits of postwar economic growth and metropolitan expansion in the 1940s to contests over how to distribute the costs of the same in the 1970s. It involves more than a transition from an era of possibility to an era of limits, however. Oakland and the East Bay embodied what was at stake in California politics between the end of World War II and the late 1970s: the distribution of the assets and debts of postwar affluence,

the triumph of growth liberalism and the vast inequalities it created and left unresolved, the possibilities of a welfare state and the retrenchment of the tax revolt. Places like Oakland gave the nation a new politics after World War II. But in the end, power in the postwar metropolis was not evenly distributed. The tax revolt placed debilitating limits on struggling cities like Oakland at the exact historical moment when African Americans achieved their greatest political successes.

Oakland is a horizontal city where the single family home dominates the landscape. It slopes upward from the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay on former tidal flats across a gently ascending rise to a series of hills separating the city from neighboring interior valleys. By the 1920s real estate interests had carved the city into long, narrow strips that marked neighborhoods by income and elevation—flatlands, foothills, and hills—and embedded a class regime literally into the physical terrain (map 1.2). Stretching from the smoke-stack factories of the industrial bay shore inland toward the foothills, block after block of workers' cottages and California bungalows gave Oakland a distinctly proletarian feel at mid-century. In the flatland neighborhoods of West Oakland, the city's densest and oldest district, the lifeblood of community and politics was the railroad and the docks. Thousands of white railroad operators, firefighters, and craftspeople; black laborers, Pullman porters, redcaps, and dining car waiters; black and white teamsters, and longshore and warehouse workers had settled in West Oakland by the 1940s. Like many urban neighborhoods in midcentury America, West Oakland was a mixture of industry, commerce, and residence where factory employment was close at hand for both men and women. Neighborhood stores, barber shops, restaurants, taverns, laundries, and other businesses provided hundreds of additional jobs and needed local services. With its industrial, commercial, and residential districts close and abutting, West Oakland was, in the words of one resident, a "city within a city."

In the workplaces and communities of midcentury West Oakland, African American residents forged a distinct laborite culture that blended class politics with civil rights. Based in the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and other black railroad unions, as well as the left wing of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) on the docks and the Marine Cooks and Stewards Union (MCSU) on the ships, this culture extended its influence broadly through the East Bay. It was by no means universal and never enjoyed the endorsement of the majority of whites. But it nonetheless flowered in the working-class districts of the Oakland flatlands—and north into Berkeley—nurturing through the dark days of Cold War anticommunism a social and political milieu in which antiracism and progressive ideas, debate, and struggle were the order of



Map 1.2. Oakland neighborhoods after World War II. West Oakland, Fruitvale, and East Oakland made up what was commonly called the “flatlands,” which extended north into Berkeley. The city of Piedmont, an elite, upper-class bedroom community, was entirely surrounded by Oakland. The incorporated cities of Alameda, Emeryville, and San Leandro are also featured. Cartography Lab, University of Wisconsin.

the day. In this milieu, Pullman porters joined with University of California law graduates in Democratic political clubs. African American women, many of them daughters of southern Jim Crow, engaged in an activist homeowner politics that subverted the prescriptions of postwar white domestic femininity. And calls for black economic rights and a broader welfare state for all California workers defined the political agenda. This culture extended its reach across time. Black longshoremen, veterans of the brutal class wars on the docks in the 1930s, articulated an internationalism that would, in the 1960s, influence Oaklanders Huey Newton and Bobby Seale as they founded the Black Panther Party. Black leaders from the railroad unions established political strategies in the 1940s that would guide a generation of activists in the late 1960s and early 1970s. From one decade to the next across the second half of the century, these neighborhoods were home to a rich range of laborite, community, civil rights, and eventually black liberation politics.⁶

West Oakland had predominantly crowded and worn turn-of-the-century housing. East Oakland, alternately, an expansive set of neighborhoods running the length of the southeastern two-thirds of the city, boasted tracts of newer California bungalows and ranch-style homes. As Oakland's industry spread along the flatlands here in the first half of the century, home-builders created suburblike neighborhoods within relatively easy distance of local factories. Chevrolet, General Motors, Willys-Overland, Fisher Body, Durant Motor Co., Faegol Motors, and the Star Motor Company made East Oakland the center of automobile production in Northern California by the 1930s. It was home as well to numerous machine shops, canneries, cotton-processing plants, tire and rubber companies, steel-casting plants, and light assembly shops. East Oakland also produced wood products, wire and cable, phonographs, office machines, and farm implements. Merchants followed this industrial expansion, taking advantage of the consumer market created by a burgeoning residential population located far from the downtown retail center. By the end of World War II, East Oakland stretched for seven miles southeast of downtown. Its neighborhoods, commercial strips, and factory districts looked and felt like the thriving garden metropolis imagined in Oakland's booster literature. "It's an amazing new West," an Oakland broadsheet declared in 1946, "and the Metropolitan Oakland Area, California is at its very heart!"⁷

In East Oakland, and other similar neighborhoods, another political tradition developed in the postwar years. Skilled workers joined with merchants and other small business interests, all largely white, in a diffuse populism that counterposed "the public" against big business and downtown property owners. Adherents of this midcentury populism were vehemently pro-union, resistant to high taxes, and wedded to the

ambition of suburban homeownership that the “amazing New West” promised. In the 1940s these politics embraced a commonsense notion of what constituted a “fair share” for “working people” on a range of economic matters from wages to taxes and leisure. These politics, which emerged at the same time in nearby suburban cities like San Leandro and Milpitas, led in multiple directions. In one of those directions lay an individualist conception of property rights that buttressed calls for low taxes throughout the postwar period and provided the ideological grounding for the emergence of the so-called tax revolt of the late 1970s. Oakland and the East Bay thus incubated two of California’s most important postwar political traditions: a broad liberal one that sought expansions of the social wage and racial equality; and an equally broad populist-conservative one that celebrated private rights and understood liberalism’s limits through property and homeownership. These two visions clashed at key moments in California’s postwar history. This book is about those clashes. It is also about the fierce contests within and challenges to these broad paradigmatic American political ideologies.⁸

Working-class Oakland lived and labored in the flatlands. In contrast, the city’s professional, middle, and upper classes resided in the hillside districts, or in the “foothills” along the edge of the flatlands. The hills featured sweeping views of the entire San Francisco Bay region, a status perch for the city’s professionals, bankers, and employers. “High above the turmoil of traffic and the hustle of business,” a 1930s promotional piece rhapsodized, “are homes tucked away among the tree-covered slopes.” Piedmont, a foothill city entirely surrounded by Oakland, was (and still is) a refuge of middle-class and elite withdrawal from the hum of the streets. Ten minutes by automobile from downtown, it nonetheless felt entirely removed from the din of industrial Oakland, nestled among eucalyptus trees along curving streets with verdant yards and gardens. Since the 1920s the city’s political class had resided here, including Oakland’s civic patriarchy, the Knowland family, owners of the *Oakland Tribune* and players in local and national politics. Beyond Piedmont, in the Oakland Hills proper, were smaller communities of professionals, wealthy merchants, and a few industrialists. In between the hills and flatlands lay a third ecology of residence, foothill neighborhoods of detached single-family homes draped over a terrain of alternately rising and falling slopes. A mish-mash of white-collar civil servants, merchants, professionals, and other skilled working-class people owned homes here. Overwhelmingly native born and Protestant, they attended the many churches nearby and shopped in the commercial district along MacArthur Boulevard, which runs the length of the city from downtown to far East Oakland.⁹

In the hill neighborhoods, too, ideological and material interests competed to shape people’s outlook. Piedmont was home not just to the city’s

elite bankers, lawyers, and property owners, but to a fiercely antistatist conservatism wedged in the far right of the state's Republican Party. In particular, Joseph R. Knowland and his son, William F. Knowland, battled progressives within the state Republican apparatus and worked to push the party to the right in the 1930s and 1940s. Dedicated enemies of organized labor, the welfare state, and radical politics of all varieties, the Knowlands helped to set the political tone for many of the city's other downtown property owners, their patrons and guardians, and those with a vested interest in downtown as a site of capital accumulation. At the same time, in other hillside neighborhoods, especially Montclair northwest of Piedmont, a strikingly different tradition had emerged by midcentury. Liberal professionals and civil servants from both the progressive wing of the Republican Party and the center of the Democratic Party pushed for some of the same reforms sought by organized labor: neighborhood improvements and a more open city government on the local level and a modest welfare state at the federal and California state level. Long frustrated with the conservative Republican cronies who ran Oakland, they were interested in opening channels of political opportunity for their class and, more broadly, in improving the lives of the city's residents through political alliances with organized labor. Over the postwar decades, both of these hillside political outlooks and the class interests they represented would factor enormously in the struggle for Oakland.

This book tells a story in three parts. Part I traces visions of the postwar city—those of urban trade unionists, African American leaders and activists, and first-generation suburbanites—and the contests to realize those visions. At the end of World War II, men and women in California's East Bay invested in the promise of a postwar industrial garden. The garden embodied the optimism of growth liberalism. Cities and suburbs alike were to bloom and prosper, with workers and their families lifted into the middle class by high wages, the easy accessibility of homeownership, and a new state activism at both federal and local levels. The postwar economy, centered on the single-family home and its consumption needs, would draw urban and suburban worlds into a productive, mutually beneficial relationship. More than a metaphor, the garden came to represent a concrete political and spatial formation: class harmony in pastoral cities where factories and homes existed in unobtrusive balance; homeowner democracy in both city and suburb, literally "*home rule*" in the words of one suburbanite; and an endless horizon of upward social mobility with a plentiful supply of good jobs and inexpensive new homes. African Americans and whites, workers and employers, urbanites and suburbanites, renters and homeowners agreed on the garden's allure but imagined the distribution of its costs and rewards differently. Those differences were the mainspring of politics.

The industrial garden metaphor guided urban development and planning after 1945, but it was no postwar invention. Its antecedents extended into nineteenth-century English urban social criticism and French Utopianism. In the first half of the twentieth century, the “garden city” movement emerged on both sides of the Atlantic in the writings of Ebenezer Howard and Lewis Mumford and in the practical demonstrations of places like Letchworth, England, and a host of American suburbs. An alternative to both city and country, garden cities were meant to occupy the mean between civilization’s opposites by combining factories, dwellings, commerce, greenbelts, and services into a single entity—“all the advantages of the most energetic and active town life, with all the beauty and delight of the country,” to borrow Howard’s formulation. Much of urban history has focused on the garden metaphor’s application to suburbs, but urban modernism, especially midcentury American versions, drew heavily on its formula as well. To date, however, histories of urban space and modernist city planning, on the one hand, and histories of politics and social struggle, on the other, have not been brought together; they remain strangely apart. Part of my contribution here is to suggest how joining them produces a richer history of both place and nation.¹⁰

Part II begins with Oakland planners, developers, and capitalists turning to the instruments and technologies of postwar urban design to remake their city. In the 1950s and 1960s they hoped to restore property values by redeveloping land, clearing slums, constructing highways and rapid transit, and mechanizing the port—a broad engineering of new urban forms. They sought to revive the city, and downtown in particular, as a site of capital accumulation. At the same time, African Americans sought a different sort of urban renaissance, one shaped by the goals of economic opportunity for the growing black community: jobs, development, and neighborhood investment. The two visions clashed, as the reengineering of Oakland, coupled with structural economic changes, further disadvantaged the city’s black working class. To resolve the tension between divergent views of the city, liberal reformers focused on remaking citizens, reconstructing people themselves through a variety of measures, from juvenile delinquency programs to the War on Poverty. Instead of a resolution, a new politics was born—a struggle over control of urban resources in the late 1950s and 1960s that dominated and convulsed the city like nothing since the organized labor campaigns of the 1930s.

In Part III the story’s denouement comes in a series of revolts and restorations. The industrial garden was deemed a failure even by those who a generation earlier had invested so much in its promise. But its demise was interpreted very differently in Oakland and nearby suburbs. For black leaders and activists, the new postwar metropolis in California and its political economy undergirded by segregation had failed to deliver

upward mobility to the majority of black workers. This realization spawned revolts in Oakland, led by African American community activists and the Black Panther Party. Together, they articulated a radical critique of the whole of metropolitan development since World War II and implicated liberalism in continued black poverty. In contrast, in nearby suburbs, perceptions of the industrial garden's failure there spawned a new activist conservatism, led by homeownership taxpayers. They reacted to the mounting costs of California's rapid postwar development by attacking and limiting the liberal state. Homeowners embraced tax reform for an enormous variety of reasons, but they nonetheless produced a dramatic convergence of political ideology around an antistatist, property-owning individualism that would have enormous consequences for California and the nation. By 1978 Oakland civic authority had passed into the hands of the black bourgeoisie, and Proposition 13 had signaled the emergence of a new suburban order. The book ends on this profoundly ambivalent note. Despite the industrial garden's failure, a new generation of urban and suburban Californians believed that they could revive and reinvent its promise, albeit from vastly different points of view, ideological grounding, and spatial location.

This book proceeds on two levels and may be thought of as a guide to two interconnected dimensions of the postwar city. The first is political culture: how political contest is shaped, framed, and understood. The second is metropolitan space: how and where urbanization creates markets, property, and communities. I briefly take up each in what follows. In terms of political culture, this book primarily follows two stories: the trajectory of the postwar black struggle, in all of its diverse forms, and the politics of suburban city building, in all of its equally diverse forms. Both shaped political culture in Oakland and the East Bay but also in California as a whole.

Born within the liberal and radical milieus of the New Deal era, African American politics in Oakland evolved into various forms of neighborhood-based reform and Maoist and nationalist revolutionary movements in the 1960s and 1970s. The historiography and much of the social science theorizing of the post-World War II black liberation struggle draw on the southern experience. Indeed, the southern civil rights movement has been rendered so completely as *the* paradigmatic postwar black struggle that most historical surveys make little mention of the North and West outside of a brief discussion of black power and offer no framework in which to understand the northern and Pacific Coast dimensions of African American politics and social movements. One collection of readings even includes a section entitled "The North Has Problems Too," an opaque reference to the North's status as a secondary site of struggle.

Attention to the South is richly deserved, but an overreliance on the southern story has shaped national understandings of black politics and given them a spurious twist: as triumphant civil rights “moved north” after 1965, the movement foundered on the shores of urban rebellions and black nationalism. North and South have come to represent the inverted histories that we tell about African American liberation politics in the second half of the twentieth century. The South is “the movement.” The North is the foil. The South is nonviolent. The North is violent. The South is paradigmatic, the North an aberration.¹¹

Rewriting the history of postwar African American social movements and politics in the North and West requires a richer, deeper, and necessarily more complicated story in which northern and Pacific Coast cities are not places where civil rights organizing stalled or failed in some absolute sense, but places where the postwar black rights movement took unique forms and trajectories and experienced its own successes and setbacks, where African Americans pushed to dismantle the segregation embedded in urban industrial and postindustrial capitalism, and where a dynamic black political culture nurtured multiple strategies and ideologies of resistance, accommodation, and liberation. These places deserve to be understood as more than either derivative of or antithetical to the southern movement. Collapsing African American politics into such a narrative flattens twentieth-century U.S. history. This is not to suggest that northern and western African American history should be disconnected from southern history. Rather, it is to argue that we must connect the building of African American political capacity and social organizing to the longer sweep of northern and western urban history and political economy. And in doing so, we must think beyond a triumphalist southern story and a declensional northern one.¹²

Narratives of civil rights that begin in Montgomery, or in *Brown v. Board of Education*, and end in Birmingham perpetuate a southern exceptionalism that obscures decades-long African American organizing in the postwar North and West. In cities like New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, and Oakland, African Americans worked first within New Deal liberalism and later outside of it to reform the labor and housing markets from which they had been excluded. Much of the modern civil rights movement, and its emphasis on *economic* rights, in the United States was dedicated to a critique of and confrontation with the two-tiered welfare state instantiated in the New Deal—especially its segregationist housing policies, its lack of fair employment and full employment provisions, its exclusion of hundreds of thousands of black workers from the protections of labor laws, and its deeply biased forms of social insurance, including what is now called “welfare.” This required a massive engagement with the major institutions of the nation—especially the

state, finance and real estate capital, and industrial employers of all sizes—that coincided with and was propelled by the largest internal black migration in American history: the movement of four million African Americans from South to North and West. Moreover, the New Deal state's intimate involvement in urban policy meant that the federal government, municipal politics, and metropolitan development converged during these decades to a degree unprecedented in the nation's history. This made the federal government an adversary as often as an ally. In this sense, the postwar black struggle in America represented one of the world's most sustained and militant engagements with the modern state apparatus.¹³

Oakland provides an excellent vantage from which to launch an inquiry into this history. Best known as the birthplace of the Black Panther Party in 1966 and as a national fulcrum of black radicalism throughout the late 1960s, Oakland was also a major seat of African American influence in California politics beginning in the late 1940s and the home of an extensive tradition of black social advocacy and organizing. Indeed, the generation of black activists before the Panthers developed strategies, alliances, and sources of power that profoundly shaped the political terrain of race in both the East Bay and California as a whole. Recovering the story of that generation, men and women who achieved none of the national media exposure and fame of the Panthers and faced little of the state-sponsored harassment and investigations, allows us to appreciate both the surprising continuities as well as the jarring divergences between the activists of the 1940s and 1950s and those of the 1960s and 1970s. Understanding the broader patterns of African American political organizing in Oakland and California in the postwar decades brings into focus a neglected chapter in the black liberation struggle and confirms a trajectory of struggle that depends neither on the traditional markers of the southern movement nor on the conflation of violence, protest, and nationalism that have hampered thorough understandings of black power and black radicalism. The long postwar black liberation movement in the East Bay featured a fluid political environment in which philosophies and strategies competed with and interpenetrated one another. Above all, in the decades after World War II, civil rights in Oakland stood less for *civil* rights than for economic rights, the foundation on which black American political demands had rested since the 1930s.¹⁴

The postwar city, and especially segregation and deindustrialization, has recently garnered substantial attention among American historians. Joining an earlier urban historical literature on ghetto formation has been an emergent scholarship on the urban crisis. Both historiographical literatures emphasize the hardening of racial segregation in the urban nation after World War II and the brakes placed on racial liberalism by

northern whites in conjunction with federal urban policy in the postwar decades. Extending explorations and critiques begun by, among others, W.E.B. DuBois, St. Clair Drake, and Charles Abrams, this new scholarship has offered an important and thoroughly historicized understanding of the relationship between economic restructuring, poverty, race, and the industrial city. But the standard narrative still marginalizes rather than emphasizes African American politics and self-activity. In our understandable zeal to document the limits whites have placed on liberalism, it is too often overlooked that black Americans too imagined the city and its possibilities, reacted to urban decline and decay, and fashioned politics and social movements with the ambition of making their neighborhoods and cities better places to live. Whether they succeeded or failed, their efforts require serious attention and reflection.¹⁵

African American activists in Oakland, San Francisco, and Los Angeles fought to secure a place for black communities within the shifting patterns of metropolitan geography and economy that accompanied the vast spatial transformation of midcentury urban America. They engaged the processes and institutions responsible for the second ghetto and the urban crisis as no other group in California. Industrial restructuring, redevelopment and urban renewal, highway and rapid transit construction, and suburban city building together became the pivots around which black politics turned. These issues were not merely the backdrop to the black liberation struggle. Through them the movement itself was constituted. In Oakland in particular, the political discourse and strategies of the long postwar African American rights movement stressed the failure of urban and metropolitan political economy to secure the promise of democracy and opportunity—they stressed the failure of the postwar metropolis and modernism itself. In this sense, the movement, including liberal, radical, and nationalist variants, was not primarily a response to southern mobilization, but a parallel development that sought to redistribute economic and political power within the increasingly divided metropolis. When local, state, and federal political efforts had failed to do this, when liberalism came up wanting, many African Americans turned to black power and radical liberation politics.¹⁶

Liberalism is too plastic a concept to leave without a definition. It can alternately mean progrowth politics or regulatory politics; racial equality or white racial privilege masking as colorblindness. Its meanings change over the course of the twentieth century and vary according to who is deploying the term. In part the usefulness of the term resides in its generality. I have made every effort to clarify the meaning of the term in each chapter's context. But broadly, liberalism as it came to be constituted in the American polity between the end of World War II and the late 1970s meant four things: (1) New Deal liberalism, its institutions, and its

commitment to a modified welfare state; (2) moderate market regulation in the interests of the middle and working classes, largely white, in the context of continued economic growth; (3) racial liberalism, that is, racially equal opportunity in social and political life, as well as some state intervention to achieve an “equal playing field”; and (4) individualism, the belief that society and politics, as well as reforms and government policies, should be organized around individual people rather than groups or classes. As we will see, there were deep contradictions within liberalism itself; how can a state policy both be liberal and promote racial apartheid? These contradictions are made abundantly clear in what follows. Indeed, the contradictions within liberalism are among my primary topics.¹⁷

By the late 1960s, many African American radicals and nationalists referred to the United States as Babylon. It was often an elusive metaphor, but it captured the profound cynicism engendered by decades of liberal failure as well as the remarkably optimistic belief in rebirth, in beginning again. In 1969 the Black Panther Party warned that fundamental change must come to the nation, lest it “perish like Babylon,” the biblical city that fell under the weight of its own corruption and imperial ambitions. Babylon as both place and concept passed into the lexicon of radical black politics in the late 1960s, borrowed from African American religious traditions as well as from the Jamaican Rastafarians for whom Babylon denoted Western capitalism and imperialism. In the hands of the Panthers, Babylon acquired a new rhetorical provocativeness, as when the party imagined that “in the concrete inner city jungles of Babylon” men and women would join together “to cast aside their personal goals and aspirations, and begin to work unselfishly together.” Babylon stood both for the inevitability of imperialism’s demise and for the possibility that something might be erected in its place, something better, more democratic. “The people of Babylon” could, through struggle, throw off oppression and create a new day. For the Panthers and other black radicals, the industrial garden of midcentury had become Babylon—a false city that had to be remade to stave off collapse.¹⁸

Babylon provides a powerful metaphor, like the industrial garden, through which to think about a particular moment in postwar American urban history. Indeed, Babylon reminds us that black power, and contests over its meaning and implications, is a fundamental part of the political history of urban America. Facing a national crisis of unprecedented dimensions—following decades of segregation and industrial restructuring—African American radicals and liberals alike responded politically. Black communities were not solely victims of an “urban crisis”; they were burdened with, and engaged in, conceiving remedies. In Babylon, black power advocates found an *urban* referent—albeit one that stretched deep into the history of the black church—through which to conceive the plight of the

black nation. This book self-consciously embraces the term, not because it was an ideal, unproblematic or even always transparent analogy, but because it evokes the essential realities of the postwar American city: poverty amidst wealth, national economic growth with urban decline, and the hardening of apartheid within the liberal state. The journey through those seeming paradoxes inevitably takes us to the connections between the city and political power and to three decades of intense contest over the uses, value, and nature of urban space.¹⁹

Past East Oakland, across the city line, lay southern Alameda County—in the 1940s an enormous expanse of small towns, orchards, ranches, open farmland, and tidal flats. Here was the region's suburban future. The flatlands widen considerably south of Oakland, stretching across a great breadth from the bay to the inland hills. Between the hills and the water, only San Leandro and Hayward existed as incorporated cities in the 1940s. San Leandro, directly across the city line from Oakland, combined truck farming, a few industrial assembly plants, and food processing into a viable economic base. Close enough to Oakland to serve as a bedroom community for commuters, San Leandro would come to play a crucial role in the regional struggle to shape residential and industrial politics after the war. In addition to San Leandro and Hayward—a slightly larger, though otherwise similar, city—southern Alameda County was home to ethnic Mexican *colonias*: unincorporated residential districts of laborers, merchants, and a few professionals, all of them attached to the rural economy and its cycles of fruit and vegetable harvest, processing, and canning. The bulk of the land there, however, tens of thousands of acres, was dedicated to ranches, farms, orchards, and small commercial settlements, uses that would fade ever more quickly and irrevocably as the postwar years went by. But, as Oakland's Chamber of Commerce put it in the late 1930s, "cattle still graze over the slopes."

To understand what happened to this suburban East Bay landscape after 1945, we must dig deep into local planning and politics and keep in view both the broad structure of U.S. capitalism and the federal state and the particularities and contingencies of place. For here lies a second site of political culture examined in this book: the political culture of property and homeownership cultivated in California's hothouse of boosterism, populism, and individualism. Postwar suburbanization was as much a product of local planning and politics as of national macroeconomic processes and broad patterns of capital mobility. Indeed, to take up suburbanization as primarily a function of the national mobility of capital is to miss the extraordinary diversity of suburban forms and the importance of local issues and markets in their emergence. In Oakland, planners and boosters after World War II promoted a regional, metropolitan distribution of industrial

investment and growth, campaigning nationally for factories, warehouses, and other facilities for the city's suburban periphery. This initially benefited but ironically ultimately undermined Oakland itself. At the same time, economic incentives within emerging suburban communities—San Leandro, Hayward, Union City, Fremont, and Milpitas especially—gave rise to a homeowner politics that embraced industrial growth, linked racial segregation with high property values, and secured the bourgeois amenities of “garden living” through the property taxes paid by corporate industrial property owners. Both efforts contributed to industrial decentralization in California's East Bay in the 1950s and produced new metropolitan locations of residential and industrial capital.²⁰

Recovering East Bay suburban history means mapping how capital and politics create space. It means charting a history of how places are produced. This account of the East Bay investigates the intersection of political and spatial histories in the processes of city building. Across the breadth of these decades, white suburbanites did not “flee” Oakland. They were drawn to suburban communities by the powerful economic and cultural incentives behind city building: new housing markets subsidized by the federal government; low taxes underwritten by relocating industry; and the assurance that a new home, spacious yard, and garage signaled their full assimilation into American life and its celebration of modernity and consumption. From their first encounter with the home mortgage market, through dozens upon dozens of relationships, from the handshake over a home sale to the capital mobility that brought new industries to their cities, suburbanites participated in a process of market creation. That process generated expectations: homeowners came to expect, and later demand, low property taxes; they came to expect and rationalize racial segregation; and they came to accept as natural the conflation of whiteness and property ownership with upward social mobility. To secure those expectations, suburban homeowners were not shy about entering electoral politics over the course of the postwar decades to assert their property “rights” and to contain the benefits of suburbanization within city boundaries. Lifted into the middle class by the federal welfare state, white residents of southern Alameda County fought the extension of those same benefits to African Americans.²¹

The story of East Bay suburbanization thus chronicles the interaction between large forces at work in the region and nation, especially the mobility of industrial and residential capital, and the local strategic opportunism of homeowners, real estate developers, and other property-oriented interests, who sought to maximize the profitability of various kinds of markets. This local opportunism was itself a synthesis of two venerable traditions within American political culture: low-tax fiscal conservatism and booster promotion. That synthesis evolved into one of the most powerful political

movements of the second half of the twentieth century in California and ultimately the nation. Its adherents, legion by the 1960s, came from virtually every economic station, united by their status and interests as homeowners. Indeed, postwar suburbanization had the effect of creating a proto-class, the members of which might have had dissimilar political loyalties (as well as different incomes, jobs, etc.) but could be united on the single issue of property taxation. Postwar suburbanization helped to instantiate, in place, a tax-conscious voting bloc. That bloc competed with advocates of liberalism and radicalism to define the direction of the state in the postwar decades. Suburban city building in the East Bay in the 1950s and 1960s, as in the nation, called forth a contentious debate about the relationship between public and private resources that set the stage for the transformation of the physical American landscape and the terrain of national politics.²²

This story of politics and political culture is intertwined with another important postwar story—the modernization of urban space. Thus, the second dimension and narrative trajectory of the book follows the history of space. It is more than a matter of neighborhood demographics and the movement of industry. Space is about the processes through which markets, property, communities, and even class and race are constituted within capitalist urbanization. Space as both a metaphor and an analytical hinge can be abstract. But space as historically constituted is quite concrete—recall, for instance, the aforementioned apartheid, urban redevelopment, suburban factories, black power politics in Oakland, and tax revolt politics in the suburbs. To make the specificity clear, I offer here a brief typology of how space as a category of analysis is deployed in the book. I use it in three overlapping but distinct ways: space as property, space as social imagination, and space as political scale.

I place space before the reader not because it is the sole or even the most important dimension of the story, but because it offers a critical context for understanding the history of Oakland, the East Bay, and the nation in this period. People, communities, and institutions did not compete for resources for abstract goals and purposes. They competed to put those resources to use to create particular and concrete places. We cannot separate historical actors from their spatial relationships. Class and race are lived through the fabric of urban life and space. Civil rights, black power, and tax reform political movements did not call for rights in abstract terms and ill-defined places. They called for very specific things in relation to very specific places. Space is not the whole story, but it would be a strange and incoherent one without it.²³

The most obvious spatial element in any city is its built environment: office buildings, factories, dense neighborhoods, parks, and schools. These

are the physical markers of cities that distinguish them from other types of places. But office buildings and factories are not simply buildings; they are also *money*—a form of capital that is, for a time, fixed in space as property. Capitalism drives the creation of fixed spaces. But nearly as quickly as that fixed space is created, capitalism creates extraordinary pressures either to abandon existing cities or to remake them in altogether new ways. Here lies the source of the tensions of development and redevelopment that we have come to associate with urban life. The physical features of a city, though seemingly fixed, are always being “redeveloped.” This is the reality of the city in the capitalist marketplace. But the residents and workers within cities are never simply the docile subjects of capitalism. They protest, they strike, they vote. Ultimately, urban politics is one of the principal ways the costs and benefits created by capitalism are distributed across both space and social groups. Contests over that distribution, and its rippling effects, produced the central drama in the making and remaking of Oakland and the East Bay in the postwar decades.²⁴

Property can be conceived of as space that produces capital. Boundaries drawn around property—in the form of corporate city limits, racial red lines, zoning codes, or highway rights-of-way, for instance—signal where to invest and where not to invest. They constitute a grammar of local development. At the core of urban politics lie tensions and contests over the role of property in civic life, over the distribution of the property tax burden, and over the buying and selling of property. At the same time, space is *more than* just property. Capitalism values different spaces differently. Once those values are in place, embedded in property, that powerfully determines all kinds of aspects of social life. The effects of property are far-reaching; they extend well beyond the marketplace. They structure all kinds of interactions—from where one can buy a home to where politics is organized, from how police interact with neighborhoods to where children go to school. The struggle for the postwar city was over no less than the power to control and organize space and the leverage to wring opportunity out of the American industrial metropolis during its disruptive postwar cycles of development and redevelopment.

Space is also a primary component of social imagination. Spatial analogies are imaginative maps through which people organize and record what cities mean. Jane Jacobs was interested in such maps when she offered her reading of dense Manhattan streets. George Chauncey has creatively uncovered the maps of gay New Yorkers in bath houses, street cruising, and nightlife in early twentieth-century Manhattan. St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton found such maps in the ethnic and racial geography of Chicago’s South side in *Black Metropolis*. In Oakland there are maps as well. One, the industrial garden, helps to organize the first three chapters of this book. First and foremost a booster paradigm of growth

and opportunity, the garden became an open-ended metaphor with appeal across the social spectrum. By the late 1960s, the garden had become, in the words of one African American community organizer, a “plantation.” In this view, the city of opportunity had become an internal colony. The difference between a garden and a plantation, between an open, connected city and a colony, between a neighborhood and a ghetto, between the pastoral and the imperial, is paramount. These differences tell us a great deal about what is at stake in the struggle for the city. The shift from garden and pastoral metaphors to plantation and colonial metaphors follows the narrative of politics throughout this book. We should not conflate ideas and rhetoric with the lived experience of citizens, or with the more concrete realities of zoning codes, property values, and tax rates. But neither should we settle for the banality that the “reality” of a city belies the representations of planners and boosters and the prejudices of residents. Urban life constantly confounds such easy dichotomies.²⁵

Finally, space organizes political scale. We can think of American electoral politics as a series of linked arenas that ascend from the household through the neighborhood, the district or ward, the city, county, state, and ultimately to the federal government. At each scale there are levers of power that control certain dimensions of public life. Zoning ordinances are decided at the city level. Public housing has historically been a federal project administered through municipalities. Labor law lies within state and federal jurisdiction. And so on. The scale at which politics happen—including both formal electoral politics and *politics* more broadly—matters enormously. The urban political terrain is far more than an extension of national party politics, as the homeowner mobilizations of the 1970s so clearly demonstrate. City governments exert critical control over local economic development, which creates patterns of local political struggle absent at the federal level. But there are equally important “city limits,” limits to what cities can do because they are both trapped in the capitalist marketplace and subject to policies and decisions made at other levels of power. One of the stickiest paradoxes of urban and suburban history is the extraordinary power of local political arenas, on the one hand, and the vast reach of federal power across jurisdiction and distance, especially after World War II, on the other. Where political projects are mobilized, as well as the sorts of spaces they attempt to control, are highly significant yet frequently overlooked dimensions of struggle and strategy. Particularly in the postwar decades, when an activist federal government partnered with cities in an array of different projects, cities competed with one another for investment and an elusive tax base. In short, location matters, for politics as much as for property values, for race as well as class.

The temptation is to tell the history of this period solely in terms of urban decline. But Oakland is hardly representative of unidirectional

demise. A journalist described Oakland in the 1960s as “a familiar kind of industrial city: high-rise office buildings and apartments downtown, plastic shopping centers on the fringe, and slowly decaying wooden houses in between.” The city never fully made it as an industrial capital. Despite the tremendous wartime growth of its shipbuilding, food processing, and automobile industries, Oaklanders entered the postwar period much as they had left the 1930s, anxious that the city’s relatively small industrial base would disappear. While cities like Detroit, Chicago, and Los Angeles employed hundreds of thousands of manufacturing workers at various peaks between the 1920s and 1950s, Oakland never employed more than fifty or sixty thousand. When deindustrialization felled Detroit, it cut down a mighty giant. It wreaked havoc on Oakland as well, but Oakland has virtually always been on the make, selling itself to outside capital as often as hosting it. To tell the story of Oakland as one solely of industrial decline is to miss the larger truth that there was hardly a golden industrial past from which the city slipped. The postwar period is less a tragic story of deindustrialization tearing asunder a once mighty industrial empire than the story of a struggling medium-sized city, first in industrial America, then, beginning sometime in the 1960s, increasingly in postindustrial America. For better or worse, it has been a hard road.

Oakland embodied the seeming contradictions of the postwar American metropolis. It was characterized by poverty amidst wealth; racial apartheid at the heart of liberalism; and high unemployment in periods of economic growth. Because of these conditions, it has much to tell us about politics and space in late twentieth-century America. Oakland was thus typical in ways that allow it to stand for the urban nation in this period. But its typicality should not obscure the very different histories of other postwar American cities. Oakland was and is far less segregated than Chicago, Milwaukee, or Philadelphia. Oakland was not a Fordist giant like Detroit. Political systems in other cities—especially Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia—incorporated a large black electorate much earlier than in Oakland because of their ward-based electoral systems. Oakland’s relationship to San Francisco makes it more like Newark and Camden than like Washington, DC, or Atlanta. The East Bay suburbs were more industrial than many across the nation. And so on. Only additional comparative scholarship on these questions will shed greater light on Oakland’s relative representativeness. What we may say without caveat, however, is that the story of Oakland and the East Bay that I recount here forms no straightforward arc, no simple tale of hope giving way to disillusionment. Neither is it a triumphalist one of discrimination yielding over time to inclusion. These sorts of bald opposites are of little use. It is an American story precisely because it is unfinished. Its endings continue to be contested, its meanings alive with contemporary political significance.