

**International  
Institute of  
Social Studies**

*Erasmus*

**West Oakland as an “Urban Frontier”:  
How Real Estate Advertisements Use Colonial,  
Racialized, and Gendered Narratives to “Sell”  
Gentrification-as-Development**

A Research Paper presented by:

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(USA)

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for obtaining the degree of  
MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

Major:

**Social Justice Perspectives:  
Human Rights, Gender and Conflict Studies**

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The Hague, The Netherlands  
November 2020

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## List of Acronyms

ISS	Institute of Social Studies
BART	Bay Area Rapid Transit
ADU	Accessory dwelling unit
DIY	Do-it-yourself
HGTV	Home & Garden Television
SF	San Francisco
SOMA	South of Market (gentrified neighborhood in San Francisco)
OWW	One-World World

## Acknowledgments

Scholarship and study are not individual pursuits, nor are academic works the ‘product’ of a single mind. There are so many people who have been my support system throughout this time and who have helped me cultivate this work from a shapeless idea into a research paper. In other words, this is going to be long!

First, I want to thank Silke Heumann and Rosalba Icaza, my supervisor and second reader, for all their wisdom, guidance, and support in this process, and for their wonderful teachings in the courses Discourse Analysis and Transitions for Social Justice Lab, which inspired and molded much of which appears in this paper.

My peer discussants Lisa-Marlen Gronemeier, Karah Brink, and Olívia Andrade de Almeida, and my eternal sounding board and RP co-conspirator Johana Collantes, all offered incredibly helpful feedback at every stage of this thesis—from the official RP seminars to our café meetups, pizza nights, biers at the Bieb, and my extremely long WhatsApp voice messages. My time at ISS, and the content of this paper, would be nothing without you all.

A special thank-you to those at ISS who kept me engaged, connected, and grounded during the early and dark days of lockdown: my literature class, for keeping me emotionally awake and encouraging creativity as much as critical thought; my ethnography team, for our beautiful and hilarious group chats; and Zuleika Sheik, all the speakers, and students in the Transitions for Social Justice Lab, for sharing so much radical love, care, refusal, and healing as transformative praxis. Even when I was half-asleep from the brutal nine-hour difference, I so appreciated you all.

Another special thank-you to my professors Farhad Mukhtarov and Roy Huijsmans, and teaching assistant Dhika Sjamsoe’oed Sadjad, who went out of their way to share their knowledge on discourse analysis and ethnographic approaches. And to all my professors at ISS, for inviting us to challenge what we already thought we knew to be true, reflect and write critically on development and social justice issues, and showing us that there is more than one ‘world.’ Also thank you to my former professors at the University of California, Santa Cruz, who guided me through what an interdisciplinary, critical, and creative undergraduate experience, and taught me to think deeply instead of efficiently.

My SJP family: thank you for all you have shared with me throughout the course of our MA program (we’ll always have Athens!). To the whole ISS class of 2019–2020: we’ve had a difficult year, but we made it through what would have been difficult even if there wasn’t a pandemic. I’ll always be grateful for our times and studies together before—and amid—global chaos.

Finally, thank you to my family and friends who have cheered me on along the way, and for all your expressions of deep love and care. Special thanks to my parents, for believing in me and always being interested in what I’m working on! To my mom, who witnessed almost the entirety of this process and brightened my days with cupcakes and roses. To my dad, who sent me tons of political “dad memes,” crossword hints, and food photos during social distancing. To my grandma, who turned 90 as I wrote this and who offered me her house to stay in after I abruptly fled COVID for the U.S., and who has

always supported me in everything from school projects to homemade art projects. To my late grandpa, who fought social injustice through his storytelling, and who was the first one who told me I could write a story, too. To my VA Cousin Group Chat, for food pics and AG discourse.

To my LOMLs, who I have now known for half my life, who encouraged me to go to grad school, are always down for TBHBBF sessions, and wrote me love letters for the New Year (blessings). My Writer Coven sisters have been some of my most aggressive cheerleaders in this MA process, and are so understanding even when I'm too busy to help with our projects. My Book Club ladies, who are 50% hilarity and 50% intense support, for always welcoming me back when I've visited from Pennsylvania or the Netherlands.

Finally, to Jose Cruz Guerrero, my partner\* of more than 10 years and an incredible specialist on Latin American rare books and print materials, who has been so interested in my studies, readings, and my research that he should probably earn an honorary MA from ISS at this point. I've been so lucky to have you in my life, and not just for our 4+ hour phone calls discussing my readings. Thank you also for showing me that my childhood fascination with flyers and open houses could be a research interest. Even though we were 5,450 miles and 9 time zones apart, thank you for being there "with" me during my MA experience.

I couldn't have done this without all of you.

\* ISS friends will know him as "my Brian."



## **Abstract**

Oakland, CA (USA), is currently undergoing gentrification, intensifying racialized displacement and inequality. The historically Black neighborhood of West Oakland is particularly affected, as many white elites and investors have identified it as a place to ‘rehabilitate’ older houses or industrial buildings. In this research paper, I use discourse analysis methods to analyze West Oakland real estate advertisements (written ads, photographs, and video tours of the houses) in order to ‘make strange’ colonial, racialized, and gendered narratives that have been made ‘mundane’ by modern and Eurocentric ways of knowing. I analyze discourses such as the ‘urban frontier,’ (re)development, and exoticization, using a content analysis and critical discourse analysis approach and drawing from lenses that include thinking-from-Oakland, post-development, gender, and other work on the ‘urban frontier.’ I argue that ‘urban frontier’ representations of West Oakland are used to justify economic ‘development’ and racialized displacement; portray the ‘urban pioneer’ as a benevolent masculine hero of Eurocentrism; and construct the neighborhood as an ‘authentic’ experience for the consumption of elite, white outsiders. Market and state institutions stand to profit by this selling of a particular representation of ‘home’ and ‘inhabiting.’

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

How is development logic violent toward certain bodies—and how is that logic deeply rooted in our beliefs and assumptions about seemingly innocuous representations? As a process of urban (re)development, gentrification produces violence, such as racialized displacement, in pursuit of Euro-capitalocentric ‘progress.’ The harmful ideologies of this (re)development are often based on discursive framings that have been made into common-sense assumptions through power-laden practices. One example is the ‘urban frontier’ discourse, which uses a settler colonial ideology to understand the gentrifying neighborhood as a space ripe for conquest and ‘opportunity.’ My research seeks to examine narratives like the ‘urban frontier’ and (re)development that have been made ‘mundane’ but that affect understandings of home, neighborhood, and ‘reality’ in complex ways. I use a discourse analysis approach on West Oakland real estate texts in order to identify and ‘make strange’ these narratives and how they are entangled with racialized and gendered representations.

A discourse analysis approach toward West Oakland real estate texts and their role in gentrification has not yet been carried out. Additionally, much work on gentrification aims to produce universally applicable knowledge from the particular, viewing it as a generic side effect of capitalism. My research recognizes the importance of thinking-from-Oakland, following McElroy and Werth's (2019) assertion that Oakland's experience is not the same as San Francisco's (or any other city's) due to its particular history of settler colonialism and racialized dispossessions. I offer a concluding reflection with the possibility for decolonial thinkings such as de-learning and refusal.

**Keywords**

Housing, racialization, gender, gentrification, displacement, urban pioneer, urban frontier, exoticization, development, post-development, urban renewal, investment, frontier thesis, real estate, discourse analysis, Oakland, West Oakland, San Francisco Bay Area.

## Chapter 1 – Introduction



Lloyd, his dogs, and the Warriors House (2020)

Royal blue walls and steps. Golden yellow window trim. A padded armchair on a shaded front stoop. A security door that looks like the setting sun. And everywhere, flags, pennants, and photographs of the Golden State Warriors basketball team.

The Warriors House is a Victorian-era bungalow in West Oakland, a local landmark famous for being painted the California-at-sunset colors of the Warriors. Revered by many to be the best professional men’s basketball team in the U.S., the former-underdog “Dubs” have been based out of Oakland since the 1970s, but—after a recent string of national championship titles—moved to San Francisco in 2019.

Lloyd, the 58-year-old owner of the Warriors House, has lived there since he was a child. When his mother passed away in 2019, Lloyd inherited the house—and discovered that his mom had been the victim of predatory lending, which all too commonly targets low-income Black communities (GoFundMe 2020; Ferrari 2020). Lloyd, who lives off of government disability income, was suddenly told by the bank that he owed them \$350,000 or he’d lose his home (GoFundMe 2020). The house was listed for sale for \$699,000 as a “contractors special” (013A), which is often used as an insider term for real estate investors who buy, ‘rehabilitate,’ and sell houses for a steep profit. The story in the listing was minimal, describing the Warriors House as something to demolish, fix, rebuild—a broken thing without a past, only a future—to develop as “your own” (013A):

Contractors special. Property is close to Emeryville, BART and freeway access. You can make this house your own.

In July 2020, Lloyd's neighbor Ali helped him set up a GoFundMe crowdfunding campaign and a T-shirt fundraiser. They went viral, catching the attention of the local news—and the Warriors themselves, who decided to hold a fundraising auction. In all, as of November 2020, these campaigns had raised more than \$300,000. Lloyd is working with the Oakland Community Land Trust to negotiate shared ownership of the Warriors House, which will also ensure that it remains affordable to low-income residents in perpetuity (GoFundMe 2020).

In stories like these, a happy ending is the exception, not the rule. In West Oakland, there are many more stories of displacement where people never come close to being able to save their houses—or tell their stories to a mass audience. Instead, the stories that are told are those that promote gentrification, investment, and the commodification of the neighborhood in subtle, everyday ways—so surreptitious that they often go largely unquestioned.

Real estate texts are mundane, but they are not neutral. They tell stories about places and people, crafting narratives that construct and maintain common-sense assumptions. Their mundanity is what makes them so influential: in reading them, we<sup>1</sup> do not even recognize how we are normalizing (and have already normalized) particular, hegemonic ways of thinking-being-feeling-inhabiting. Yet, language is political, and the way we come to understand 'reality' is dominated by power-laden meaning-making practices. As we internalize and naturalize common-sense assumptions in everyday language, like housing advertisements, our selves are also constructed.

In this research, I attempt to take the first step toward a de-learning and refusal of a particular dominant ontology by 'making strange' the mundane narratives used to sell ideas of 'home' and 'inhabiting' in gentrifying West Oakland. By elucidating these stories and examining their roles in social and political ideologies, I hope to challenge hegemonic constructions and conceptions of 'reality,' such as modern and capitalocentric ways of thinking about the home, neighborhood, and the practice of inhabiting.

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<sup>1</sup> I use "we" throughout this paper not intending for it to be a universalizing "we," but rather to invite readers to think together with me from their own social locations.

## 1.1 Nature of the Problem

My research is concerned with the ways in which West Oakland real estate texts—written advertisements, photographs, and video tours of the house-for-sale—use ‘mundane’ but politically charged language to further gentrification and capitalocentric ‘development’ as profit-generating practices. In this paper, I examine and ‘make strange’ colonial, racialized, and gendered narratives in the real estate texts, using discourse analysis to understand how these narratives construct ‘reality’ and affect the lives of people in West Oakland. I hope to challenge the normalization of colonial, racialized, and capitalocentric violence and dispossession through subtle ‘mundane’ narratives, which work to help maintain white supremacy and racial capitalism. I see my research as a way of identifying harmful common-sense narratives that have been normalized, in order to begin to refuse and de-learn hegemonic ways of knowing. While I do not assume a specific audience, I believe that this paper may be useful for other white, middle-class U.S. Americans in recognizing our role in the reproduction of harmful ideologies, and ways in which we can challenge our normalized, Eurocentric ways of thinking.

## 1.2 Research Objectives and Questions

“Journalists have sought to make sense of [Oakland’s] recapitalisation by characterising Oakland as a new urban ‘frontier’ through flat comparisons to Brooklyn, San Francisco, and Silicon Valley... they have come to structure the commonsense understanding of the current moment.”  
(McElroy and Werth 2019: 879)

“If you are an urban pioneer who is looking to buy somewhere before it really booms, look into West Oakland.” (Red Oak Realty, n.d.)

In the gentrifying setting of West Oakland, discursive representations of the neighborhood as ‘urban frontier’ and the white, elite homebuyer/investor as ‘urban pioneer’ are commonplace and widely accepted. However, they carry with them a history of colonial, racialized, and gendered violence. Because discourse and epistemology are power-laden practices that have very real effects on people’s lives, I seek to elucidate and make strange the normalized ‘urban frontier’ narrative in real estate texts in West Oakland. I also seek to

identify interrelated narratives that work in tandem with the ‘urban frontier’ to construct a particular representation of West Oakland and its gentrification.

In this paper, I ask the following question:

- In what ways do real estate texts in West Oakland use a colonial, racialized, and gendered “urban frontier” discourse to sell the gentrifying neighborhood and home?

The following sub-questions help shape my analysis:

- How do the texts rely on modern, Eurocentric conceptions of the frontier myth, metropole/‘ghetto,’ and masculinity to further a development narrative of gentrification as ‘progress’?
- How do the texts exoticize difference and romanticize the ‘frontier’ in order to sell West Oakland as a ‘consumable’ place?

In Chapter 2, I offer *a* story of Oakland through briefly contextualizing its history and current gentrification and displacement processes. Chapter 3 provides an overview of the theoretical lenses I will use in my analysis, including a thinking-from-Oakland approach and theories on the ‘urban frontier,’ race, and gender. Chapter 4 outlines my approach and reflects on my positionality and limitations. For ethical reasons, and to de-center individual actors while critiquing systemic processes, I have chosen not to display the houses’ addresses, realtor names, real estate company names, or URLs for any of my primary-source real estate texts; instead, I use codes to refer to these. (An explanation of these codes can be found in Appendix 1.)

In Chapter 5, I draw from post-development, ‘urban frontier,’ and thinking-from-Oakland approaches to examine development narratives like (re)building, investment, neighborhood change, and the ‘urban pioneer’ figure. In Chapter 6, I analyze how exoticization of the ‘Other’ and romanticization of the frontier are used to commodify West Oakland. I end with a conclusion that seeks to synthesize my analyses.

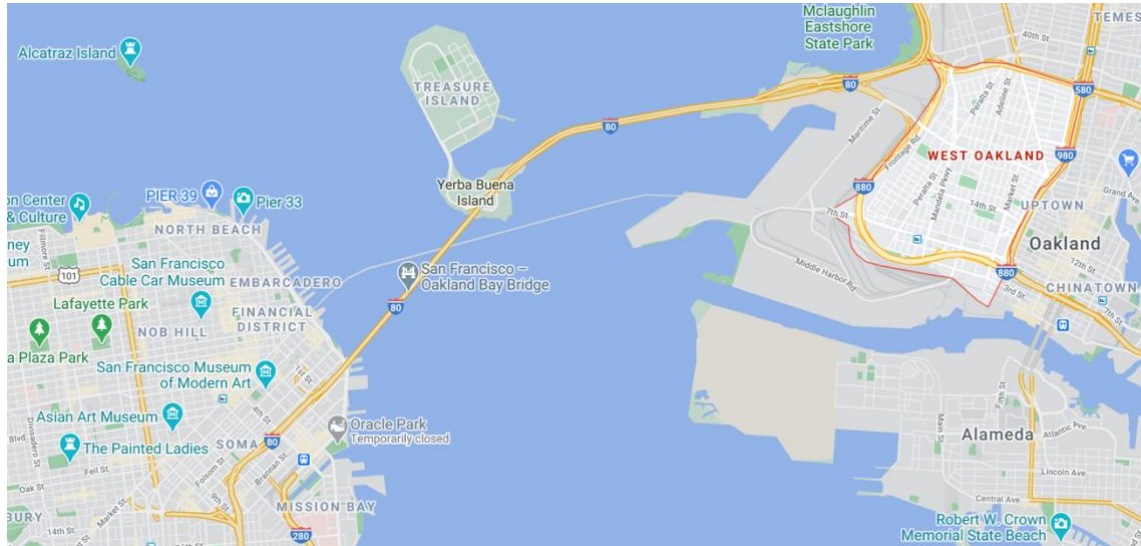
In this paper, I argue that ‘mundane’ and common-sense representations of West Oakland as ‘urban frontier’ are used to justify Eurocentric economic ‘development’ and racialized displacement; portray the ‘urban pioneer’ as a benevolent, hegemonic masculine hero of modernity and progress; and transform the neighborhood into an ‘exotic’ and ‘authentic’ consumable experience for elite, white outsiders. Through these representations,

institutions like the real estate industry, development companies, and the state generate profit by the selling of ‘home’ and a particular hegemonic way of ‘inhabiting.’

Because I am guided by ontological questionings and the hope that this research will invite you into a thinking-together with me about your own complicity, common-sense assumptions, and how *our* selves have been constructed, I include a short reflection on the possibility of decolonial futures through the idea of ‘radical inhabiting.’ My paper closes with a poetic thinking-from-Oakland by Oakland’s 2018 Youth Poet Laureate Leila Mottley.

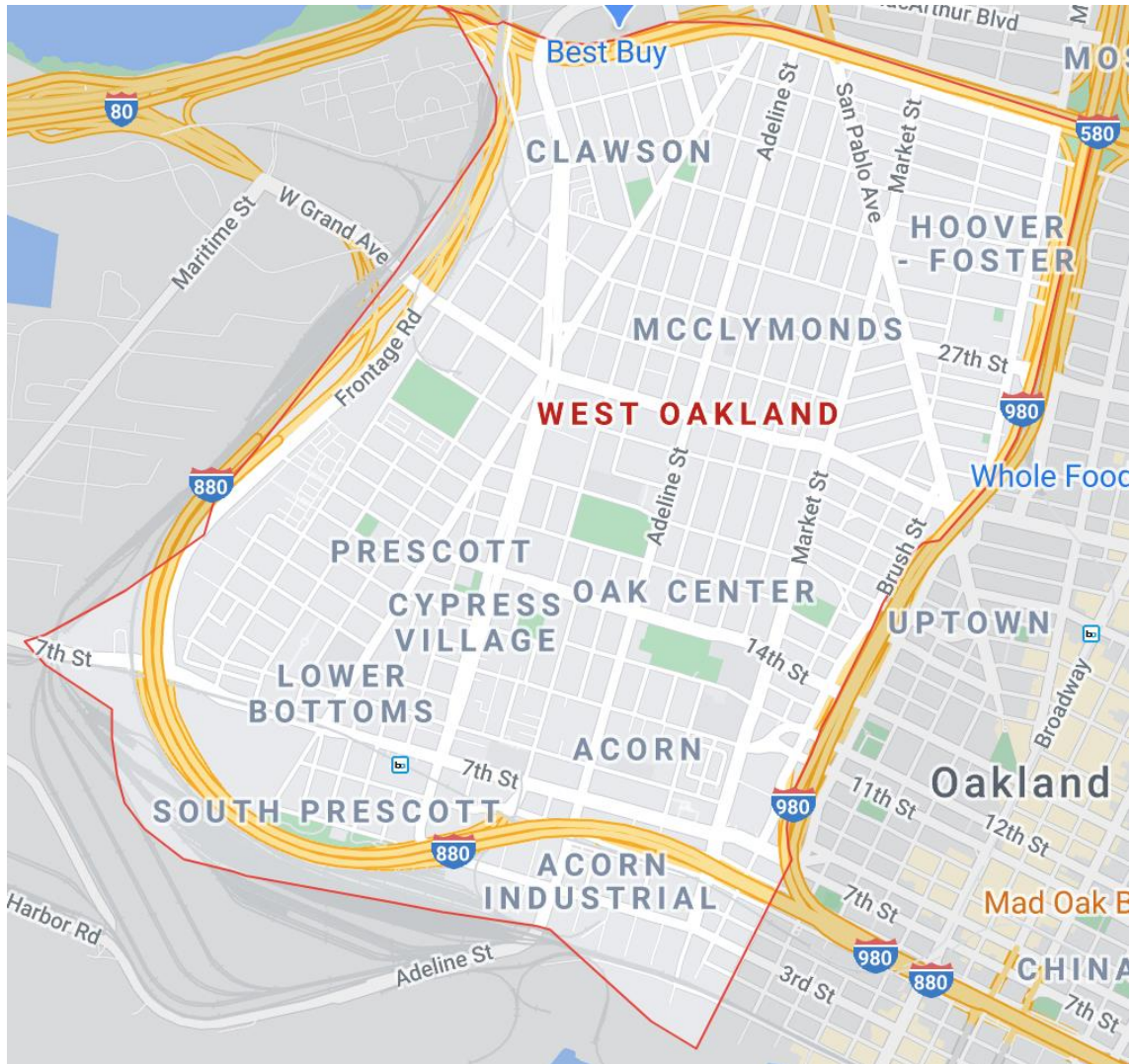
## Chapter 2 – A Story of Oakland

There is no one story of Oakland. Rather, this—like my paper as a whole—is *a* story of Oakland, drawn from imperfect accounts and compiled by an imperfect storyteller.



**Map 2.1:** Map of West Oakland in relation to Downtown Oakland and San Francisco. Note the proximity to the Bay Bridge connecting West Oakland with San Francisco (Google Maps 2020a).





**Map 2.2:** A closer map of West Oakland and some of its neighborhoods. Note that it is almost entirely ringed by elevated major freeways that serve as its borders (Google Maps 2020b).

## 2.1 A Brief History of The Town

Oakland, California, nicknamed “The Town,” is separated by bay waters, just over 6 miles (10 km) wide, from San Francisco, known as “The City.” Much of Oakland’s perceived identity is in relation to the superiority of San Francisco’s, a framing that began with Spanish colonizers’ naming of what is now called Oakland—what was once known as Huchiun, the land that the Lisjan Ohlone people belonged to—as *contra costa* (opposite coast), positioning San Francisco as the ‘norm’ (Sogorea Te’ Land Trust, n.d.; McElroy and Werth 2019: 879). Founded on settler colonialism, and with a long history of racial capitalism and dispossession, Oakland “has been contoured by waves of settler theft and racial violence” (McElroy and Werth 2019: 879).

Part of Oakland's settler history was the narrative of Manifest Destiny—the belief that the U.S. was chosen by God to “expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent” (History.com Editors 2010). Manifest Destiny was used to justify 19<sup>th</sup>-century settler colonialism and displacement and genocide of Native American and mestizo populations. As one of the westernmost places of North America, the San Francisco Bay became a beacon of Manifest Destiny, and its settlement a goal and symbol of development through conquest. *Westward the Course of Empire Takes Its Way*, an 1862 painting hanging in the U.S. Capitol Building, portrays pioneers moving through a rugged landscape toward the Golden Gate strait, which offered the U.S. strategic access to the Pacific Ocean, and, thus, global influence ‘from sea to shining sea’ (Architect of the Capitol, n.d.; O’Sullivan 1845).

Oakland was key in this western hub of commerce. In 1869, it became the terminus for the transcontinental railroad, and its port allowed for movement of goods between the trains and San Francisco (Port of Oakland Seaport, n.d.). Around the port and railroad, West Oakland was built. It became home to many Black and working-class people, including workers for the Pullman Palace Car Company (one of the first companies to hire Black employees after the end of slavery), like the Black Pullman porters, who founded the first all-Black union in 1925 (History.com Editors, 2019). By the 1940s, West Oakland was home to thousands of working-class people from diverse ethnic backgrounds (Self 2003). West Oakland (“a city within a city”) became a mix of warehouses, stores, restaurants, and houses—as well as a renowned musical destination, with some of the U.S.’s most famous Black musicians performing at its nightclubs (Self 2003: 21; Harrington 2011).

During the 1910s–20s and 1940s–80s, millions of workers—including eight million Black Americans—moved from rural southern areas to north and western urban centers like Oakland (Gregory 2009). Oakland's Black population grew from 8,000 in 1940 to 42,355 in 1950 (Self 2003: 56). In the post-WWII era, West Oakland became the heart of the East Bay's Black community; this was partly due to segregation as well as many white workers bring granted favorable federal housing loans and leaving West Oakland to buy homes in other neighborhoods (Self 2003: 52).

After legal segregation ended, racialized housing and urban development policies and practices continue to maintain racial capitalism, *de facto* segregation, and generational Black poverty (Self 2003; Taylor 2019). This historic and structural impoverishment meant that, even after housing discrimination became illegal, home prices remained a barrier for Black residents (Tesfamariam 2019: 28). As white-owned property has appreciated,

majority-Black neighborhoods like West Oakland have been disinvested from, over-policed, and ‘redeveloped,’ furthering racialized inequality (Self 2003; Tesfamariam 2019). In one instance, the City of Oakland described West Oakland as “blighted” to justify its urban “redevelopment,” demolishing 50 blocks of housing and displacing almost 9,000 residents (Ferrari 2020). Through these practices, West Oakland’s poverty and unemployment became at least two to three times higher than the rest of Oakland (Rhombert 2004: 3).

Oakland has been subject to other forms of state violence. The city took on efforts to racially “control” and “manage” its Black population, which later became the model for the federal government’s “War on Poverty” (Rhombert 2003: 3). While Oakland has long been a site of colonial and racial dispossession, it has also been a historic site of resistance, with groups like the Black Panthers and other movements working against white supremacy, racialized violence, and the displacement caused by ‘urban renewal’ (Bledsoe and Wright 2018; Ferrari 2020).

## **2.2 Today’s Development Stories**

West Oakland’s current housing landscape has been shaped by the subprime mortgage crisis, in which predatory loans were given to Black borrowers at three times the level of white borrowers, and the San Francisco Bay Area’s post-2000 tech boom and the resulting “housing crisis,” in which skyrocketing housing costs have disproportionately affected low-income communities of color (Ferrari 2020; Ramírez 2019: 157). Due to its proximity to San Francisco and its tech companies, Oakland’s “housing stock” has become regarded as “ripe for redevelopment” (Ramírez 2019: 152). Again constructed in relation to its neighbor, Oakland has been rebranded as a place where San Francisco residents and tech workers move for more affordable housing. Oakland is seen as “glad to absorb them after generations as the region’s grittier, rougher, neglected stepchild” (Bender 2016).

This has created a wave of widespread gentrification, a process in which a “historically disinvested neighborhood” “experiences an influx of middle-class or wealthy people who renovate and rebuild homes and businesses and which often results in an increase in property values and the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents”; this is also often racialized (Merriam-Webster, n.d.; Chapple and Thomas 2020). From 2013–17, the San Francisco–Oakland metropolitan area experienced the most gentrification in the U.S. (Chamings 2020).

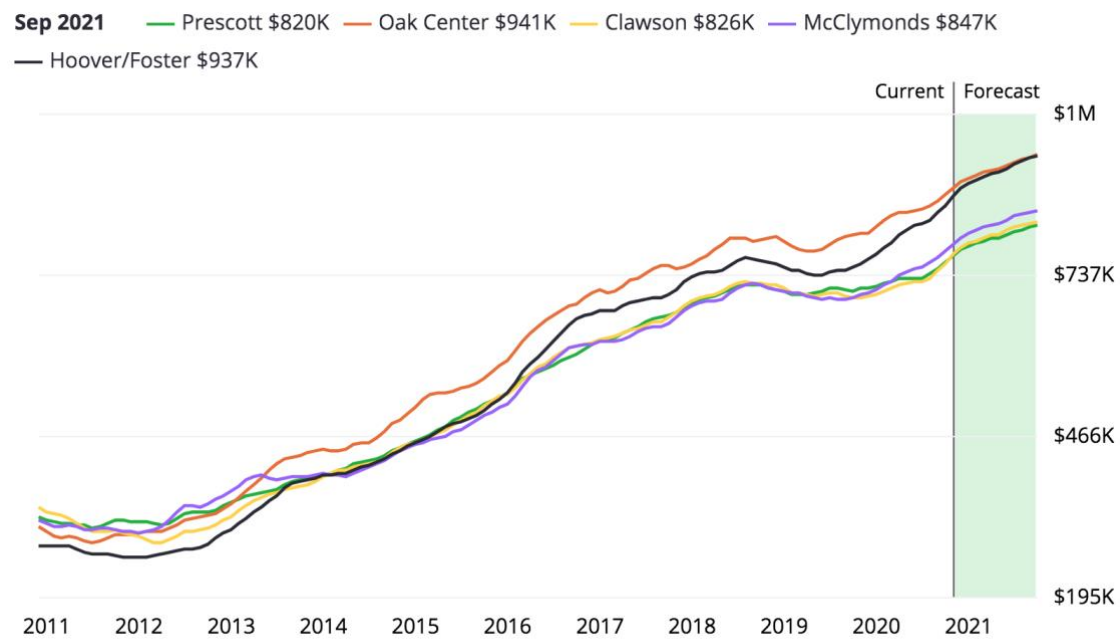
Real estate investors (often national or global corporations) play a key role in gentrification. They are often seen as more desirable homebuyers over individuals because they can bid high and pay upfront. Investors commonly buy up foreclosed homes and ‘rehabilitate’ them—which may often mean “slapping on a coat of paint”—then resell them for “dramatic” price increases, or rent them out as property values rise (Tepperman 2013).

Oakland’s gentrification involves the influx of white residents and the displacement of Black residents. Oakland’s Black population, which was 140,000 in 2000, is projected to fall to 70,000 by 2030 (BondGraham 2018). Although Black residents now comprise only 23% of Oakland’s population, they make up 70% of its unhoused population (Ferrari 2020). In comparison, white residents have become the largest racial/ethnic group in Oakland, now comprising 27% of Oakland’s population; by 2030, it is projected that 30% will be white (BondGraham 2018).

There are many other signs of displacement. Since 2017, Oakland’s unhoused population has nearly doubled from 2,761 to 4,071 (Ravani 2019). In 2018, Oakland had four vacant homes for every unhoused person; these high vacancy rates may point to a large amount of renovations or evictions in the area (Schatz 2018; Brinklow 2019). From 2005–2015, Oakland saw 20,340 foreclosures and 32,402 evictions (Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, n.d.). While Oakland has some renter protections, landlords often make use of legal exceptions to evict tenants or raise rents beyond the rent ceiling (Orenstein 2020; City of Oakland 2018a).

West Oakland is one of the “fastest gentrifying” neighborhoods in the U.S., due to factors like its proximity to San Francisco (only one BART train station away, and directly across the Bay Bridge), affordable-for-the-area housing, and Opportunity Zone designation (which offers investors tax breaks from investing in or redeveloping “distressed” communities; this often leads to displacement) (Hansen 2020; Red Oak Realty, n.d.; City of Oakland 2018b). Gentrification is also spurred by rehabilitation of West Oakland’s industrial buildings (“converting the old factories and warehouses... into contemporary live/work lofts is all the rage”) and Victorian-era houses (“Many new West Oakland” homebuyers “choose to buy older Victorians and renovate them from the inside out”) (Red Oak Realty, n.d.).

Gentrification can also be seen through West Oakland’s soaring house prices and large, new developments. In March 2012, the average typical home value across five West Oakland neighborhoods was \$298,000; in October 2020, it is \$816,000 (Zillow 2020b).



**Figure 2.1:** Average typical home value in five West Oakland neighborhoods, from 2011 to now, and forecast (in green) (Zillow 2020b).

While West Oakland was once seen as “acres of vacant lots,” it now has many new, under-construction, or proposed large residential developments (Li 2017). These include developments sometimes more than 1,000 units (Li 2017).

Oakland continues to be compared to San Francisco: its gentrification is described in terms of San Francisco’s, and West Oakland is imagined as “the next ‘SOMA’” (McElroy and Werth 2019; Red Oak Realty, n.d.). Ramírez describes how Oakland, a city “defined by its Blackness for the past half-century has become a site of racial capitalist desire, as tech corporations venture east of San Francisco and eye the ‘underdeveloped’ sites in Oakland, housing developers at their heels” (Ramírez 2020: 147). Compared to San Francisco, parts of Oakland (like West Oakland) are seen as ‘underdeveloped’ and thus targets for gentrification and ‘rescue’ through (re)development.

## Chapter 3 – Ways of Reading: Theoretical Approaches

### 3.1 Thinking-from-Oakland

My research attempts to follow McElroy and Werth's (2019) invitation to 'think from Oakland.' This place-based epistemology refuses universalizing or comparative understandings of Oakland's current gentrification, such as the narrative that it is simply a new phase of San Francisco's gentrification. Instead, they call for situating Oakland's gentrification and displacement in its history of settler colonial dispossession and racialized violence (McElroy and Werth 2019). I attempt to think-from-Oakland by considering the particular context and questioning universalizing and globalizing discourses that are used within West Oakland real estate texts.

Writing about Oakland, la paperson (2010) describes how the 'ghetto' and "white 'pure space'" (such as gated communities, suburbs, and urban cosmopolitan neighborhoods) are examples of the "racialization of space and spatialization of race" (paperson 2010: 12; Lipsitz cited in paperson 2010: 10). The 'ghetto' becomes pathologized as a site of poverty, which can be 'fixed' by inclusion in the zone "outside," perceived as the "place of universal rights" (paperson 2010: 12). It is simultaneously regarded as "an exoticized site of the black 'Other,' a horizon of cosmopolitan desire, and an idealized place of authenticity" (paperson 2010: 18). Subject to the "appetite" of white development, the 'ghetto' becomes seen as impermanent: "perhaps the truest measure of the ghetto is not its formation but its availability for dislocation" (paperson 2010: 13, 19). For example, 'urban renewal' presents economic 'development' and displacement as a "solution" to the pathologized 'ghetto,' thus promoting an "obliteration" that "fits the sensibilities of a neoliberal episteme" (paperson 2010: 19).

The ghetto-metropole-colony framework distinguishes and conceptualizes 'ghetto colonialism' as an actual process of dislocation, rather than using colonization as an analogy or conflating the ghetto with either metropole or colony. In this framework, the metropole is the imperial space of extracted wealth and privilege, and the colony is a valuable "asset" to empire that is outside the nation yet within (and constituting) its imperial reach (paperson 2010: 21). Within the nation but produced as the metropole's "undesirable discard," the 'ghetto' is "only marginally involved in imperial projects yet a major preoccupation in maintaining domestic order" (paperson 2010: 21, 23). Within the Global

North, the 'ghetto' is the "last refuge of the irrational to be eliminated" (paperson 2010: 22). This framework allows for an understanding of the particularities of the 'ghetto' as a space constructed as marginalized and 'deviant' within the Global North. The colonial practices that take place in the 'ghetto' can be understood as a kind of colonization through the "violence of plunder" (such as wealth expropriation from West Oakland) followed by a neocolonization through the "violence of mercy" (such as through modern ordering processes, like 'development') (paperson 2010: 25). In the case of 'ghetto colonialism,' the colonization takes place in an 'internal' borderlands: where the metropole meets its 'ghetto.'

Arguing that "Oakland in 2019 is a place of violent struggle for the right to remain in one's home, in one's community—the right to live and thrive in peace," Ramírez (2020) uses a borderlands lens and plantation analytic to understand Oakland's gentrification (Ramírez 2020: 152). Through a refusal of the "naturalized narrative of gentrification" as an "inevitable process of capitalist redevelopment that is dislocated from the lived experiences of dispossession," she argues that Oakland's gentrification must be situated in the continuing processes and effects of settler colonialism and racial capitalism (Ramírez 2020: 149). Thus, an understanding of gentrification must center the violence of racialized displacement and dispossession rather than sanitizing gentrification as "merely redevelopment of a place" (Ramírez 2020: 150).

Ramírez argues that urban redevelopment and gentrification are "bordering practices that create structural and cultural exclusion in city space" (Ramírez 2020: 148). Borders signal "(dis)belonging" and a borderlands lens shows how "city spaces are divided and violently restructured through forces of racial capitalist dispossession such as gentrification" (Ramírez 2020: 148–149). Oakland as borderlands is marked by a "relational co-existence" of inhabitants who, based on their ability to access capital and power, are conceived of as 'legitimate' or 'illegitimate' (Ramírez 2020: 149). These relationships, while unequal and frequently violent, "emerge in the city in both structural and seemingly mundane ways" (Ramírez 2020: 149). A plantation analytic shows how anti-Black violence became normalized through the plantation's "enforced placelessness," thus naturalizing the ongoing "destruction of a black sense of place" (McKittrick cited in Ramírez 2020: 150). This destruction can be seen in gentrification's dispossession and displacement, which are not simply geographical-spatial violences, but also psychic violences of annihilating one's sense of place.

The geographic lenses of the borderlands and plantation allow us to see how racial capitalism and colonial practices continue to influence how the city is produced. Part of

this production comes from the ways in which power is constructed and experienced through language and meaning: “the meaning of a place is subject of particular discourses of *power*, which express themselves as discourses of *normality*” (Cresswell cited in Ramírez 2020: 151). Here, placemaking is a power-laden act of discursive meaning-making.

These thinking-from-Oakland lenses offer important geographical and racialized understandings of Oakland. I draw from them to analyze the ways in which the real estate texts represent and construct Oakland, as well as to situate other (non-Oakland) theories.

### **3.2 The “Urban Frontier” and (Re)development**

#### **The Frontier Myth**

Turner’s 1893 frontier thesis claimed that the U.S. West ‘frontier’ imaginary was instrumental for the ‘development’ of U.S. identity, space, society, and politics:

“American development has exhibited not merely advance along a single line, but a return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and a new development for that area. American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier.” (Turner cited in Paul 2014: 323)

Paul describes how Turner’s (now heavily criticized) frontier thesis viewed the U.S. West as not a “specific region or place” but the “dynamic space of the frontier” that moved ever west to characterize “the meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Paul 2014: 323; Turner cited in Paul 2014: 323). The frontier became a key part of nationalistic mythology: as “a special place from which [the nation’s] future could be built,” the frontier’s “discovery, conquest, and settlement” became “the dominant theme of American history” (Paul 2014: 312; Slotkin cited in Paul 2014: 312). The frontier thesis constructed the U.S. as a civilizing force that could develop ‘wilderness’ into society.

Turner imagined two mythical U.S. Wests: one ‘uncivilized’ West of expansionism, colonialism, and land dominance (carried out by the pioneer), and one semi-‘civilized,’ garden-like West of peace, agrarianism, and settlement/residence (carried out by the homesteader) described as a “pastoral idyll, a democratic space, and as a land of opportunity” (Paul 2014: 318–319). The second West, an exemplar of modernity and development, was used to “legitimize the violence” of the first, which became seen as a necessary precondition of the second (Paul 2014: 314). Turner promoted a view of the Native Americans as divisible from the land, which permitted an ideology of racialized



violence as complementing development processes. The conquest itself was romanticized, with colonial figures imagined as heroes in “our national epic of exploration” (Coues cited in Paul 2014: 321). In the Enlightenment model of a linear path of development, Native Americans became perceived as violent and underdeveloped and needed to “be vanquished in order for the West to be ‘won,’ ‘settled,’ and ‘civilized’” (Paul 2014: 336). Frontier stories do not hide or try to explain white violence, showing how the frontier myth works as hegemonic discourse to produce a West “grounded in the unquestioned acceptance and successful naturalization of the fundamental ideological premises of frontier discourse,” above all, “the assumption that white people’s usurpatory presence in North America is justified at all” (Paul 2014: 338).

## **The “Urban Frontier”**

Smith (1996) examines how the frontier myth has been applied to U.S. cities as part of a generic and universalizing narrative of gentrification and (re)development. Due to postwar white flight and suburbanization, the U.S. city became naturalized as an “urban wilderness”: “the habitat of disease and disorder, crime and corruption, drugs and danger” (Warner cited in Smith 1996: xv; Smith 1996: xv). In the 1960s, a shift occurred, discursively transforming the city from a dangerous wilderness to a tame-able frontier, reflecting “an optimism and an expansive expectation” linked to “self-confident conquest” (Smith 1996: xvi). This shift, associated with “urban renewal” discourse and the rehabilitation and renovation of urban buildings, directly invoked frontier imagery through the “urban pioneers, urban homesteaders and urban cowboys” as “new folk heroes” (Smith 1996: xvi).

In likening the city to the frontier, it becomes imagined as “idyllic yet also dangerous” (Smith 1996: 12). Additionally, “frontier is a style as much as a place,” and Smith points to the trendiness of aesthetics like “desert decor” and “cowboy chic” that are “woven into the same urban landscapes of consumption” in gentrifying cities (Smith 1996: 14). For example, trendy shops in New York’s SoHo sell indigenous art, art with desert scenes, whips and spurs, cactuses, and bleached buffalo/bison skulls.

The term “urban pioneer” is “as arrogant as the original notion of ‘pioneers’ in that it suggests a city not yet socially inhabited; like Native Americans, the urban working class is seen as less than social, a part of the physical environment”; they become, implicitly yet not altogether tacitly, the ‘savagery’ that the urban pioneer’s ‘civilization’ seeks to tame or fix through conquest-as-(re)development (Smith 1996: xvi). The urban pioneer is thus

constructed as a hero of modernity and progress, showing how “the frontier discourse serves to rationalize and legitimate a process of conquest” (Smith 1996: xvi).

The “frontier imagery is neither merely decorative nor innocent... but carries considerable ideological weight” (Smith 1996: 16). Frontier ideology in the gentrifying neighborhood imagines the current residents as “uncivil” and “on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line, as savages”; this naturalizes “social difference and exclusion,” and the goal becomes transforming the space into “bourgeois enclaves,” displacing poor residents (Smith 1996: 16). While the (re)development of the U.S. city is a political and economic strategy, the frontier narrative stresses the rugged individualism of the pioneering hero, obscuring the role of institutions like the state and market. Smith points out that the “gentrification frontier” is constructed and promoted by banks, real estate developers, the state, and corporations (Smith 1996: xviii). The real estate industry as an institution both constituting and constructing the ‘urban frontier’ is thus crucially important to investigate through an elucidation of the frontier myth narratives.

Situating gentrification in the history of “settler colonialism, imperialism, slavery, and racialized expropriation,” Törnberg and Chiappini (2020) investigate how Airbnb hosts in majority-Black neighborhoods in New York City market the “urban frontier” to their guests (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 569). The authors find that white hosts seek to attract guests through a “form of colonial discourse” that exoticizes difference and transforms communities into “consumable” experiences (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 553). The hosts advertise the neighborhood as an exciting, authentic, or exotic place to be explored by an adventurer, framing the neighborhood as an ‘urban frontier.’ They also describe neighborhoods through references to other well-known cities, illustrating the “globalizing tendencies of gentrification,” in which “global urban imaginaries” become more recognizable for the cosmopolitan middle-class than particular places (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 563). The messaging carries a sense of urgency, warning the reader not to miss out before the place loses its ‘authenticity’ to gentrification, as “the frontier will keep moving” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 563). Hosts simultaneously negate and play up racial stereotypes through exoticizing narratives that “tell a story using poverty, drugs, and crime as attractive, edgy, and authentic elements” as implicit in the story of the urban frontier (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 564).

The authors’ findings are helpful in understanding how colonial discourses, especially the exoticization of racialized difference, are used to commodify historically

Black places. They argue that the city has become a “marketplace within which *place* is consumed like any other postindustrial product” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 554).

“This requires a construction of consumer tastes to enable extraction of profit from urban land: real estate developers are known to manipulate cultural symbols of the industrial past of a factory building they wish to convert into an office park or art gallery, as cultural symbols and representations affect the ability to attract capital and new residents... These representations of place have a material impact.” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 556)

The way the city becomes commodified also affects ideas of who does and does not belong. In addition to physical displacement, cultural displacement occurs when neighborhoods are changing so deeply they are no longer recognizable to their residents.

Gentrification discourses “fit into a long history of tailoring racial stereotypes to fit the specific needs of colonial policies” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 566). The authors argue that what is being colonized today is the idea of “accumulation by cultural dispossession”: urban pioneers extract “cultural authenticity” for their own growth, consuming and objectifying the “authenticity found in the suffering” of marginalized people (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 567). This cultural neocolonialism dehumanizes the Black resident as colonial subject. In this process exists both “subtle” and “blatant” racism: “the former allowing [historically Black] neighborhoods to be marketed as hip and attractive, while the latter legitimizes the displacement of previous residents” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 567). Gentrification is not ‘natural’: postindustrial commodification destroys the unique and local, so “capital needs to find ways to maintain its supply of the uniqueness” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 567). Thus, “consumer tastes in gentrifying neighborhoods... are constructed to enable extraction of profit from urban land: emphasizing the conjoined racial processes of property making and property taking” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 568-9).

I use the ‘urban frontier’ lens to highlight this pervasive narrative that appears throughout the real estate texts, whether in representations of Turner’s frontier myth or understandings of the city as a ‘frontier’ and consumable space. While this lens does not think-from-Oakland, it offers a critique of the universalization of the ‘urban frontier’ by gentrification actors. Therefore, I do not see it as a generic ‘gentrification theory’ but rather a theory of studying and critiquing universalized representations.

### 3.3 Post-Development

Escobar's (1995) post-development challenges the common-sense assumption of 'development' as a naturalized process toward an unquestioned, neutral state of 'advancement.' The ways we understand 'development' have been shaped by the project of modernity, which has always furthered a "regime of order and truth... reflected in an objectivist and empiricist stand" in which certain people are constructed as "Other" (Escobar 1995: 8). Our understandings of 'development' have emerged from a dominant, colonizing Western epistemic tradition, and our understandings have been politically constructed to further those ways of knowing-being.

Through this modern logic, the Global North (or 'developed,' 'First-World' places) uses the concept of 'development' to discursively define the Global South (or 'developing,' 'Third-World' places) as backward, inferior, and lacking—and thus in need of complying with the North's rational progress. 'Development' is conceptualized as a linear path toward 'advancement.' This hegemonic imagining of certain geographies as 'underdeveloped' justifies intervention, Eurocentrism, and (neo)liberal ways of thinking, allowing 'developed' geographies to profit through political/economic intervention that attempts to rebuild 'developing' places in the image of the 'developed' world. This also serves to co-construct and affirm the North as advanced, superior, and progressive through its dialectical opposition to the South. 'Development' (and the Western epistemes it affirms and propagates) comes to be seen as "*the truth*" rather than a power-laden discourse that *produces* "truths" (Escobar 1995: 20). In this regard, 'development' functions quite similarly to colonial discourses of 'civilizing'; both assume the common-sense 'good' of Enlightenment 'progress' and are used to further political and economic projects.

Post-development invites us to think beyond modernity's logic of the primacy of development and economy that, through political processes, has become regarded as a common-sense belief. I draw from post-development to challenge unquestioned 'development' logic in narratives of (re)building, investment, and capitalocentrism. This allows me to see how West Oakland is constructed as 'developing' toward the 'development' goal of San Francisco, and how its 'underdevelopment' is used as a justification for neoliberal profit-generating exercises.

### 3.4 Pluriversal Ontological Politics

Escobar (2016) describes how Euro-modernity has become defined as the One-World World (OWW), in which there is only one way of understanding “the” world: along “capitalist, rationalist, liberal, secular, patriarchal, white” ways of thinking (Escobar 2016: 15). This process, in which “power-laden practices” bring “into being a particular world or ontology,” means that entire other worlds are silenced as the OWW becomes seen as the common-sense understanding of “the way things are” rather than “the result of particular practices and historical choices” (Escobar 2016: 21). Interruptions, disruptions, and “emergences” of other ways of thinking-being-feeling are thus ontological struggles to maintain a pluriverse, or as the Zapatistas described, “*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*, a world where many worlds fit” (Escobar 2016: 15, 20).

An important component of a political ontology and pluriversal studies approach is an understanding of “the conditions by which the OWW continues to maintain its dominance” (Escobar 2016: 22). My research seeks to challenge hegemonic discourses about ways of living and inhabiting found in real estate texts, thereby working to elucidate a process through which the OWW maintains itself through neoliberal values of home.

### 3.5 Gender

Lugones (2008) describes how gender has been a formative social tool of domination, shaping colonial processes of violence and difference. Despite historical multiplicities of gender/sex understandings, the dominant way of thinking has become the gender order of western Europe that was created and imposed through colonialism, establishing gender as an organizing principle and “a tool of domination that designates two binarily opposed and hierarchical social categories” that defined women “in relation to men, the norm” (Lugones 2008: 8). Racial inferiorization and gender subordination were interwoven, with race and gender made to be interrelated forms of social order that have affected “the production of knowledge... the very conception of reality at every level” (Lugones 2008: 11). Through the construction of white women as ‘pure,’ men of color became seen as “a threat to white women” and women of color “over sexualized and thus undeserving of the social and sexual protection accorded to white middleclass women” (Espiritu cited in Lugones 2008: 15).

The Eurocentric gender order was used to define the colonizer as a dominant, strong, superior ‘self’ through construction of the racialized and gendered ‘Other’ (Wekker

2014; Tosh 2004). The masculinity of the colonizers became “affirmed and celebrated” through violence against and inferiorization of colonized subjects (Tosh 2004: 53). Wekker describes how the exoticizing of the colonial ‘Other’ enabled the metropole to define itself relationally. The metropole’s “ideas about a healthy, vigorous, bourgeois body, full of self-mastery and self-control” were “predicated upon racialized, sexualized other bodies” (Wekker 2014: 170). This allowed the metropole to establish the individual “self” in opposition to the ‘Other,’ which was necessary due to the “ever-threatened, anxious superiority of the white self” that “needed to be strengthened incessantly” through acts of violence against the ‘Other’ (Wekker 2014: 170). Wekker conceptualizes the hegemonic form of masculinity as an ‘individual self’ imagined in opposition to the colonial and racialized, sexualized (and gendered) body. A white masculinity is defined as the superior norm against the inferior ‘Other.’

Through the masculinities framework, Connell (1995) conceptualizes our lives as continually shaped by this imposed, naturalized gender order. While masculinity and femininity are defined in relation to each other; there are multiple masculinities constructed relationally. Hegemonic masculinity is defined in opposition to feminized or homosexual (‘subordinate’) and racialized (‘marginalized’) masculinities; thus, we can understand it as a white heteromascularity (Connell 1995). Hegemonic masculinity’s defining feature is that it becomes what most men believe is the only “way of ‘being a man’” and stands for “those masculine attributes which are most widely subscribed to—and least questioned—in a given social formation” (Tosh 2004: 44, 47). Common attributes may include strength, sexual performance, practical competence, the ability to protect women, and self-reliance, but they are always contingent on what the “politically dominant class” values and which “help to maintain its authority” (Tosh 2004: 47–48, 51). In contemporary Western society, it may be the “calculative rationality and technical expertise” of a business executive (Tosh 2004: 48).

The frontier myth also uses colonial conceptions of gender and hegemonic masculinity to construct a ‘valiant,’ conquering figure. The pioneer hero is imagined as the white, heteromascular man exemplifying rugged individualism and dominance over nature and the inferior ‘Others.’ His “sense of entitlement to land and power is unquestioned” and his violence against the colonial subjects is “legitimated by the narrative” (Paul 2014: 337). Additionally, frontier spaces themselves become seen as gendered “in a dialectical dynamic that co-constructs femininity and masculinity” (Paul 2014: 329). Frontier land is coded as feminine in “what is probably America’s oldest and most cherished fantasy: a daily reality

of harmony between man and nature based on an experience of the land as essentially feminine” (Kolodny cited in Paul 2014: 329). Feminizing the landscape “affirms the male figure as colonist, settler, and cultivator” and frames settlement as a patriarchal fantasy (Paul 2014: 329).

Bringing these theories together, I understand ‘hegemonic masculinity’ as a colonial construct of a ‘superior’ white, heteromasculine, male ‘self’ defined relationally through representations of the ‘inferior’ racialized and feminized ‘Other.’ By drawing from these gender lenses in my reading of the real estate texts, I can understand representations of hegemonic masculinity, how race and gender are co-constructed, and how the ‘feminization’ of spaces strengthens and affirms the ‘urban pioneer.’

### 3.6 Contested Inhabitations

The ways in which people inhabit, or do not inhabit, homes are political and contested. The ability of a person to inhabit, and in what way, is based on categories of identity and difference like race, gender, and class; therefore, the act of inhabiting is itself a product of long historic and systemic processes of exclusion and dominance.

Avitts (2010) identifies how the ‘staged’ house (a house that is professionally decorated prior to being shown for sale) produces the home as a capitalist object and social status symbol. The artificial, curated staged home ‘sells’ an aspirational and exclusionary upper-middle-class, white, heteronormative, and heteromasculine lifestyle, which is thus confirmed and celebrated as the U.S. social norm.

hooks (1990) describes the Black homeplace—the site of Black women’s homemaking—as a place of safety, affirmation, rest, and, thus, radical resistance to white supremacy:

“Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one’s homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world” (hooks 1990: 42).

hooks’s homeplace is the site of life-affirmation amid an inhospitable, racialized world. She argues that Black women’s homemaking is a political act because it provides a space for

Black love, respect, nurturing, affirmation, and thus healing from “many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination” (hooks 1990: 42). Challenging conceptions of women’s ‘naturalized’ domesticity, homemaking is a deliberate, radical choice made by Black women in order to resist and fight white supremacy.

While offering different perspectives, these lenses offer counter-understandings to the idea of ‘home’ and ‘inhabiting’ constructed and promoted by the OWW. I draw from them to question hegemonic, capitalocentric views of the home and inhabiting processes.



## Chapter 4 – Methodology and Methods

### 4.1 Methodology

My research seeks to read real estate texts with the goal of elucidating and making strange power-laden, normalized discourses. The figure of the storyteller, who practices active listening, critical intimacy, and using vulnerability as strength, is central to my methodology (Motta 2016). For this, I embrace strong reflexivity and relational positionality, acceptance of limitations and failures, and willingness to learn (or de-learn) from these failures. Guided by a consideration for sensing and feeling in addition to analytical perception, I often reflected on my feelings or reactions from my observations.

My ‘making-strange’ is guided by a methodological refusal of the OWW, whose dominant ontology of ‘inhabiting’ and ‘home’ I attempt to see beyond. Language is a powerful tool that shapes and asserts a hegemonic ‘reality’ that we come to know as *the* reality, rather than a multiplicity of realities. I see discourse analysis as a helpful tool in illuminating common-sense assumptions that are normalized by and maintain the ontology of the OWW.

I am guided by decolonial questionings and the possibility for decolonial futures. It is my hope that, through making strange these discourses, I can reflect with readers on how our common-sense assumptions have been constructed, and how they reflect how *we* have been constructed, as a first step toward possibilities for de-learning and healing from this way of thinking (Esteva cited in O’Donovan 2015: 532).

### Storytelling, Reflexivity, and Positionality

As part of embracing storytelling as methodology, I am conscious that the story I am telling is only *a* story of West Oakland, mediated through my own positionality, rather than *the* story.

I have a complex relation with the idea of ‘home.’ I grew up living half of the time with each of my divorced parents, neither of whom were homeowners, so my ideas of home have involved a sense of temporality and restlessness, and some questioning of belonging. While growing up, I regularly visited open houses-for-sale, where I began to recognize certain patterns that led me to create a mental catalog of real estate terms and marketing tactics. This informs my research today, as do my lived experiences. Witnessing and experiencing how capitalocentric ideas of the ‘home’ enable violence—like evictions, foreclosures, abuse from landlords, the struggle to pay rent or mortgage, and the inability

to buy one's own home due to being barred access to the real estate 'market'—has led me to view housing as a major part of socio-economic relations. In my first apartment, I was offered a 'buyout' to leave so rent could be raised. I did not feel I could afford to be loyal to my ideals, and contributed to rising rents so that I could profit individually. This became an acknowledgment of complicity.

I have tried to understand the complex power relations of West Oakland through de-essentializing those involved (although the real estate texts may rely on essentialized, binary discourses) (Crossa 2012). Power is not always clear-cut and can be leveraged in a multiplicity of ways, such as through resistance movements (like Moms 4 Housing, a group of homeless mothers and children who moved into an unoccupied, investor-owned West Oakland house, claiming that housing is a human right [Ferrari 2020]). In my attempt to de-center individual actors in systemic processes, as well as for ethical reasons, I have chosen to keep private all of the houses' addresses, real estate agent or company names, and URLs.

West Oakland is historically a working-class, Black community being gentrified largely by affluent white people. My social location as a white, middle-class person marks me as someone with privilege and power. While I position myself as anti-capitalist, feminist, and anti-colonial, I nevertheless benefit from the white supremacy that has marginalized and disempowered the neighborhood I am now studying. Therefore, I have tried to be reflexive about my positionality and role in this research, and to simultaneously reflect on my whiteness and complicity while challenging my understanding of the individual 'self.' Additionally, because I draw from the work of BIPOC writers, a trans woman, and theories on race and colonialism, I have questioned whether this is a kind of colonizing for my own use as a privileged thinker. Yet, the alternative seemed to be to give further attention and space to dominant voices and rationalities. I have attempted to remain aware of how I can draw from or be guided by these ways of thinking, rather than viewing myself as 'using' or 'employing' them.

I chose not to interview, survey, or otherwise 'study' people who are being impacted by gentrification. In this, I attempt to be guided by bell hooks, who writes here as the nonmarginalized storyteller addressing the 'Other':

"No need to hear your voice when I can talk about you better than you can speak about yourself. No need to hear your voice. Only tell me about your pain. I want to know your story. And then I will tell it back to you in a new way. Tell it back to you in such a way that it has become mine, my own. Re-

writing you, I write myself anew. I am still author, authority. I am still the colonizer, the speaking subject, and you are now at the center of my talk.” (hooks 2000: 208).

As research is inherently extractive, I decided to extract only from institutions that create and maintain power relations. To highlight some of the other important stories of Oakland without turning them into research ‘data,’ I begin the paper with a summarized version of Ali’s telling of Lloyd’s story in my introduction, and end it with a poem by an Oakland poet. I hope that, through inclusion of these stories and reflection on my positionality, my research will be useful as a critical analysis of narratives of power, and not taken as an exhaustive account of stories of the home in West Oakland.

## **Limitations**

While my goal is to elucidate the violence of language, I nevertheless have my own blind spots. Discourse analysis is a useful tool for critiquing and challenging modernity, power relations, and processes of silencing; however, through my analysis, I necessarily produce silences of my own.

The COVID-19 pandemic limited my research. Because of the digital nature of research, I was unable to choose how I moved around and experienced the space, and I had to manage with low-resolution photographs and poor video/audio quality. The unstable internet connections during live-streamed videos meant that I ended up watching most of them after they were recorded. Additionally, the house listings being hosted digitally meant that the text and photographs were subject to changes or deletions (though I archived a version of them). Yet, through all this I realized that I was, given the circumstances, experiencing this process in the same way a prospective buyer would; I began to view these challenges as part of a participant observation.

## **4.2 Methods**

Critical discourse analysis is an interpretive approach to research that understands power relations and inequality as being “enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted” by language and meaning-making (van Dijk 2001: 466). A poststructural perspective suggests that knowledges, identities, and places are ‘made’ and constantly being remade. This views discourse as constructing and impacting material realities, with the recognition that ‘reality’ is not fixed but is subject to ongoing shapings and remakings (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). Content analysis is an often-enumerative approach that uses coding and categorizing to

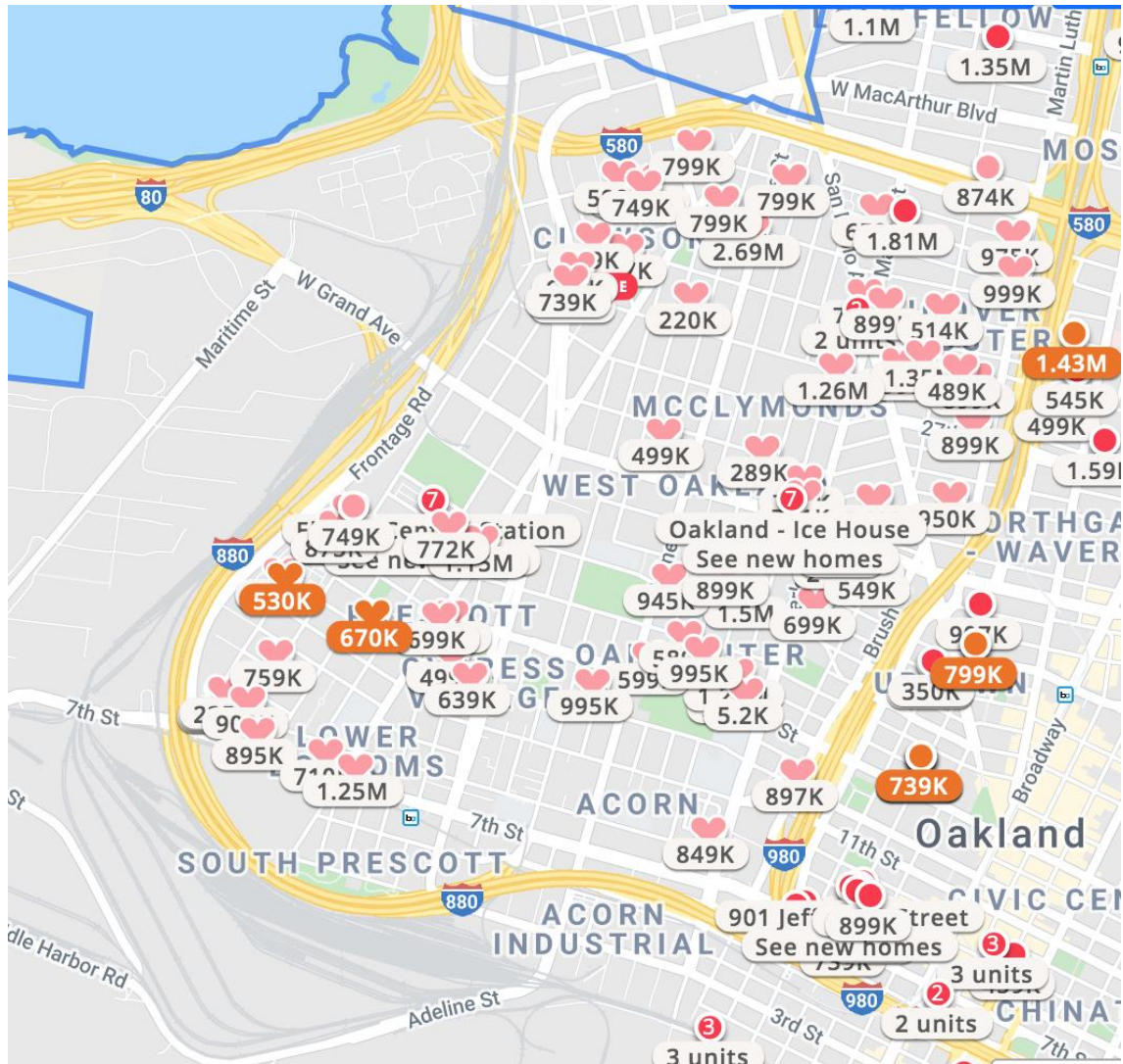
analyze a large amount of texts or corpus. Ethnographic content analysis uses thematic-cultural approaches to interpret enumerative findings, situating them in context (Grbich 2012).

## **Text Selection and Description**

I chose three types of texts for my analyses: the written advertisement of each house, photographs of each house, and video tours of all available ‘open houses.’ While all of the 150 houses had at least some written advertising language and at least one photograph (though these were at times auto-generated by the website), there were only eight houses represented in video tours, for a total of 16 tours.

There were some challenges in determining what texts to use. I included auto-generated ‘boilerplate’ written ads, though they did not feature heavily in my analyses. Some properties—usually ones being sold by development companies—had identical written advertisements and photographs. I also decided to include these: West Oakland’s landscape is increasingly dominated by corporate investment and development; in my texts, this dominance is expressed as a textual dominance.

I wanted to attend physical open houses; however, because of the pandemic, the only options were appointment-only tours or video tours. I decided to attend the video tours for ethical reasons (I’m not a real homebuyer, so I didn’t want to waste the agents’ time or increase COVID-19 exposure for either of us) and methodological reasons (I wanted the participant observation of being a casual attendee of an open house, a public event attended by multiple people and not dependent on dialogue between two parties).



**Map 4.1:** A map of the 150 houses-for-sale (with some obscured under other icons on the map). Note that West Oakland is ringed by major elevated freeways and does not include the area north of the freeway marked “580” or east of the freeway marked “980” (Zillow 2020a).

## 1. Written Advertisements:

### *Corpus Content Analysis*

I read and collected 150 written advertisements—descriptive advertising texts from Zillow—to assemble my text corpus. These were advertisements for all West Oakland houses listed as ‘for sale’ from July 11 to September 10, which included 150 properties (including single-family houses, condos, townhouses, multi-family buildings, and vacant lots).

I performed corpus content analysis of the written texts using the software MAXQDA. Guided by iteration and reflexivity in my coding, I ran multiple content analyses of word frequencies (how often certain key words appear) and collocation (how often certain words are combined), which I had visualized through word clouds and data

tables. These allowed me to understand the predominance of certain language across the 150 texts.

As I gathered and built my corpus, refined my content analysis protocols, and reread the advertisements several times, I kept notes on the most frequent or striking language to identify the major narratives. I then categorized these by narrative and used them to closely read the texts with an attention toward the main narratives I identified.

## ***2. Photographs:***

Most houses for sale are professionally ‘staged’—decorated by an interior designer—and photographed. Therefore, the photographs (included on the house listing’s Zillow page along with the written advertisements) are curated texts that transmit narratives, providing an important layer of visual analysis for my research. My visual analysis included all the photographs for the 150 houses (1–40+ for each house). I followed a similar close-reading approach as for the written ads, noting my observations, categorizing them by major narratives, and viewed them again with an attention toward these.

Some houses did not include any internal photos (such as the foreclosure houses, which sometimes just have a Google Street View photo); others (rarely) were of unstaged houses, which appear more cluttered and realistic. The more expensive a house is, the more extensive the staging and photography seems to be. Apartment buildings’ photographs focused more on external, shared, or maintenance/electrical spaces.

## ***3. Video Tours:***

Eight of the 150 houses were shown through 16 video tours (some were shown multiple times). In these tours, a real estate agent filmed a live video while ‘touring’ the house and describing its features. While these were pre-scheduled, public tours on Facebook or Instagram Live, I ‘attended’ most after they were recorded because the video quality and internet stability became poor during live viewings. While watching the video tours, I took jottings that I later turned into field notes and coded for frequent language. As with the ads and photographs, I categorized these into lists of major narratives.

## ***Synthesis***

Reading together the findings from my three text groups, I identified the major overarching narratives (and sub-narratives or examples) that I found most interesting. These included development narratives of (re)building, investment, neighborhood change, and the ‘urban

pioneer’, as well as exoticization and romanticization narratives around race and gender, urbanness, and the frontier. With an attention toward these, I again revisited the texts.

In the following two chapters, I draw from theoretical lenses like thinking-from-Oakland, the ‘urban frontier,’ post-development, and gender to analyze these narratives, attempting to elucidate the ways in which the real estate texts use colonial, racialized, and gendered discourses to commodify the home as a consumable product.

### ***Reading Notes***

- Appendix 1 contains a list of the 150 houses, coded for privacy reasons, with a guide to the codes. Appendix 2 contains a list of the video tours of open houses.
- Appendices 3 and 4 contain my corpus content analysis word frequency findings.
- Appendices 5 and 6 contain my corpus content analysis collocation findings.
- Appendices 7, 8, and 9 contain detailed lists of my findings of written ads, photographs, and video tours, respectively. These have been refined for my research focus.
- In the following chapters, I use single quotes ( ‘ ’ ) as scare quotes, to refer to a previously cited and commonly used word or phrase from my findings, and occasionally to introduce terms.
- I use double quotes ( “ ” ) to a) cite texts from my theorizations or background chapters; *or* b) cite the real estate texts. To differentiate them, the codes for the real estate texts are cited immediately after the quoted word or phrase; for example, “fixer upper” (074A).
- Quotes from the written ads retain their original grammatical or spelling errors (if any).



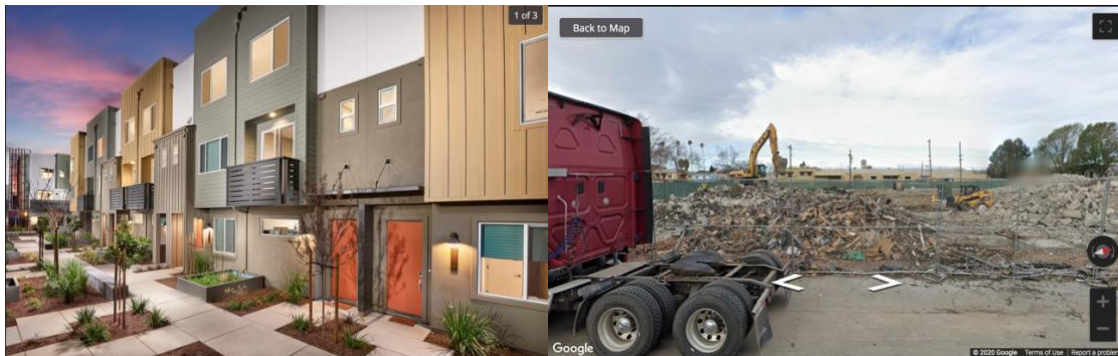
## Chapter 5 – “Up-and-Coming”: Re-imagining West Oakland Through (Re)development

One of the major narratives in the real estate texts is (re)development through ‘urban renewal’: that West Oakland is changing for the better through the influx of outside residents, investors, and capital, and the (re)building projects they bring. In this chapter, I draw from a post-development framework and an approach guided by thinking-from-Oakland to investigate racialized and gendered representations of the ‘urban frontier’ in narratives of (re)building, investment, neighborhood change, and the figure of the ‘urban pioneer.’

Because the development narratives that I identified are so intricately linked, I will present the findings of my close reading first and then provide a deeper analysis of them together in the section called “Whose Development?”

### 5.1 (Re)building

In the texts, (re)building narratives of construction and renovation define West Oakland’s ‘development.’ The influx of outsider capital is evident: one agent says that the house’s developers live in an affluent suburb and Los Angeles (130F). Written ads describe how the buyer can profit from local economic (re)development incentives (like “mixed use” zones [030A], “Opportunity Zone[s]” [035A], or “green” cannabis zones [069A]) that have created a local “Building Boom” (017A) and have made Oakland “one of the fastest growing markets in the Bay Area” (077A). Building new residential structures on spaces that don’t currently produce wealth (like a “vacant lot” [050A] or a large backyard) is seen as “a very profitable enterprise” (130E).



A new townhouse for sale and its Google Street View image (provided by Zillow) (081B)



Individual houses are also often imagined as projects of (re)development to be ‘fixed’ or ‘saved.’ For example, each house described as a “fixer upper” (074A) discursively becomes, by definition, a ‘broken’ thing in need of being ‘fixed.’ In the written texts, older houses have “opportunity” (mentioned 39 times) and “potential” (13 times) that “you don’t want to miss” (147A). A house that needs repairs is framed by written ads or video tours as something that is not yet a fully formed thing, but a “work in progress” (107D) or “your next great project” (107A)—something that needs to be saved and reimagined by someone with capital. Older houses that have been remodeled are seen as “brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century in a beautiful manner” (132D), likening (re)development with a linear timeline. Formerly industrial buildings are commonly “converted” (042A) into lofts or condos. These properties are constructed as projects for and projects of (re)development, with some (like the ‘fixer’) in need of ‘saving,’ and others (like the converted lofts or “lovingly restored” remodels [132D]) having already been ‘saved.’ Gendering the spaces is also used as a discursive tool: two houses—one that had already been (re)developed and one that is seen as needing a “makeover” (107C)—have female pronouns attached to them. Some ‘fixer’ houses provide architectural models or labeled photographs to show what the property could look like after its transformation from its current ‘deviant’ state.



House photographs contrasted with potential plans (049B)

While some houses are intended to be ‘fixed’ for resale and profit, other houses’ “potential” is to be developed into the buyer’s very own dream house—something fully, uniquely theirs (“put your own stamp on it” [107C], create your “own space in Oakland” [107C], “make this house your own” [013A]).

## 5.2 Investment

In some written ads, purchasing the house is described as an investment rather than (or in addition to) a home for the buyer to live in. The written ads discussing investment frequently use investment insider language (“the cap rate is approximately 17% and the GRM is approximately 5.5” [046A]) and describe the neighborhoods as a “market” (083A) and houses as “income” properties (070A). These ‘investment’ properties may be cheaper houses seen as needing repairs, houses that are meant for the buyer to live in but have an additional unit on the property to rent out, or multi-unit/apartment buildings. There are also foreclosure/pre-foreclosure houses, which often have a Google Street View image or another poor-quality photograph compared to the careful staging of ‘traditional’ market houses. One pre-foreclosure was the Warriors House from this paper’s introduction. Its photograph looked like it was taken out the window of a car that hadn’t bothered to stop, and the photographer didn’t bother with color-correcting the underexposed photo, which appeared to me to muddy the house’s bright colors.



**Warriors House, poorly photographed (013B)**

The amount of foreclosures and pre-foreclosures (13) in the texts shows how widespread displacement is, and draws a direct link between someone losing a house and someone buying or investing in that house for profit.

Investment texts frequently describe how a buyer can profit from reselling or renting the property or units (“you will build value” [107C]). Renters “help you subsidize how you live” (132C)—during a tour for a house with an additional attached unit, one agent says that:

“think about, you know, just renting it like twenty-five hundred a month... maybe three-thousand? That adds thirty thousand to thirty-six thousand a

year of income... it would more than cover the taxes and some of the mortgage. It makes living here much more economical... I love that kind of living, it's great to have somebody helping to support how you're living, and—and providing housing in the marketplace, 'cause Oakland is a very tight housing market.” (130F)

The landlord is seen as a benevolent figure who ‘provides’ housing, rather than one who contributes to housing scarcity and displacement. In another house, the agent describes how the future landlord will be seen as offering a “generous” (132C) rental unit that’s “rare” (132C) and desirable for tenants because it was built with “the same standards as you have upstairs” (132D).

Written ads for investment properties, especially apartment buildings, often use language that links profit-generation with the act of replacing current renters with new ones. This includes subtly dehumanizing language about the benefit of current renters leaving so that rents can be raised: one written ad boasts that a property will have “impressive upside potential upon unit turnover” (066A). In other words, it will pay off once the units are vacated and new residents move in—one reason why some written ads highlight that their units will or can be “delivered VACANT!!” (113A). Another ad, which hints that the building’s 22 apartment units can be turned into condos, says: “Please do not disturb or disclose to tenants property is on the market” (046A), suggesting that the building being sold will threaten its residents’ ability to stay there. Having the capacity to “increase rents to the market rate” (091A) is seen as an opportunity for the investor to “seize” (111A). Agents sometimes assure prospective buyers that it will be easy to attract a particular kind of ‘desirable’ renter: “this feels like an executive apartment... something in a luxury building that you would pay thousands of dollars a month for in downtown Oakland or in San Francisco” (132C). The unit is meant to attract someone with an “executive” lifestyle and budget who is from outside West Oakland, such as those moving from downtown Oakland or San Francisco.

### **5.3 Neighborhood Change**

The “impressive upside potential” of the “turnover” (066A) is also described on a larger scale, with West Oakland itself constructed as ‘developing’ for the better. It is described as in a state of change and improvement: written ads call it “thriving” (016A), “burgeoning” (069A), and “up-and-coming” (128A).

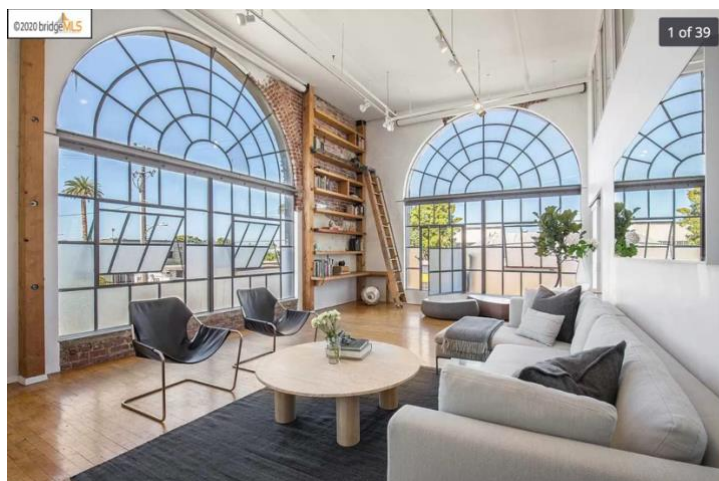
In this ‘changing’ neighborhood, newness is prized. Agents often point out new buildings nearby, such as an agent who points out the street’s “great, new houses” and “properties being remodeled” and other “houses in between” (107C). The newness of houses is also conflated with how ‘good’ their inhabitants are, as in one video tour: “As you can see across the street, we’ve got really wonderful neighbors... some new units... houses are nicely painted” (107D). This suggests that residents of older houses or houses that haven’t been recently painted are ‘bad.’

San Francisco is used to sell West Oakland, pointing to the relationship in which West Oakland is constructed as “underdeveloped” (Ramírez 2020: 147). In the photographs, six houses feature San Francisco-themed décor and imagery. This points to the relationship between the cities and the desire for real estate agents to attract current or would-be San Franciscans to West Oakland. In written ads, terms related to San Francisco and accessing it are frequent, such as “San Francisco” (appearing 29 times, almost half as often as “West Oakland”), “BART” (75 times), and “Bay Bridge” (18 times). West Oakland is also compared to San Francisco’s gentrified neighborhood SoMa, called “SOMA-style” (042A) and being similarly shortened to “WeOak” (042A).

## 5.4 The ‘Urban Pioneer’

While the buyer is often framed as an investor, houses also seek to attract a long-term resident who is buying their own home. The texts construct the buyer as an outsider figure, using language like “make your move to West Oakland” (082A), and providing information about West Oakland’s weather (132D) and local landmarks (079A). One prospective buyer asks, in a Facebook Live comment, “This house looks amazing... How’s the neighborhood?” (132F).

The texts work to attract a specific type of buyer through the construction of a particular, two-pronged lifestyle. First, the houses are marketed by promising a luxury urban lifestyle, in which the inhabitant is imagined as well-traveled and erudite (many bookshelves and several travel books), stylish (modern art and décor), creative (“a community of creative residents” [106A]), tech-savvy (“Smart home enabled” [146A]), and eco-friendly in a fashionable way (“Tesla charger” [145A]). The buyer is seen as an elite intellectual: one room is set up “as a smoking room, or a port-drinking room, or a cognac room” [112C] for sitting with friends, looking at the outdoor waterfall, and discussing “philosophy, or politics” [112C].



**Industrial loft with books, indoor plants, and entertainment space (052B)**

The second part of the lifestyle is the ‘rural’ one, which promises outdoor living (“plenty of open space for your imagination” [015A]), urban farming/homesteading (“chicken coop,” “beehive,” “drip irrigation” [125A], “raised vegetable beds” [117A]), and having something like a “farmhouse” (130C). The romanticization of farming and settlement is important; in Turner’s frontier thesis, this represented the second, garden-like West that worked to justify the violence of the conquest. In this figure, we can see the two seemingly contrasting elements of the term ‘urban pioneer,’ producing someone equally at home in idealized representations of the city and countryside, and who brings sensibilities of each—one who has the “best of both worlds” (107D).

While the West Oakland urban pioneer differs from the classical pioneer—who exemplifies traditional hegemonic masculinity—he is, I believe, the embodiment of a 21st century San Francisco Bay Area hegemonic masculinity. Shown through the texts’ curated lifestyle, he represents “those masculine attributes which are most widely subscribed to—and least questioned” in the context of an urban, tech-centric, progressive society (Tosh 2004: 47). In a gentrifying West Oakland, hegemonic masculinity must embody both the adventuring, conquering, and colonizing masculinity of the traditional pioneer who sees the ‘frontier’ as full of opportunities to be ‘seized’ (such as the female-coded house) as well as the educated, progressive, and ‘civilized’ masculinity demanded by the contemporary Bay Area tech elite. This West Oakland urban pioneer embodies Turner’s two Wests: both the violent pioneer and the peaceful, settled homesteader—each of which is vital for the myths of ‘development’ and the ‘civilizing’ mission.

## **5.5 Whose Development?**

A post-development (Escobar 1995) and ‘ghetto-metropole-colony’ (paperson 2010) lens can help elucidate how the real estate texts carry a strong development narrative to construct West Oakland as a ‘developing’ place following a modern, linear progression toward ‘development.’ The texts situate West Oakland through development discourse, relying on and maintaining assumptions of the unquestionable importance and necessity of ‘development’ as part of a linear progression to a more ‘advanced’ state (Escobar 1995).

Contextual information allows us to understand West Oakland as formerly constructed as a ‘ghetto’—a space within-but-without the Global North that is constructed as marginalized and ‘deviant’—but undergoing current gentrification that has made it be seen as more ‘desirable’ for white elites (Chamings 2020; BondGraham 2018). This former perception of West Oakland as ‘ghetto’ is supported in the texts by references to neighborhood change (for example, “up-and-coming” implies an upward and forward motion from a previously ‘down’ or ‘lower’ position) as well as racialized safety narratives (which I describe in Chapter 6). West Oakland as the ‘ghetto’ became understood as a pathologized place of violence, crime, and poverty, a place that was ‘underdeveloped’ and “irrational” and thus needing to be ‘saved’ by the Eurocentric, neoliberal rationales of ‘developed’ places (like its neighbor San Francisco), people, and capital (paperson 2010: 22; Escobar 1995). Constructing the racialized ‘ghetto’ as ‘Other’ and lacking enabled the co-construction of the white metropole as rational and safe, strengthening the “anxious superiority of the white self” through violence against the ‘Other’ (Wekker 2014: 170). Additionally, the Silicon Valley tech boom and resulting housing ‘crisis’ necessitated the expansion of ‘white pure space’ of the metropole into the ‘ghetto,’ which became, through this process, reimagined as the ‘developing’ or ‘gentrifying’ city—or “urban frontier” (Ramírez 2019; paperson 2010; Escobar 1995; Smith 1996: xvi).

The methods of ‘developing’ from ‘ghetto’ to ‘gentrified’ are explored in the texts, which also hint toward the goal of this ‘development.’ West Oakland’s current construction as ‘developing’ can be seen through the texts’ language of ‘fixing’ houses, the neighborhood being “up-and-coming” and having “great new neighbors,” and the frequent references to ‘urban renewal’ through (re)development incentives like Opportunity Zones. Further, the texts’ frequent references to San Francisco (through common décor and word frequency) point to West Oakland being positioned as “underdeveloped” in comparison (Ramírez 2020: 147). Attracting investors, capital, and residents from places like San Francisco allow West Oakland to be (re)developed in San Francisco’s image (or “SOMA-style” [042A]; therefore, urban renewal and investment are seen as the ‘development’ processes that West

Oakland needs in order to ‘progress’ toward the modern metropole of San Francisco. Embedded in this ‘development’ are the displacement narratives that go hand-in-hand with investor and urban renewal narratives (photographs of foreclosures; “VACANT” [113A]; “turnover” [066A]). These point to the colonial perception and construction of the ‘ghetto’ as a “dislocating procedure” that both contains Black communities and defines them as undesirable and in need of elimination (paperson 2010: 9).

These narratives of development, investment, and displacement are also tied to the construction of the ‘urban frontier.’ The idea of the buyer as a benevolent, outsider “urban pioneer” who represents the hegemonic masculinity of both ‘pioneering’ and ‘homesteading’ mirrors the ideas of development in Turner’s frontier myth, which imagines the frontier as a space of “discovery, conquest, and settlement” (Slotkin cited in Paul 2014: 312). West Oakland’s urban pioneer is a masculine hero of modernity and progress bringing ‘civilization’ through development processes, whether it is through ‘urban renewal’ and ‘fixing’ or ‘saving’ West Oakland’s ‘deviant’ or nonproductive spaces (like the “vacant lot” [050A] or the “fixer upper” [074A]), investing and “providing housing” (130F), or just ‘settling’ West Oakland as an “urban farmer” (125A) or someone creating their “own space in Oakland” (107C). Here, we can see what paperson calls the “violence of mercy” as the urban pioneer becomes imagined as a valiant hero bestowing ‘civilization’ and ‘development’ on the ‘backward’ frontier (paperson 2010: 25).

The use of female pronouns for the ‘fixer’ house establishes it as a feminized entity that can be saved by the hegemonic masculine urban pioneer. The feminization of this made-‘deviant’ space in a historically Black neighborhood shows the gendered and racialized construction of the ‘Other’ as backward and in need of ‘civilization’ through development (which allows for the co-construction of the white masculine ‘self’ as a hero of modernity) (Wekker 2014). Like the feminizing of the frontier, gendering the ‘fixer’ house affirms “the male figure as colonist, settler, and cultivator” (Paul 2014: 329). It also naturalizes the ‘encounter’ between him and the ‘broken’ urban space, in which his “entitlement to land and power is unquestioned” and the violence associated with his presence is legitimated (Paul 2014: 337).

In the frontier myth, the ‘civilizing act’ is done through conquest, which, while violent, is ‘necessary’ for modernity to win out and for the frontier to transform into a ‘developed’ place. Investment narratives that point out how profitable the neighborhood is for investors, especially through the lens of displacement (e.g., landlords can “increase rents” [091A], experience “impressive upside potential upon unit turnover” [066A], and



easily attract “executive” renters from affluent areas who can afford expensive rent [132C]), mirror the divisibility of land and inhabitants that Turner’s thesis manufactured. Current residents need to “be vanquished” for the urban frontier “to be ‘won,’ ‘settled,’ and ‘civilized’” (Paul 2014: 336); in other words, current tenants must be replaced by new tenants through “turnover” in order for the building and neighborhood to achieve “impressive upside potential” (066A). The current residents of West Oakland, due to their lack of access to power and capital (which the new, ‘legitimate’ residents or investors have), are thus constructed as “illegitimate” and “on the wrong side of a heroic dividing line” (Ramírez 2020: 149; Smith 1996: 16).

While traditional frontier texts openly glorified violence against Native Americans, the celebration of the violence of displacement in West Oakland real estate texts is more tacit. Additionally, the narrative of ‘redevelopment’ is used to sanitize gentrification and divorce it from the ongoing violence of racial capitalism and settler colonialism (Ramírez 2020). However, (re)development and gentrification serve as “bordering practices” that create exclusions by violent restructuring (Ramírez 2020: 148–149). While direct violence is not glorified, and the systemic violence of dispossession is obscured, displacement is still celebrated: through the language of profit to the buyer (using the depersonalizing language of ‘turnover’ and “can be delivered VACANT!!” [113A] to describe displacement without centering people being displaced) and perceived benefit to the neighborhood (painting the investor as a benevolent figure who is “providing housing” to a “tight housing market” [130F] rather than actively contributing to displacement processes). The implicit celebration of displacement as a profit-generating and ‘desirable neighborhood’-building process shows the extent to which the Eurocentric capitalist system has normalized marginalized people losing their homes while elites directly benefit. In the West Oakland texts, we see the “unquestioned acceptance and successful naturalization” of “the assumption that white people’s usurpatory presence... is justified” (Paul 2014: 338). Real estate investment necessarily carries with it the violence of displacement, which is somewhat obscured in the texts, but implicitly celebrated—and framed as necessary for ‘development’ to occur.

In sum, the texts identify ‘development’ as occurring through ‘urban renewal’ projects and the influx of outsider residents and capital; they also describe displacement as both necessary for ‘development’ (beneficial to the formerly ‘ghetto,’ “burgeoning” [069A] neighborhood) and profitable. By doing this, they implicitly identify a perceived lack of capital and the ‘backwardness’ or unsuitability of the current residents as contributing to



West Oakland's 'underdevelopment.' West Oakland's 'development' becomes seen as a process that displaces Black and working-class residents—those who are marked as less desirable via racial and class difference—while attracting white and elite outsider residents and investors (and their capital). This displacement is even celebrated as part of West Oakland's 'up-and-coming' journey. The way 'forward' is imagined as through investment that increases market value of the neighborhood, prioritizing economic development over the lived experiences of the neighborhood's actual residents. Therefore, displacement of the Black working-class should not be understood as a regrettable *outcome* or 'underside' to urban (re)development, but as a necessary, accepted, and even celebrated *practice*. West Oakland is seen as being improved by displacing Black, working-class people.

## Chapter 6 – Selling the ‘Other’: Exoticization and Romanticization

In this chapter, I trace the ways in which the real estate texts use processes of exoticization and romanticization to commodify West Oakland as a desirable place for the ‘urban pioneer.’ Drawing from the ‘urban frontier’ framework as well as a gender lens and thinking-from-Oakland, I examine how the texts ‘sell’ the ‘Other.’

### 6.1 Black History, Bodies, and Pain

#### History of West Oakland

While race isn’t explicitly mentioned in any of the written texts or video tours, West Oakland’s history (as a majority-Black neighborhood) is often referenced: “The rich west oakland history runs deep into the soul of [this house]” (015A). “Historic,” “historical,” or “history” appear 20 times in the written ads. DeFremery Park (a site of meetings and rallies for the Black Panthers) is mentioned in three written ads, and four of the houses for sale are on Pullman St., a new street in a development named after the historic Black Pullman porters. Some written ads refer to West Oakland’s musical history: a loft in the renovated Peralta Theater “harkens back to the day when West Oakland was a musical district, with night clubs and music venues” (144A), and one property is the “loved and cherished” home of Black funk drummer Zigaboo, and “already a treasure in this vibrant community” (095A). Another ad misspells ‘Flint’s Bar-B-Q’ when it offers the chance to “own a piece of Oakland history: the former home of Flint Barbeque in burgeoning West Oakland” (069A). This casual renaming is itself an example of the idea that one can “own a piece” of history—it commercializes the historical and cultural ‘value’ of the place, yet simultaneously rewrites and re-imagines what it means and what it ‘should’ be.

This appropriated Black history of West Oakland is sanitized to exclude historical and ongoing colonial racialized violence and dispossession, instead selectively painting the West Oakland of the past through its “rich” (015A) and “vibrant” (095A) history of Black music and enterprise (Ramírez 2020). Yet, through narratives of safety and security, the texts contain occasional allusions to an understanding of West Oakland’s reputation as a ‘reforming ghetto’ that was once pathologized as a source and site of crime and violence (paperson 2010). Many written ads describe the house as private and quiet or an “oasis”

(006A), as well as mentioning safety features like “security” (mentioned 8 times), “fence” (5 times), and “gated” (18 times). Photographs often show security walls or gates.

One house’s seller, who contributed to the house’s written ad, remarked that they were “pleasantly surprised to find that the neighborhood is super friendly” and that they “felt completely safe living in West Oakland” (009A). These comments are used to subvert racist and classist expectations and assure other people who are not from West Oakland that they can feel safe, too.

### **“Master” Bedroom**

In nine of the video tours, I observed that agents are trying to adapt to not use “master bedroom” (or bathroom) anymore, but they often forget (“the master—I’m sorry, the primary bedroom” [112C]), explicitly mention that they are no longer using that term (“which we are now calling *premiere* suite” [052C]), and sometimes sound sarcastic about it (052C). However, in the written ads, “master” still appears 27 times.

After George Floyd’s murder and the following Black Lives Matter protests—one of which involved a far-right white extremist killing a Black federal security guard in Oakland (Blankstein and Collins 2020)—many companies nationwide took performative measures to promote a ‘racial justice’ narrative. In the real estate industry, agents are no longer using the term “master bedroom” because it connotes slavery (Franklin 2020). This performance of supporting racial justice and decrying violence is intended to serve as a smokescreen for the real estate industry, obscuring an understanding of it as a white supremacist institution that has contributed to segregation and redlining and continues to play an active role in racial injustice through racialized narratives and practices such as gentrification and involvement with predatory lending. The changing of terms is a rhetorical and revisionary tool that capitalizes on the pain of police violence against Black people, while depicting its own racial injustice and violence as ‘in the past.’

### **Black Art and Décor Subjects**

The portrayal of Black art subjects (including Black women, which I explore below) also appear in the texts. One house’s photographs featured fake mug/arrest shots of celebrities on the wall, including Prince (105B). It was very disturbing to see arrest photos of a Black man used as décor.



**Fake celebrity mug shots, featuring Prince (105B)**

Another house's photographs show that it is decorated with numerous art pieces with Black subjects, including an older photograph of a man in a suit and jacket, a huge photograph of a child with a distressed and separated canvas so that the face is split, and an enormous, minimalistic painting of three children (112B).

The painting of three children has what looks like the Equal Housing Opportunity logo in the top corner. This reference to the federal Fair Housing Act—which made it illegal to advertise any preferences or discriminating practices in housing advertisements (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, n.d.)—is especially interesting because the house is a glaring symbol of gentrification (built in 2017, in a luxury development, and listed at well over \$1 million); additionally, in the video tour, the agent describes how the owner lives alone, despite there being four rooms that could be used as bedrooms, and one bedroom is even entirely empty of furniture. Oakland has four vacant homes for each unhoused person (Schatz 2018), and this house only having one bedroom used feels like a reflection of that. This house invokes a visible symbol of fair housing, yet its existence as part of a new development, and it being resold for such a high price, shows that it actively contributes to displacement processes in West Oakland.

## **Black Women's Bodies**

In my visual analysis of the photographs, I recognize that, due to the low-resolution of some images, the angles or distance of the art in the photographs, or the abstract nature of

some of the art, it is sometimes impossible to tell certain details of the art, such as the subject's race or ethnicity, expression, or clothing.

To the best of my abilities, I found five houses and a total of nine art pieces (some houses had more than one) of women noticeably depicted as Black. Of the women I could confirm as being clothed and having visible clothing (only three), two were wearing revealing clothing (the third was a child). The women's hair was often highlighted, with one woman having graffiti tagged all over her Afro (009B) and another serene-looking woman with an Afro surrounded by flowers (112B), depicting the hairstyle as simultaneously 'urban' and 'natural.' From what I could tell, none of the paintings or prints depicted women looking at the viewer, with all of them either shown from the back, with eyes closed, or simply without a head or face.



**Woman with Afro (009B)**

The context in which these were used (as 'marketing objects' in the house-for-sale in a gentrifying historically Black neighborhood), the fact that many of them did not have visible clothing, and that they were not looking at the viewer but were rather observed without observing 'back,' contributes to a sense of dehumanization through sexualization and exoticization of Black womanhood. For example, the image of woman with the graffitied Afro appeared in the house of the homeowner who had said they "pleasantly surprised" by how "friendly" the neighborhood was, and that they "felt completely safe" in West Oakland (009A). The contrasting of racialized 'safety' language and the portrayal of a

Black woman with a graffitied Afro shows how exoticizing practices are more about Othering than celebrating.

In the video tour for 112B, the agent says that the house was not staged, so I was interested to learn more about the seller of the house. Through an online search, I found that he is an affluent, retired Black man who is moving abroad. While I am not arguing that he himself is exoticizing the Black figures or sexualizing the Black women in the décor of his house, it is important to note that the real estate agent ‘allowed’ him to keep his regular furnishings for the showing and photographs rather than having the house staged, which is very rare in houses for sale—especially ones that are high-priced and shown as video tours (there were only two unstaged video tour houses: this house, and a house that needed major repairs and thus couldn’t be decorated to look like a ‘normal’ house). Like the real estate companies appropriate the racial history of the neighborhood, they are using these art pieces to commercialize and sell the house; therefore, it still represents a type of exoticization.

As the texts both highlight difference (by using exoticized images and histories) and negate racial stereotypes (like being “pleasantly surprised to find that the neighborhood is super friendly” [009A]), West Oakland becomes seen as a simultaneously safe and exciting, ‘authentic,’ or ‘exotic’ place for the ‘urban pioneer’ (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020). The texts tell a story using “crime as attractive, edgy, and authentic” through the (decidedly inauthentic) mugshot of Prince, playfully suggesting the danger of the racialized neighborhood (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 564). The house is constructed as a peaceful fenced ‘oasis’ surrounded by a ‘vibrant’ yet ‘dangerous’ neighborhood. In this view, danger comes from the ‘outside’ racialized residents who are stereotyped as more ‘violent,’ who become constructed as either ‘threats’ (men of color) or ‘oversexualized’ (women of color) and thus unworthy of the same protection as ‘pure’ white women (Espiritu cited in Lugones 2008). However, the use of sexualized Black women’s bodies in the houses shows that narratives of power construct and perpetuate this stereotype of ‘oversexualization.’ Black women’s bodies are commodified as marketing tools to help sell the West Oakland house, yet the displacement of actual Black women through real estate processes of gentrification is disregarded. The perception that Black women do not deserve to be protected is a tool that enables and justifies structural and direct violence—like displacement.

By performing the contemporary ‘wokeness’ of avoiding “master bedroom”; invoking a sanitized version of West Oakland’s Black history; portraying Black bodies as

decor; or exoticizing Black women, the texts work to manipulate “cultural symbols and representations” in order “to attract capital and new residents” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 556). The texts use language that commodifies spaces as cultural symbols—like Zigaboo’s house as a local “treasure” (095A)—rendering these spaces, and the ‘authenticity’ that they carry, ‘ownable.’ Buying a house in West Oakland offers the ‘urban pioneer’ access to extraction of the neighborhood’s ‘culture’ and ‘authenticity.’ The exoticization and commodification of Black history, bodies, and pain in real estate narratives in West Oakland can be understood as part of colonial discourse that uses exoticization to re-imagine the Black urban community as an experience or place for outsiders’ consumption (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020).

## 6.2 The Urban and Industrial

Another common narrative in the texts is the romanticization of West Oakland’s urbanness and industrial history. Frequent terms in the written ads are “urban” (12 times), “city” (21 times), “industrial” (8 times), and “loft” (43 times). West Oakland is seen as “super urban” (107C) with houses that push “the boundaries of the conventional home” (147A) by offering “authenticity and style” (115A), “industrial edge” (067A), and an “idyllic urban lifestyle” (138A). This romanticization of West Oakland’s industrial history and urbanness, which are directly tied to the area’s working-class background, is an example of “real estate developers [manipulating] cultural symbols of the industrial past” to lure newcomers and capital (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 556).

West Oakland is often constructed as ‘urban’ through relation to other, more recognizable urban places. The photographs often depict other parts of Oakland (like in a staged house’s art of the Port of Oakland and Grand Lake Theater [003B] and marketing photos that show the Oakland hills, included with a house’s interior photos [055B]), using their more conventionally ‘attractive’ features as selling points for Oakland as a whole. The visual depictions of West Oakland—specific décor are limited to what appear to be historic documents from Pacific Cannery, which has now been turned into lofts (037B), and a print of Oakland Central Station, which is a future development project (109B)—the West Oakland of the past and future, not one that exists today. The exoticization of other cities, and ‘the urban’ as a romanticized imaginary, is also widespread: an agent describes a house as having “New York flavor” (105C); 27 houses use imagery of cities like San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, and Paris as décor elements; and graffiti is included and celebrated in exterior photos of five houses. This romanticization of a generic ‘urban’ shows how the

“globalizing tendencies” of the institutions and processes involved in gentrification work against places-as-particular to create a global urban imaginary that is recognizable to the cosmopolitan middle class (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 563). Here, gentrification works as an expression of modernity and the One-World World, threatening place-based understandings by transforming a local and particular West Oakland into a global and blandly urban one.

One house had a book about “vanishing Americana” and photographs of things that are ‘disappearing’ from the U.S. (094B), which was interesting to see in an area undergoing redevelopment and displacement: is West Oakland a part of this? This book points to how the construction of the ‘urban frontier’ relies on a narrative that the unique and exceptional ‘authenticity’ of the gentrifying neighborhood will soon disappear—yet, the solution for white outsider elites is not to refuse gentrification, but rather to act fast before the “opportunity” is gone forever; in other words, “the frontier will keep moving” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 563).

### 6.3 Frontier Décor

While West Oakland’s ‘urbanness’ is celebrated, the texts also often use U.S. West-themed décor. Part of the exoticization of the urban frontier is through the use of frontier imagery and discourses in the gentrifying neighborhood. Because “frontier is a style as much as a place,” Smith identifies “desert decor” and “cowboy chic” being “woven into the same urban landscapes of consumption” in gentrification (Smith 1996: 14). The West Oakland house for sale—one of the most visible “urban landscapes of consumption”—has numerous examples of this (Smith 1996: 14).

The photographs show that staged houses are frequently decorated with U.S. West-themed objects, like art of cactuses and succulents (in 63 houses), feathers (9 houses), horses (6 houses), and rugged or pastoral Western landscapes and highways (6 houses). Other frequent décor that invokes the frontier are trophy hunting-themed decorations, like animal-skin rugs (in 17 houses); animal-skin blankets, pillows, or cushions (18 houses); and animal skulls or wall-mounted heads (3 houses). Additionally, four houses feature some farming motifs, like milk pails or farm crates.





**Rural dance-hall sign, cowskin rug, and decorative gourds (061B)**

The exoticization of the ‘frontier’ and indigenous people (symbolized by natural Western landscapes, cactuses, and feathers) and the romanticization of settler colonialism (symbolized by horses, trophy hunting, and farming) exist concurrently in these real estate texts, offering a metaphoric representation of the frontier as perceived by Turner to be a liminal “meeting point between savagery and civilization” (Turner cited in Paul 2014: 323). In these symbols of the frontier exist a long history of pain and violence, yet their frequent usage shows that they have become normalized as seemingly ‘apolitical’ objects and can be employed as trendy design choices. The violence of the frontier is not hidden, but it does not need to be—it has become unquestioned through its role as “shared knowledge” (Paul 2014: 338).

The exoticization of West Oakland’s ‘Blackness,’ ‘industrialness,’ and ‘urbaness’ translates into a representation of an place that “has a material impact” based on the “construction of consumer tastes to enable extraction of profit from urban land” (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020: 556). Through this representation, West Oakland becomes conceived of as an imagined place: “an exoticized site of the black Other” and “an idealized place of authenticity” but also, through commodification and gentrification’s globalizing processes, a “horizon of cosmopolitan desire” (paperson 2010: 18). Additionally, the real estate texts utilize colonial discourse (including frontier décor) to attract ‘urban pioneers’ who are made to feel a sense of urgency about losing out on opportunities in West Oakland (a sort of neocolonial FOMO, or ‘fear of missing out’ heightened by social media self-documentation), as well as a deep need for the extraction of ‘authenticity’ through

consumption and objectification of the experiences and places of marginalized people. Therefore, the ‘urban pioneer’ is called to ‘seize’ the opportunity to “own a piece of Oakland history” (069A). The real estate texts rely on colonial/frontier discourses to both exoticize the people and history of West Oakland—inasmuch as they can be used to commodify houses in the neighborhood—and romanticize historic violence through familiar cultural symbols of the frontier. These discourses work to attract new residents and their capital through the selling of the ‘Other’ and the confirming of a white settler exceptionalism through unquestioned allusions to the frontier myth. In short, the texts implicitly promote a neocolonialism of people and places outside the (white, middle-class) ‘norm.’

This neocolonial process produces material and embodied effects on the lived experiences of inhabitants beyond physical displacement. The struggle “for the right to remain in one’s home, in one’s community—the right to live and thrive in place” is experienced in a multiplicity of ways (Ramírez 2020: 152). The city becomes commodified in a way that affects ideas of (dis)belonging, such as through cultural displacement (in which the neighborhood changes so quickly it is no longer recognizable) and destruction of one’s sense of place (through the racialized dispossession and “enforced placelessness” normalized by “plantation logic”) (Törnberg and Chiappini 2020; Ramírez 2020: 150).

The use of Black women’s bodies as housing advertisements is an especially violent example of the violence of commodification. Understanding the homeplace as a site of resistance—the only place away from the external world’s white supremacy, and where Black women’s homemaking is a radical act of deep love and affirmation—we can see gentrification as the encroachment of white supremacy and plantation logic in the homeplace (hooks 1995). The homeplace, then, becomes threatened by the physical and cultural displacement in which “sense of place is being annihilated in Oakland” (Ramírez 2020: 157). Through the marketing of West Oakland as consumable, the site of the homeplace becomes a commodity but also—as an existing house predating West Oakland’s current gentrification—something deviant that must be ‘fixed’ through white supremacist, capitalocentric (re)development. Black women’s homemaking is threatened by gentrification’s processes of home-taking that are justified by modernity’s racialized and gendered logic.

## Chapter 7 – Conclusion

In this paper, I have used discourse analysis to ‘make strange’ the ‘mundane,’ everyday language of the real estate industry in West Oakland. My goal has been to elucidate how the real estate texts produce colonial, racialized, and gendered narratives in their use of ‘urban frontier’ discourses of gentrification-as-development and commodification of the ‘Other.’

Language around (re)building, investment, neighborhood change, and the ‘urban pioneer’ constructs West Oakland as a former ‘ghetto’ that is currently ‘developing’ through gentrification. The influx of elite residents and capital is celebrated, as is the outsider, hegemonic masculine figure of the ‘urban pioneer,’ whose ‘civilizing’ presence is framed as beneficial to the neighborhood. These narratives use colonial and racialized language of ‘development’ and ‘ghetto’ to affirm and promote the white, elite urban pioneer as ‘superior’ in relation to the Black, working-class residents. In addition, the racialized displacement of West Oakland’s current residents is itself celebrated as a necessary practice toward ‘development.’

Exoticizing and romanticizing language is used to commodify West Oakland as a marketplace, where ‘culture’ and ‘authenticity’ (regarded as a unique quality of marginalized people) can be consumed. West Oakland’s historic Blackness and urbanness are exoticized, transformed into cultural symbols that attract the ‘urban pioneer’ figure through the promise of an edgy and generically urban lifestyle. Meanwhile, the texts romanticize colonial violence through use of frontier imagery. These commodifying processes use the exoticized ‘Other’ and romanticized settler colonialism to attract new residents and capital.

These representations have harmful consequences. They maintain colonial hierarchies of power through the construction of the superiority of the white/masculine ‘self’ from the ‘developed’ metropole to the Black/feminine ‘Other’ from the ‘underdeveloped’ (or ‘developing’) ‘ghetto.’ As West Oakland becomes commodified, and the urban pioneer is called to ‘seize’ the opportunity to “own” part of Oakland (069A), the question of who does and doesn’t belong becomes increasingly tied to what types of people are regarded as valuable in a Euro-capitalocentric society. In favor of profit-generation and normative ways of inhabiting, the narratives legitimate and normalize violences against Black, working-class people, from physical displacement to cultural displacement, ideas of disbelonging, and destruction of one’s sense of place.

In the real estate texts, development and frontier narratives are harnessed for financial gain, using colonial language to ‘sell’ West Oakland in a profitable and racially

unjust way. While the urban pioneer becomes the protagonist of these texts, he is not the storyteller. The focus on his rugged individualism obscures the institutions that construct, maintain, and benefit from the ‘urban frontier,’ like the real estate industry, development companies, and state. However, it would be reductive to claim that these institutions’ discourses are intentional in their celebration of the violence of the frontier myth, which has become familiar to the point of mundanity. Rather, we can understand the ingrained, common-sense assumptions of the frontier as an expression of the white, capitalocentric, patriarchal One-World World. It is important to recognize this myth as the incredibly powerful discourse that it is: a definition and affirmation of U.S. national identity and exceptionalism—one that has perhaps shaped ideas of *our* selves.

## Toward a Radical Inhabiting

Following my making strange the discourses explored in this paper, I invite readers to reflect on how not only our perceptions of the world, but also *we*, have been constructed (Esteva cited in O'Donovan 2015). What is it that we have learned through *the* world? What must we de-learn?

I see the next steps of this research as a transition that seeks to de-learn our understandings of inhabiting. Inspired by D'Emilia and Chávez's (2015) Radical Tenderness Manifesto, I have previously outlined my introductory thoughts on this, which I expand upon here (Van Amburg 2020). This transition is, at core, a refusal of the OWW through a de-learning and refusal of the violent narratives in West Oakland real estate texts, which are obscured by normalized modern and neoliberal ways of thinking. For those of us who are white U.S. Americans, for whom consuming consumes our lives, a refusal of the OWW means questioning how we consume land, home, and more, by asking ourselves: *who* or *what* are we consuming when we consume? How are our senses of individual 'self' and satisfaction tied to the suffering of others through our consumption? By refusing the OWW, we can see other ways of living—ones that are not based on the consumption of someone or something.

These other ways of living already exist, yet the OWW continually seeks to erase them through its singular ontology. Other ontologies are already making themselves known as “emergences” of other ways of thinking-being-feeling, such as through resistance to gentrification in West Oakland (Escobar 2016: 15). My research has focused on “exercises of power” through hegemonic discourse, but in Oakland—a space of “competing discourses”—there are concurrent “practices of freedom,” like living and dreaming (paperson 2010: 7). Oakland is a space of contested geographies and meaning-making, in which there are emergences around a black spatial imaginary of solidarity, the brown commons, and decolonizing the ‘ghetto’ school (Ramírez 2020; paperson 2010). By refusing hegemonic, neoliberal values of home and property—one of the processes through which the OWW maintains itself—we refuse the OWW, and thus recognize and make space for a pluriverse, a world where many worlds fit.

Instead of seeing these worlds as worlds to conquer, erase, or ‘fix,’ we can understand them through ‘world traveling’ as an act of playfulness and loving. Through this, we can travel to worlds that we do not inhabit or that we are not fluent in, as an act of

love to those who are of those worlds, and a way to understand “what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes” (Lugones 1987: 17). World traveling means being open to sharing, surprise, and bearing witness with others as we begin to know ourselves relationally, as plural selves. By world traveling, we also begin to understand ourselves: “only when we have traveled to each other’s ‘worlds’ are we fully subjects to each other” (Lugones 1987: 17).

The goal of this transition is, I believe, a form of healing. Those of us who are white U.S. Americans do not experience the colonial wound in the same way as the colonized subject and racialized body. However,

“we are wounded in a different way, as we become molded and shaped into beings of casual violence, those who inflict. Our psychic wounding—the one that scalpels and sutures our selves into individuals with a rational mind, a consuming body, an unquestioning heart—is what enables us to wound others. How have we been wounded to think in ways that compel us to ignore the colonial wound, or perceive it as a relic, an already-healed-over scar? What if we worked to see West Oakland as an open wound, as a borderlands (Ramírez 2020)? As part of the modern capitalist rhetoric that acts as our dissecting surgeon, real estate narratives—like a cheap home renovation—seek to mask West Oakland’s wound, whitewashing violence and tension and claiming that gentrification is part of the neighborhood’s healing rather than its continual wounding. These narratives are themselves part of the wounding that they try to hide.” (Van Amburg 2020)

Healing is a process that requires an investigation of the OWW and a refusal and de-learning of its monological, capitalocentric, extractive, Eurosupremacist, patriarchal ‘world’ through the embracing of pluriversal ontologies and a world traveling based on love. This healing from an unquestioned state of consuming allows us to rethink how we understand inhabiting, toward what I am calling ‘radical inhabiting.’

*Radical inhabiting is looking out the window and seeing home.*

*Is not wanting to rewrite stories you don’t understand.*

*Is listening to the sounds of places you’re not from.*

*Radical inhabiting is saying no to the home-turned-commodity.*

*Radical inhabiting is learning how you have consumed*

*and have been consumed, too.*

*Sometimes we consume for survival, but sometimes,*

*as my stepfather would say, it is purely recreational eating.*

*Radical inhabiting is resisting the urge to put something in your mouth  
and bite down*

*when you're not even hungry.*

*Radical inhabiting is fighting for your home,*

*for your neighbors, for the world you inhabit,*

*whether or not it affects you-as-individual.*

*Is recognizing you are sometimes*

*problem, not solution.*

*Radical inhabiting is learning to tend your home with care for others.*

*Is learning languages you never knew existed.*

*Is understanding why the train wakes you up at night;*

*why the highway cuts and shadows your neighborhood.*

*Is learning a place as music instead of noise.*

*Radical inhabiting is a way of living and being that does not wound,*

*but that sees the wound and kisses it.*

*Radical inhabiting is a Commoning, a convivial caring-together.*

*Is a stewardship, not an ownership.*

*Is knowing you don't own the land and you never can,*

*but it is a part of you and you are a part of it.*

*(Van Amburg 2020)*

## **Afterword: “Love Poem to Oakland”**

by Leila Mottley (2018 Oakland Youth Poet Laureate)

Dear Oakland,  
last night I got off a plane  
rolled my neck  
felt it crack  
and said,  
Honey,  
I’m home  
Said  
baby  
I ain’t gonna leave you again:  
This is my love letter,  
This is my spilling over,  
waxed, mural of a song to you.  
My prayer to the Panthers,  
to the Everett and Jones on MacArthur  
that smell so good  
got that rubber chew of a home too far  
That sweet spice  
of my city.

Oakland,  
can I cradle you  
like my daddy cradled me?  
Hold you tight,  
say  
baby, I got you.  
Tough love,  
say  
Fix yo face ‘fore I fix it for you  
Fix these streets ‘fore I fix ‘em for you  
Where did all the color go?  
Where did all my sweat laced church clappin  
handin out pies on High Street men go?  
My sisters with their gloves on,  
with their afros out,  
Don’t care if they’re afraid of us  
cuz we got these streets  
We got this lake  
We got fruitvale station at five pm  
when the music starts



Dear Downtown,  
what I gotta say  
to make you love me?  
What i gotta do  
to strip uptown back?  
If I can't have this hair, this skin,  
then I don't want no five dollar coffee  
No ten dollar cobbe salad  
piled up with all this talk 'bout how we been "criminals," been scared straight  
to they can feed us back our shame.

East Oakland,  
I know you ain't forgotten about me.  
I know you been waitin for my tongue to click  
Gums to throat to lungs  
Scream til the bay dries up.  
I know you been sittin on your heels,  
for me to find the key to the Alameda Detention Hall,  
tell your kids that mama hasn't forgotten about you,  
hasn't left you chained from your childhood.  
Mama been at work,  
been waiting to set us free,  
to give us back our city.

Oakland,  
I'm talkin to you:  
Dimond to Laurel to Uptown to Chinatown to Fruitvale to Foothill to Temescal to  
Eastmonte to West  
Oakland  
We're ten steps from home, a mile, we racin', they been displacin':  
our bodies, our words, our letters  
been trying to tear us apart  
But I know you been lovin us  
Been whisperin' our history  
Black Panthers to White Horse to BART at night,  
Oakland,  
We're fightin' home  
We're clawin' home  
We're comin' home.

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: List of Houses

**Codes:** Each house is listed by a three-digit code that is associated with a distinct house. In the body of the paper, a letter is added to the end of that code to designate the type of text being referenced. For example, “A” is the written ad, “B” is the photographs, and some houses have a “C” and further letters for video tours.

**Note:** One house was posted on Zillow twice, so I ‘collected’ it twice. It was an interesting artifact because each listing of it was slightly different. It appears here as two separate entries.

001

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

002

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

003

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

004

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

005

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

006

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

007

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

008

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

009

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 010  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 011  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 012  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 013  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 014  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 015  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 016  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 017  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 018  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 019  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 020  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 021  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 022  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 023
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 024
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 025
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 026
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 027
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 028
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 029
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 030
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 031
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 032
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 033
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 034
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 035
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 036
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 037
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 038
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 039
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 040
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 041
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 045
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 046
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 047
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 048
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 049
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 050
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 051
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 052
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
  - C. Video tour, Instagram Live. Company 2, Agent 2A
- 053
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 054
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 055
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 056
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 057
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 058
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 059
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 060
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 061
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 062  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 063  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 064  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 073  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 074  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 075  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 076  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 077  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 078  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 079  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 080  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 081  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 082  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 083  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 084  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 085  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 086  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 087  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com



- 088  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 089  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 090  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 091  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 092  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 093  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
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A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
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- 095  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 096  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 097  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 098  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 099  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 100  
A. Written ad, Zillow.com  
B. Photographs, Zillow.com

- 101
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 102
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 103
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 104
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 105
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
  - C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
  - D. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- 106
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 107
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
  - C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 3, Agent 3A
  - D. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 4, Agent 4A
- 108
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 109
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 110
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 111
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- 112
- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
  - B. Photographs, Zillow.com

C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A

113

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

114

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

115

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

116

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com

B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

127

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

128

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

129

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

130

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- D. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1B
- E. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- F. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A

131

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

132

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- D. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- E. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A
- F. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1B

133

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

134

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

135

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

136

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com

B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

138

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

140

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

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- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

142

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

143

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

144

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- C. Video tour, Facebook Live. Company 1, Agent 1A

145

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

146

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

147

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

148

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

149

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com
- C. Video tour, Instagram Live. Company 2, Agent 2A

150

- A. Written ad, Zillow.com
- B. Photographs, Zillow.com

## Appendix 2: List of Video Tours of Open Houses

House code	Price	Type of house	Neighborhood	Times shown*
105	\$899,000	Brand-new, single-family home	Lower Bottoms/Prescott	2
112	\$1,095,000	A few years' old condo in a new development	Prescott	1
052	\$1,175,000	Loft in a converted warehouse	Ralph Bunche	1
013	\$899,000	Restored Queen Anne Victorian with ADU**	Hoover Foster	4 (3 times from 1 agent, 1 time from a second agent)
130	\$899,000	Victorian-style cottage duplex (or with ADU)	Ralph Bunche	4 (3 times from 1 agent, 1 time from a second agent)
107	\$550,000	Victorian fixer-upper	Prescott	2 (1 time each from 2 agents)
149	\$749,000	Victorian bungalow/cottage	Clawson/Dogtown	1
043	\$699,000	Loft-style condo in converted historic Peralta Theater	Prescott	1

\* This amount refers to times it was shown *during* my period of collection. There have been additional later videos of some of these houses that are not included in this research.

\*\* Accessory Dwelling Unit

Appendix 3: Word Frequency – Word Cloud (50 most frequent words)





#### Appendix 4: Word Frequency – Table (61 most frequent words)

Word	Word length	Frequency	%	Rank	Documents	Documents %
home	4	181	1.81	1	86	57.33
oakland	7	177	1.77	2	99	66.00
sale	4	147	1.47	3	136	90.67
new	3	101	1.01	4	42	28.00
space	5	95	0.95	5	56	37.33
located	7	88	0.88	6	65	43.33
bart	4	75	0.75	7	70	46.67
west	4	74	0.74	8	58	38.67
unit	4	71	0.71	9	43	28.67
open	4	69	0.69	10	55	36.67
living	6	66	0.66	11	51	34.00
features	8	53	0.53	12	46	30.67
house	5	51	0.51	13	29	19.33
downtown	8	48	0.48	14	38	25.33
property	8	48	0.48	14	28	18.67
great	5	47	0.47	16	37	24.67
large	5	46	0.46	17	32	21.33
area	4	45	0.45	18	32	21.33
appliances	10	44	0.44	19	43	28.67
loft	4	43	0.43	20	21	14.00
access	6	41	0.41	21	38	25.33
units	5	41	0.41	21	32	21.33
parking	7	40	0.40	23	38	25.33
ceilings	8	39	0.39	24	39	26.00
opportunity	11	39	0.39	24	31	20.67
light	5	38	0.38	26	35	23.33
modern	6	38	0.38	26	36	24.00
plan	4	37	0.37	28	34	22.67
windows	7	37	0.37	28	35	23.33
community	9	35	0.35	30	31	20.67
garage	6	35	0.35	30	29	19.33
live	4	35	0.35	30	27	18.00
private	7	35	0.35	30	32	21.33
perfect	7	34	0.34	34	27	18.00
stainless	9	34	0.34	34	32	21.33
bay	3	33	0.33	36	22	14.67
street	6	33	0.33	36	29	19.33
building	8	32	0.32	38	22	14.67
close	5	32	0.32	38	30	20.00
easy	4	32	0.32	38	28	18.67
steel	5	30	0.30	41	27	18.00
work	4	30	0.30	41	22	14.67
location	8	28	0.28	43	23	15.33
updated	7	28	0.28	43	23	15.33
master	6	27	0.27	45	21	14.00
beautiful	9	26	0.26	46	22	14.67
high	4	26	0.26	46	26	17.33
natural	7	26	0.26	46	25	16.67
spacious	8	26	0.26	46	25	16.67
storage	7	26	0.26	46	24	16.00
entertainment	13	25	0.25	51	19	12.67
upstairs	8	25	0.25	51	19	12.67
closet	6	24	0.24	53	23	15.33
dryer	5	24	0.24	53	24	16.00
flooring	8	24	0.24	53	22	14.67
minutes	7	24	0.24	53	19	12.67
offers	6	24	0.24	53	21	14.00
own	3	24	0.24	53	22	14.67
washer	6	24	0.24	53	24	16.00
family	6	23	0.23	60	21	14.00
freeways	8	23	0.23	60	23	15.33

Appendix 5: Collocation – Word Cloud (35 most frequent word combinations)



## Appendix 6: Collocation – Table (61 most frequent word combinations)

Word combination	Words	Frequency	%	Rank	Documents	Documents %
west oakland	2	70	0.85	1	54	36.00
san francisco	2	29	0.35	2	27	18.00
downtown oakland	2	25	0.31	3	25	16.67
floor plan	2	25	0.31	3	22	14.67
stainless steel	2	23	0.28	5	22	14.67
natural light	2	21	0.26	6	21	14.00
bay bridge	2	18	0.22	7	16	10.67
hardwood floors	2	18	0.22	7	18	12.00
live work	2	18	0.22	7	14	9.33
easy access	2	17	0.21	10	17	11.33
open concept	2	17	0.21	10	17	11.33
high ceilings	2	16	0.20	12	16	10.67
living space	2	16	0.20	12	14	9.33
conveniently located	2	15	0.18	14	15	10.00
open kitchen	2	14	0.17	15	14	9.33
located near	2	13	0.16	16	13	8.67
washer dryer	2	13	0.16	16	13	8.67
home value	2	12	0.15	18	12	8.00
concrete floors	2	11	0.13	19	11	7.33
dining area	2	9	0.11	20	9	6.00
master bedroom	2	9	0.11	20	9	6.00
parking space	2	9	0.11	20	9	6.00
your new	2	9	0.11	20	8	5.33
brand new	2	8	0.10	24	5	3.33
contemporary finishes	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
eclectic mix	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
gated community	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
home office	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
in-unit washer	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
quartz countertops	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
retail spaces	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
single family	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
walk-in closet	2	8	0.10	24	8	5.33
entertainment space	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
events restaurants	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
family home	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
home features	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
imaginative plan	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
jack london	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
lake merritt	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
master suite	2	7	0.09	34	6	4.00
new home	2	7	0.09	34	5	3.33
parks recreation	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
private patio	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
property offers	2	7	0.09	34	6	4.00
recessed lighting	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
rental income	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
smart kitchens	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
stainless appliances	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
station house	2	7	0.09	34	5	3.33
updated kitchen	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
walking distance	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
water heater	2	7	0.09	34	7	4.67
bart ride	2	6	0.07	54	4	2.67
easier decision	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
entertainment district	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
freeway access	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
innovative designs	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
local entertainment	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
located near oakland	3	6	0.07	54	6	4.00
located nearby	2	6	0.07	54	6	4.00

## Appendix 7: Written Ad Lists

### Chapter 5

#### 5.1 – (Re)building

##### *Development trends/incentives:*

The coming West Oakland Development Project

“Opportunity Zone” (= low-income urban area where you can get tax breaks for developing property)

“Special Opportunity Zone”

Green zone (cannabis dispensary)

Possible cannabis zone

“Has underground electric. No overhead power lines.”

“Get in on Oakland’s Building Boom and build in this great city!”

“Surrounding areas have many approved plans for condos etc.”

Possibility of big development: “buildings next door for sale also need to be torn down or built out”;

“combine both lots and buildout to maximize your investment”

“Don’t miss this opportunity to invest in one of the fastest growing markets in the Bay Area”

“Many possible uses are permitted in the HBX-2 zone, including optimizing # of residences, & live/work or work/live”

Tear down and rebuild

The plans have already been made/approved by the city (“City of Oakland has approved the plans to develop this building”, “You would save 2 years of run around with the city of Oakland to get approvals and save \$100k”)

##### *Renovating the house – quality of the house:*

“Contractor’s special”

“Shovel-ready”

“CALLING ALL HANDY BUYERS!”

“In need of some TLC”

“fixer upper”

Listing how much money went into the recent renovations

Older houses are updated: modern amenities but “Old-World charm” and “period details”

“a stunning remodel using local craftspeople (not a Home Depot job!)”

All “new” features of the house listed (foundation, designer paint, roof, tile and light fixtures, plumbing, electric, etc.)

##### *Make it your own:*

“Build your dream home in this vacant lot”

“Remodel this house into a real gem to make this your dream house”

“Define your idea of [home] in this distinctive location”

“tired of looking at homes that reflect someone else’s vision?”

“restore this amazing 1890s Victorian to its rightful glory and create a space that brings your vision to life”

“turn this historical home into your dream home!”

“ready for a new owner”

“a fun space with a great canvas to personalize it into your own”

##### *Opportunity:*

“attractive and rare opportunity”

“get it while it lasts!”

Lots of potential

“don’t miss out on this great Opportunity!”

“your chance to own something truly special”

“the one you’ve been waiting for”

Possibilities: “endless,” “so many”

“exceedingly rare opportunity”

“you don’t want to miss this rare find”

“a fresh opportunity”

#### 5.2 – Investment

Language is generally much more technical and meant for insider. Implies that it is written for professional developers or contractors who have made these sorts of investments before

“Are you looking for your next great project?”

“Ready to try the investment property business in Oakland?”

Investment property

Income property / “income-earning home”

Hot deal

Foreclosure

High return potential

Areas referred to as “markets” instead of “neighborhoods” or “communities”

**Profit:**

“rare opportunity to acquire a well-maintained asset with an excellent in-place return”

“strong appeal to both young professionals and families” (as renters)

“upside potential”

Describing how many units a property has and how much the average rent is (“now rented at \$\_\_\_ a month, total gross income is \_\_\_ a month! Think about this!!!”; “\$14,000-15,000 per month potential rental income... this would give you cap rate of over 9% based on total price”)

“Please do not disturb or disclose to tenant property is on the market”

Can make improvements to the building (to attract different tenants)

“greatly increasing the price/SF rental yield”

Add parking, “increasing the desirability for tenants and offering the owner an additional revenue source”

“significant value-add component, allowing the new owner impressive upside potential upon unit turnover” (aka when tenants are displaced)

“affordable income property that will attract tenants from all socioeconomic backgrounds. And will product a respectable cash flow”

“built in income”

“well kept unit with good tenants”

“increase rents to the market ratefor a great investment opportunity”

“generate instant income while you seize the opportunity to increase value and rental income”

“can be delivered VACANT!!”

“Looking for a home that could provide some income to offset the mortgage? This could be it! Two units! We would call it a house with an ADU!” (ADU = accessory dwelling unit; different zoning laws than other rented units)

“Huge lot which creates potential for another ADU and a lovely yard!”

“legal ADU/IN-LAW!... a beautiful home, with the added benefit of potential rental income from the ADU/IN-LAW to help with that housing payment!”

“What could be better than a fully leased investment opportunity with over \$7,000 a month in gross rents!

This could be the opportunity for someone seeking to try their hand with a leased investment with this great fourplex”

“Great Rental Income”

“You will have instant positive cash flow!”

“the cap rate is approximately 17% and the GRM is approximately 5.5”

### 5.3 – Neighborhood Change

“Hot! Hot! Hot!”

West Oakland = “thriving”, “flourishing,” “burgeoning”, “upcoming”, “hot”, “growing”

“The West Oakland area is up-and-coming with a ton of potential!”

“This up and coming West Oakland neighbourhood is highly desirable”

“This home is surrounded by new construction and with its proximity to San Francisco we have a winner in this up and coming neighbourhood!”

“burgeoning market just east of San Francisco” (compare with W. Oak being called “East San Francisco”)

Near new homes or live/work communities

Is cool (“vibrant” community, “an artist area”, “artistic and multi-use”, “exciting”, “artistic”)

Discovery, pioneering: “discover a life that’s centered and central to everything”

“Hot West Oakland”

**‘Good’ neighbors/previous owners:**

In a condo complex: how many units are owner-occupied

“welcoming neighbors”

“tight knit community of friendly neighbors; a community where everyone looks out for each other but respects each other’s privacy”

“community” often used to refer to those who also live in the same condo/townhouse/loft complex or building (aka those living within the same security gates)—NOT the neighborhood, city, or community at large

“Seller has taken pride in the building and it shows”

“Recent exterior paint, and well maintained, this fourplex shows distinct pride of ownership!” (distinct for the area?)

## 5.4 – The “Urban Pioneer”

### ***Moving to West Oakland:***

“Owning a home in Oakland has never been an easier decision”

“Make your move to West Oakland and start your new life”

Some of the descriptions are written with people new or unfamiliar with the area in mind (for example, it gives explanations of what certain places are – “Lake Merritt” = large freshwater lagoon)

### ***Lifestyle:***

“Perfect for entertaining!” (“welcoming”, “inviting,” having friends over, “wet bar and wine refrigerator”)

“covered patio meditation space”

“plenty of room for reading, relaxing, or meditation”

Luxury-engineered hardwood flooring

“Luxurious”, “luxe”

### ***Luxury features:***

Towel warmer

Heated floor

Keyless entrance

Nest doorbell and thermostat

Pre-wired for gigabit internet

Smart kitchen

Tech-smart amenities

“Ultra luxurious” bathroom

“Spa-like” bathroom

“with every bell and whistle”

### ***Stylish sustainability:***

Recycled and repurposed materials (e.g., a loft floor from an old basketball court)

Electric vehicle charger, “Tesla charger”

Energy-efficient

Solar (“to help sustain a green planet and slash your electric bill”)

New LED lighting

### ***Outdoor:***

Fruit trees

Various plants

Community garden

Courtyards

Low-maintenance yard

Succulent gardens

Roof deck

“step out onto a deck for outdoor dining and tree lined views and enjoy a magical oasis of a garden!”

“savor plums, avocados and a variety of other seasonal fruit and produce from the vegetable beds and flowers and herbs for the house”

“urban farmer’s dream house”

Raised garden beds

Chicken coop

Beehive

Drip irrigation

Wide variety of native and edible plants

## Chapter 6

### 6.1 – Black History, Bodies, and Pain

#### ***History of West Oakland:***

“historical”

“historical landmark”

“own a piece of Oakland history: the former home of Flint Barbeque”

House was “loved and cherished by legendary drummer, Joseph ‘Zigaboo’ Modeliste for over 20 years”

(Zigaboo, of The Meters, a famous Black drummer who set stylistic tone of New Orleans funk music)

Historic DeFremery Park (site of Black Panthers meetings and rallies)

Oakland’s main Post Office

“rich West Oakland history runs deep into the soul...”

Library

Close to Brown Sugar Kitchen

Lofts in “historic Peralta Theater, which harkens back to the day when West Oakland was a musical district, with night clubs and music venues. Now repurposed as a hip and cool loft building, the property was renovated in 2015”

***Security:***

Gates: security gate, gated garage, gated parking, gated community

“Secure”: secure parking, secure bike room/storage, secure building

Fences: high fences, privacy fence

Lifted parking garage

Intercom system

“the private front courtyard is separated from the street by a fabulously-designed, corrugated metal fence”

“commercial grade steel doors w/ Mul-T-Lock for enhanced security”

Private entrance

Ring doorbell (also in luxurious appliances)

Urban oasis

Secluded

Dual-paned windows (for quiet)

“A place of calm retreat from the bustle of everyday life”

Sanctuary

Private patio

Quiet

Extremely private

Soundproofed

“backs to a street that is rarely used as a thoroughfare, so it’s a quieter and more welcome location in the community”

“friendly” (street, etc.)

industrial, but still quiet and you can still see green/sky/etc.

“I was pleasantly surprised to find that the neighbourhood is super friendly”

“I should also mention that I felt completely safe living in West Oakland – even when walking my dog at night”

“a block where neighbors can be found sitting on their stoop while kids are at play”

“a neighbourhood you definitely want to live in!”

“merry Magnolia St.”

welcoming neighbors

“a family-friendly enclave on the West Oakland Border” (implies it is a small space that is family-friendly and only on the border of W. Oakland)

“located on 16th street which is wide, not overcrowded, and has underground electric. No overhead power lines. Nice neighbors too.”

***“Master” Bedroom:***

Mentioned 27 times

## **6.2 – The Urban and Industrial**

***Industrial home:***

Concrete floors

Converted loft or warehouse (with unique original details)

Historic lofts

Modern industrial feel, “industrial edge”

Mixed use

Artists and makers

Edgy

Perfect urban home

Exciting

Live/work spaces (“live-work-play-enjoy”)

“a community of creative residents: musicians, artists, designers, IT workers, entrepreneurs, & other professionals”

“live/work loft exudes authenticity and style”

“nestled in a brick and timber, turn of the century era warehouse”

“perfect for displaying art, or projected film/video”

“THE coolest”

“hip”

“pushes the boundaries of the conventional home”

“idyllic urban lifestyle”

“Like a gallery in a museum”

***In the heart of hip West Oakland:***

“heart of” (West Oakland, Oakland, Oakland’s Dogtown neighbourhood, Hoover Foster District)

“close to West Oakland’s best offerings” / “in the middle of everything Oakland has to offer”

Some avoid using “West Oakland” to talk about the house’s neighborhood: “hot Prescott/Oakland Point (Lower Bottom), Oakland Point Historic District”, “WeOak” (new nickname), “North Oakland/West Oakland,” “north West Oakland”, “nestled between Uptown and West Oakland”, “at the West Oakland/Emeryville border”

“near everything of Oakland”

“at the Center of Everywhere!”

New People’ Community Market

Artisan’s Aggregate

dog park

lush and sunny walking paths

bicycle lanes (Bike Score/Walk Score; Biker’s Paradise)

“green spaces”, “greenway trail”

“locally-owned coffee shops, tap rooms”

“hip local spots”

“many unique small businesses including coffee shops and delightful restaurants”

Specific local/new businesses and “neighbourhood haunts” (Lost Foundry Studios, Mandela Foods, Orbit Coffee, Ghost Town Brewing, Soba Ichi, Pretty Lady Restaurant [which was an older diner but was bought in 2005])

***Close to San Francisco (and other desirable areas):***

“Conveniently located”

“you couldn’t be more easily connected to the city and surrounding area”

Proximity to San Francisco, commuter locations, private/public transit, highways, other desirable places (shopping, restaurants, airports, colleges, sports stadiums, parks, etc.) outside West Oakland



## Appendix 8: Photographs Lists

### Chapter 5

#### 5.1 – (Re)building

Fixer-upper houses include floor plans or labelled photos of what finished house will look like

Street view photo = construction site

#### 5.2 – Investment

Apartment buildings and multi-unit houses that are marketed toward investors (aka, with investment-themed written ads) often are unstaged. The photos sometimes focus more on the outside, shared spaces, electric room, laundry room, electric meters, etc.

#### 5.3 – Neighborhood Change

The auction/pre-foreclosure houses often just have Google Maps Street View—including the Warriors House. The photo of it makes the colors look muddy, not at all right...

#### 5.4 – The “Urban Pioneer”:

Urban gardener/homesteader: raised beds, chicken coops, communal gardens, photo of a nearby farm

Artistic: abstract art, murals painted on walls, lots of textures and textiles, a sign that just says “art,” wooden carved statues

Earthy: see U.S. West décor below; also: earth-tone art, indoor plants

Entertaining: bar carts (one with globe on it), big dining tables, outdoor spaces set up with tables and chairs, wine and bar areas, entertainment-themed signs (“screw it” with a wine screw, a print that says “what the [fork photo]”), wall wire art that says “bon appetit,” “Live. Love. Eat.”, “Oh look it’s wine o’clock”), outdoor decks with fairy lights, covered areas, fire pits, champagne on kitchen counter

Active: bikes, skateboards, dog-washing station, Peloton (fancy exercise bike) next to home office space

Musical: piano, electric guitar, trumpet, keyboard, cello

(Highbrow) pop culture: décor of musicians and entertainers (Prince, Jim Morrison, etc.), a book on The Clash, print for Sundance Film Festival, Crystal Castles fabric art in bathroom

Spiritual: yoga, meditation spaces

Live/work or home office: usually set up for one person, minimal furniture, eccentric paperweights (like a crown)

Happy: signs, décor with affirmations (“be happy,” “HAPPY,” “you are loved”)

Ambitious/adventurous: signs with affirmations (“every champion was once a contender that refused to give up,” “some adventures lead us to our destiny,” diamond print, “be kind... strong... true... brave... free,” “Design Develop Deploy”)

Cooking: expensive (\$35) cookbooks from upscale chefs or restaurants (*Ottolenghi*, *Plenty*, *Nepenthe’s* cookbook), cookbooks often have themes and are on stands, propped open to a recipe so it looks like someone was cooking, or they’re open on a counter (spines broken). They are healthy (*One Part Plant*) or are propped open to healthy recipes (“Kale Caesar Salad”). Fresh produce and food is sometimes on countertops (artichoke, lemons, loaf of bread). The kitchen is shown to be very important—many photos are of the kitchen, and in one older house where some rooms don’t even have walls, the kitchen has brand-new appliances. Some kitchens have a restaurant theme (as if implying cooking is effortless) with bistro signs, etc.

Books: lots of bookshelves but few books; assortment of nonfiction books on topics like art, architecture, “civilization,” travel, Asian mythology; often dust jackets removed; sometimes lamps are sitting on books; digital staging repeats certain books, like *American Fashion* (3 times in the same bookshelf) and *Gypsy Living* (2 times) (is this from a design software? Are they real books?); one book looks like it’s open to a page with the header “The Bourgeoisie,” but the quality of photo isn’t good enough to tell

Relaxing: bathrooms often look like spa bathrooms with rolled-up towels

Eco-friendly: *Rescued Paper* notebook (made from recycled paper)

Tech-savvy: smart home features (like Nest thermostat)

Vintage: sign that says “vintage”

Globes, maps

### Chapter 6

#### 6.1 – Black History, Bodies, and Pain

##### *History of West Oakland*

Alarm systems and security cameras visible in photos

Tall fences/gates/walls  
 Gated complexes/communities  
 Security bars on windows, security doors  
 Building without external windows  
 Wall with barbed wire at the top, surrounding an idyllic backyard  
 Houses NOT been renovated: external security bars and metal security gates  
 Houses renovated: more internal/expensive but less visible signs of security (alarm systems, wooden security gates, security cameras, Ring doorbells, keypad entry systems)  
 One house (684 Brockhurst) has “main photo” as a stylistic drawing of the house that removes the security bars from the windows (but it does keep the security door)

### ***Black Subjects in Art and Décor***

Three Black children with Equal Housing Opportunity logo appearing in dripping spray paint in the top corner

Big print of Black child’s face with split, distressed canvas  
 Old photo of Black man in a suit and jacket looking straight at us  
 African-themed décor

Fake mug shots of celebrities on wall—particularly striking is the one of Prince, a Black man

### ***Black Women’s Bodies***

Two matching women in gold dresses dancing, with backs to us  
 Black woman’s torso with words over it – the third verse of the Star-Spangled Banner, which is controversial and says “no refuse shall save, the hiring and slave, from the terror of flight or the gloom of the grave” (this is the verse that the NAACP and many are critical of, and which led to the NFL players protesting the song) - the canvas cuts off before her face  
 Woman with Afro and closed eyes, surrounded by plants  
 Naked, Black, pregnant-looking female statue (fertility icon/goddess?)  
 Black woman with braids, head to top of chest in profile, can’t tell if clothed  
 Woman’s body from neck to mid-thigh, with a tiny waist, looks naked  
 Woman with Afro and eyes closed, lots of graffiti tagged in her hair

## **6.2 – The Urban and Industrial**

Industrial/urban: exposed beams, exposed bricks, warehouse-type look, cement floors, views of factories, a sign that says “industry”

West Oakland: map of Oakland with what looks like historic or old documents from Pacific Cannery (now lofts), print of Oakland Central Station (which closed in 1994 and is being redeveloped by a developer now)

Oakland: Art of Port of Oakland cranes and the Grand Lake Theater sign, historical buildings being repurposed and romanticized, *Oakland* magazine, Oakland print/map, “beauty shots” of Oakland’s sunset and graffiti

San Francisco: lots of art of it (Golden Gate Bridge, Treasure Island, etc.) and photographs showing views of San Francisco

Other cities/the city as imaginary: tons of art of ‘global’ cities (San Francisco, New York City [Manhattan or Brooklyn], Paris, Los Angeles, Chicago, London, Portland, Las Vegas), abstract art of cities (busy street, birds on wire, bridges), graffiti shown in photographs (being used as “acceptable” art instead of vandalism), books about New York City

## **6.3 – Frontier Décor**

Succulents and cactuses—so many!

Frida Kahlo posing with agave plant for Vogue “Señoras of Mexico” photographs (1937)

Rustic/country-type art: feathers, rugged U.S. Western landscapes (red rock formations), open country roads, horses

Trophy hunting: Animal-skin rugs; sheep/animal-skin blankets, pillows, cushions; animal skulls; animal heads mounted on walls

Farm décor: farm boxes, “farm house local” box, baskets, “Rooster Homestead” pillows, milking pail, gingham towels, Surplus Goods bag, pumpkins and gourds

*Going Going Gone* book (book about “vanishing Americana” that photographs things that are disappearing—very interesting in a gentrifying area)

Native American Othering: large printed page on wall of “The Tale of Two Wolves,” which starts “An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life...”

## Appendix 9: Video Tour Lists

### Chapter 5

#### 5.1 – (Re)building

“Modern and contemporary”

Part of “West House 10” Development, built by the Downtown Development Company

Huge gravel lot (“decomposed granite”) behind house: “Look how big this yard is... You could easily put another ADU out there, or perhaps split the lot and build another house—all sorts of possibilities”

“You could easily create a yard here, put some sliders here, put a deck, and then split this and put another house, or maybe two houses here. It’s just huge. It’s fabulous.”

“It may be possible, I don’t know for sure, but it might be possible to split this lot, and put another house in the back, and sell it off.” (shrugs) “That could be a very profitable enterprise.”

##### ***For “fixer”:***

“fixer upper”

“potential” (repeated many times)

“what should be the dining room” - interesting to think that she does not currently see it as a dining room; it is in progress, shifting, and not regarded as a fully formed thing - ready to be shaped and molded or saved

“opportunity is knocking”

HGTV and DIY culture = popular

“this thing is really gonna shine”

“work in progress”

“waiting for its final touches”

“creating [your] own space in Oakland”

make it uniquely yours

“you don’t have to live with someone else’s vision... put your own stamp on it”

uniqueness = major selling point

house is for people who are “tired of seeing the same thing when viewing houses”

##### ***For renovated Victorian:***

“stunningly beautiful restoration of a Victorian... a husband-and-wife team, with their parents, that all worked together to restore this Victorian”

“it takes time and patience”

hand-painted and restored Victorian medallions = rare

“the clients really tried to pay honor to that Victorian/Victoriana-style finishes... it now has dual-pane windows, modern electrics, it has modern plumbing, it has a modern kitchen”

“it’s a Victorian that has been brought into the 21st century in a beautiful manner”

railing used as a small fence: “this is a piece of the railing from the house’s exterior that no longer passes code... but they did this here again as a detail to pay homage to the house”

they “painstakingly reproduced it and restored it”

“it brings back that Painted Lady look that you’re seeing a lot in the newspaper and hearing about in Oakland and in San Francisco”

“indicative of time and space”

“completely modern remodeled bathroom, thank goodness”

##### ***For Victorian cottage-style duplex/ADU:***

“a tremendous property that my clients have renovated” since they bought it “several months ago” (feels like a flipped house, aka they bought it for cheap and fixed it up to make a profit off the resell)

“they’ve spent a lot of money fixing it up”

“rebuilt from the ground up”

“every attention to detail has been made”

“it is just untapped potential”

“the developer group from the Bay Area did a really nice job” getting the house ready

“this development team, one partner lives, I think, out in Walnut Creek, and one lives in Los Angeles”

##### ***For renovated Victorian cottage:***

“it’s been modernized, so although it’s got all of the sweet charm, there’s been some really significant upgrades”

“it had all of the, you know, quote unquote unsexy things done” (in previous renovation)

##### ***For converted loft in Peralta Theater:***

“we’re in what was once called the Peralta Theater, and this was a building that was converted, I want to say 5 or 6 years ago, from a theater into loft condominiums”

##### ***Gendered house:***

One agent refers to the house she’s showing as a female:

- “This lady is waiting and ready for her next new owner” to make “her shine again”
- Someone just needs to come in and “wrap it up with a little bow” and then “we’re done!”
- She just needs a “makeover”
- “She’s going to be beautiful when all is said and done”

Victorian renovation: “The updates are sympathetic with her history, yet modern at the same time” - from a comment from agent on the Facebook Live video post

## 5.2 – Investment

For fixer, you can turn it into a duplex and rent the lower unit, renovate and sell it for a profit (duplexes are hot for buyers right now because they want supplemental income), or just make it a huge house for you “You will build value” here

“Start having supplemental income” from renting out the lower unit (you will have no problem renting it out) ADU: “accessory dwelling unit” that can be rented out, also referred to as “au pair”

“Who wouldn’t love having this kind of outdoor space on a rental.”

“If you could get two-thousand a month here, that’s gonna cover a lot of the mortgage on the purchase to this home, so they help you subsidize how you live”

ADU kitchen is described as “huge” (but it’s not) and “no expense spared,” “they didn’t, you know, save money by getting different appliances down here,” “we didn’t, you know, cut corners,” the “same standards as you have upstairs” - it’s built almost as nice as the kitchen upstairs, which he seems surprised by - “you don’t see a lot of ADUs that are furnished like this” (like the renter should be grateful to live in a smaller version of the upper unit - he even describes having “a place to eat” as a selling point for the renter)

ADU bedroom “generous” (implying landlord is benevolent toward tenant)

ADU bedroom: “I mean, this feels like an executive apartment, it feels like something in a luxury building that you would pay thousands of dollars a month for in downtown Oakland or in San Francisco” (the kind of person and lifestyle he’s trying to attract)

“An executive apartment, something that really is very high-end and very very nice”

“It’s something rare as far as rentals go, that I’ve seen”

Garage next to ADU, BUT “you don’t need to let the ADU resident have this, you can use it for your own use upstairs, and there’s always parking in front,” “you can block that off from the ADU. The ADU does not have to have access to the garage, it’s entirely yours” (don’t have to be TOO benevolent to renter...)

ADU has its own private yard (however, most windows in the ADU face the upper unit’s yard, not very private)

“We’re sort of positioning this as a house with an ADU”

“I think if you lived in the front unit, you could rent the back unit for about forty-five hundred a month, maybe four-thousand”

“I think this could easily rent, you know, low, eighteen-hundred, high, twenty-five hundred? And if it rented for two-thousand a month, that’s twenty-four thousand a year toward the mortgage payment here, which would be huge, I think.”

Rental income “would go a long way in offsetting the costs of owning and operating the house. You know, if you buy this house for one-two, one-one-five, and you got, you know, twenty-four thousand a year” (laughs a bit) “from the apartment, that’ll cover the taxes and some of the mortgage”

“A tremendous unit in the front for additional income”

“For a accessory unit, this is really luxurious and generous”

“Think about, you know, just renting it like twenty-five hundred a month, somewhere in that range, maybe three-thousand? That adds thirty thousand to thirty-six thousand a year of income to the property. So if you lived in the back, and you had this sort of income, it would more than cover the taxes and some of the mortgage. It makes living here much more economical than just buying a house and not having some additional rental income. So, I love that kind of living, it’s great to have somebody helping to support how you’re living, and—and providing housing in the marketplace, cause Oakland is a very tight housing market” (framing landlord as benevolent and “creating” housing)

Main house and ADU each have a separate gate in the purple fence, though they go to the same place: the ADU renter “can have their own way to come and go” - but why is this necessary if they go to the same place?

## 5.3 – Neighborhood Change

Newness is prized: the “street has a lot of great, new houses” and “properties being remodeled,” “two brand-new houses just down the street” (she shows them a few times, they are sleek, square, white, and gray)

West Oakland has had a “great spike in interest and price points” because of proximity to San Francisco and only one BART stop away

Neighborhood has a lot of long-term residents but also new development

Describes some houses as “houses in between”

“As you can see across the street, we’ve got really wonderful neighbors... some new units... houses are nicely painted” (his tone almost makes it sound like the niceness of the block is surprising, like it is in an area not known for being nice - where neighbors are “bad” evident by the fact that houses are old and not nicely painted)

The “Blue Star Stove, which is all the rage on the Peninsula... people all want those Blue Star Stoves” (Peninsula = one of the wealthiest areas, Silicon Valley elites - frames West Oakland as being able to compete with that or maybe appeal to people who currently live there)

About how she and her clients bought this house five years ago: “I remember when my clients and I found this house... boy, it was right when the market was really starting to—turn, and we could feel it.... we felt really lucky.”

“There are one-two, three-four townhomes across the street, they’re really nice townhomes, I know several colleagues who have sold those over the years”

***San Francisco:***

BART

San Francisco

You can see BART tracks from the front of the house (not generally seen as a positive thing, but agent brags about them)

West Oakland “gets you into downtown really fast, BART stations, and on your way to San Francisco, Berkeley or the East Bay, Walnut Creek, Concord, and areas like that”

Location = “phenomenal”

“It’s easy to get on and off the freeway to get where you need to go”

***Competitiveness of real estate market:***

“We are asking eight-ninety-nine, we are hoping it’ll go for a million-two or better”

“Activity has been good” (aka interest in the house is competitive)

“Obviously we’re hoping for an overbid”

“We’re trying to attract multiple offers”

**5.4 – The “Urban Pioneer”**

***Buyers unfamiliar with the area:***

Someone asks if the house has AC and agent says she doesn’t think so “but I know we have our natural air conditioning, i.e. the fog” (it never gets hot here so it seems like an outsider asking this question); also “we have this beautiful weather in Oakland, I always talk about dining al fresco in Oakland”; “one of the nice things about Oakland is this weather” - implying viewers don’t know the area very well or are from a place with entirely different weather

Question from viewer: “This house looks amazing Julie. How’s the neighborhood?” Answer: “I have a girlfriend who has lived there for years and loves it. You get beautiful, historic homes and it’s so close to everything.”

the “best of both worlds”: close to BART and downtown Oakland, yet you can have outdoor space (I guess because it is cheaper)

***Rural elements:***

“Evokes a farmhouse” or “Craftsman-style architecture”

Front porch “hearkens to the idea of a farmhouse”

“Barn doors”

Farm sink

***Luxury features/lifestyle:***

Agent giving names of the makers of appliances and other kitchen feature designers

Luxury, brand-new, designer appliances

“Beautiful new cabinets with soft-close doors”

Quiet dishwasher

Kitchen cabinets with “Milzon cabinetry, which is out of Oakland”

“Restaurant-caliber faucet”

Radiant-heat floors

“Meditation alcove”

Waterfall fixture in yard

“Den” (not something that is very recognizable to me or others in Bay Area; it evokes a kind of midcentury, suburban lifestyle)

Previous owner “set this up as a smoking room, or a port-drinking room, or a cognac room” to sit with friends, look out at the outdoor space’s waterfall and “just talk... maybe talk about philosophy, or politics, or whatever the day may be”

Deck = “a great spot to sit and have a glass of wine and read”

Living room called “parlor” and dining room called “dining salon”

“Can’t you just imagine a chaise longue, sitting there reading?”

“A different kind of grandeur”

Skylights: “one here over the tub, for stargazing”

It has a “real tub,” because “there’s nothing worse than those little shallow tubs”

***Stylish sustainability:***

In a fixer: you can make it exactly how you want, without being wasteful (Instead of moving into a brand-new home and changing the new fixtures and details, you are redoing stuff that is seemingly “waste” and that it is OK to trash or update without feeling like it’s wasteful. The assumption seems to be that new, remodeled styles, even if ugly or undesirable to the buyer, are worth something and thus shouldn’t be wasted, but older styles can be swept away and trashed without a second thought, because they are not “worth” anything.)

Garage wired for electric car

Turf lawn as environmentally friendly (“most of my clients today are using turf... you don’t ever have to water it”)

LED lighting

The bathrooms in one house have sensor lights, which the agent describes as a great thing (It reminds me of staying in cheap motels in the ’90s.)

Efficient kitchen

***Entertaining:***

Party potential

“Wonderful entertaining space”

See “cognac room”

Open-concept is seen as good for entertainment: “easy for entertaining, easy for hanging out” with friends, having parties, etc.

Big dining room with agent guessing how many people you could fit in it

“It’s a great place to entertain, it just flows so nicely”

“What a great spot to have friends over and entertain, you have all this room to socialize”

Two outdoor spaces: “you can have two separate parties if you want”

***Active lifestyle:***

Storage could be used to store “bicycles, camping gear”

Extra room could be used as a workout room or yoga studio

Space in primary bedroom set up to look like a yoga space with mats and a picnic basket with sunflowers

“Workout space or meditation area”

Football as reference: “beautiful space to sit down, hang out with friends, watch a movie, watch a football game, basketball game, anything you like”; bedroom size: “it’s almost like a first down, ten yards across, it’s just really, really big”

***Outdoor spaces:***

Mature tree with shade

“Perfect” if you have a dog

Roses, succulents, bougainvillea, tomatoes

“It’s the only unit in the building that has its own exclusive-use outdoor space. So none of the other units have access to this” - but it just looks like a loading dock/alley with PG&E electric boxes and a wall that’s been tagged, and a few chairs set up by stagers

Backyard as “retreat”

## Chapter 6

### 6.1 – Black History, Bodies, and Pain

#### ***History of West Oakland***

“a vibrant area”

“vibrancy”

#### ***Quietness/safeness in the city:***

Right near Downtown Oakland and Jack London Square, but it’s quiet and peaceful

“like this oasis” - doesn’t mention that we are looking over several chain-link fences and gates, or a car covered with a beige car cover

Viewer questions: parking space, what the neighborhood looks like outside the window, if windows are single-pane

Viewer question: how is the street view?

Interesting moment: as agent goes outside, a car drives by, playing hip hop music, and she remarks “I have a soundtrack” as it passes (relate to same agent who wanted to play jazz as mentioned in another video)

“really nice block, very quiet”

agent points out Ring doorbell  
horizontal fence in front of house  
dual-paned windows  
showing the ADU yard and space: “a really nice, quiet, private setting to offer to anyone who wants to rent in Oakland”  
Victorian house with purple wrought-iron fence that has ornate spikes at the top: the fence “just begins to tell the story of this Victorian that was lovingly restored by my clients”  
“beautiful new stained fencing all along the sides”  
“the front of the house, because it is raised up off the street, you just have a lot of peaceful, bucolic views out the window”  
“this is a private deck, right off the kitchen, perfect for the barbecue!”  
Lots of talk about privacy—but often, the houses’ windows look right out at the street, a shared space, or right at the houses next door  
Backyard: “very private, I don’t know if you noticed how private this is, but part of what makes it private is that the fences, for whatever reason, are higher than the standard”  
“really cute street”  
security code box on garage  
“modern insulation and sound convenience in a classic, original setting”  
Sign in garage: “Security cameras in use” (they must have taken it down for the open house showing, but it is next to a computer monitor that shows surveillance footage looking down from top of front of house to the street, gate, driveway, and front yard in front of house)  
“the nice thing is that you’re up... feels more private” (house is elevated)  
**“Master” bedroom:**  
Multiple agents slipped up and called it a “master” bedroom, sometimes laughing or sounding like they were rolling their eyes as they corrected themselves.  
Alternative options: premiere bedroom, primary bedroom, main bedroom  
Often, agents switch back and forth between “master” and an alternative  
“this is called... we would call this the primary suite”  
“excuse me, the primary”  
Comment from viewer: “Into the primary suite retreat?” (making fun of use of “primary”? Or maybe that the agent keeps saying “master” by accident?)  
“a true premiere space”  
“Let’s go upstairs to the master. Well, actually, the primary. The primary bedroom.”  
**Black subjects in art and décor:**  
The main art piece in the “cognac room” is a large photograph of a Black child, which has been made a kind of sepia color, distressed somewhat, and separated onto different beams so that the child’s face is split  
African-themed prints and decor  
Agent remarks that this house is not staged and is effusive about the fact that the owner (who, I find out later, is a Black man) has great taste and is “meticulously clean” and “organized” and “everything is put away” (weirdly big focus on this)  
Agent compliments purple fence and says it should be a Prince song

## 6.2 – The Urban and Industrial

“Very urban”  
“Super urban”  
“a vibrant area”  
“vibrancy”  
The house has “New York flavor”  
Close to “eateries” and the “Artist Aggregate”  
Close to “the Artist Aggregate... it is a sweet place, uh, there’s a huge climbing gym”  
“This is in the artistic and multi-use neighborhood of Dogtown, which just borders Emeryville—it’s on the north side of West Oakland”  
“Here we are in the heart of almost smack-dab in downtown, so you’ve got all the amenities”  
Art above dining table made by “incredible artist who volunteered his artwork”  
Steel floating shelves  
Distressed wood wall  
“All these windows, facing the brick, which is part of that, you know, historic loft kinda thing, you see the brick and timber”  
Converted Peralta Theater into lofts

Pointing out the industrial quality of the place (former factory, industrial sliding doors, etc.). My dad used to work partially out of a warehouse, so I would go there a lot. It isn't a place I ever wanted to live in, though. For those who did not grow up going to warehouses, living in one may seem attractive or exciting.

### **6.3 – Frontier Décor**

“all these succulents here that are so prized today, people are just very excited to see all these succulents”



# Glossary

## *Real Estate Terminology*

**flyer:** a printed advertisement for the house that contains descriptive text and photographs. Traditionally given out at open houses or (increasingly rarely) set in a large clear box outside the house for sale for anyone who passes during times outside the open house hours

**open house:** a house that is for sale that is made open to the public (targeted at interested buyers) and “hosted” by a real estate agent. These are held on specific days and times (usually on Sundays from 12–2 or 2–4) that are announced ahead of time. The real estate agent provides flyers, business cards, and written and oral information about the house, and sometimes hospitality gifts like baked goods or bottled water. The house is typically staged

**staging:** the process of removing all or most of the furniture and belongings from a house and having a professional interior decorator temporarily decorate it with new, stylish furniture and art

**fixer-upper / fixer:** a house that requires repairs, or, in some cases, cosmetic updates (sometimes also referred to as a “contractor’s special”)

**single-family house:** a house zoned for one family to live there

**multi-family property:** a real estate property or building that is zoned for multiple families or residents to live there (such as an apartment building or duplex)

**duplex:** a house that is split into two separate living units (Note: a “triplex” is three units, and subsequent amounts of units can be called “fourplex,” “fiveplex,” etc.)

**offers:** bids on the house from prospective buyers

**real estate agent:** a person from a professional real estate company who shows and represents the house

**real estate broker:** a person who owns their own professional real estate company

**live/work:** zoning allowance for a house that can also operate as a commercial business; sometimes used more casually to refer to a home with a home office

**mixed-use:** zoning term for an area with both residential and commercial buildings

**unit:** an independent living space in a larger building or complex (could refer to an apartment, one part of a duplex, a condo, etc.)

**loft:** a unit in a building that was not originally meant as a residential space; often in a converted warehouse or other historic industrial building

**condo:** a unit within a larger building (like an apartment) that is sold as a unit; often in a complex

**townhouse:** a unit in a semi-autonomous house that shares at least one wall with the neighboring townhouse unit; often in a complex

**complex:** a collection of several individual units within a defined geographical area; usually a planned development; often a gated community

**gated community:** a complex with a security fence and electronic gate around it

**investment property:** a property owned for the purpose of making a profit (whether by renovating and reselling it, or making it into a rental income property)

**income property:** a residential property owned for the purpose of rental income

**Opportunity Zone:** a state-designated low-income census tract that provides tax advantages to investors who “significantly improve” the property purchased over a period of 5 years; used as a loophole for investors with capital gains who are trying to avoid paying taxes on those gains (law created under Trump’s 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act)

**HBX-2 zone:** Oakland city-designed mixed-use zone (industrial, certain commercial, medium-high residential development)

**ADU:** accessory dwelling unit, a small, usually one-bedroom unit attached to what would otherwise be a single-family home (also called an “in-law,” “au pair,” or “granny unit”)

**Security bars:** metal bars that fit over windows so they can’t be opened or broken from the outside (also called “burglar bars”)

**Security door:** a metal door that fits over an external door so that it can’t be kicked in from the outside and to provide an extra set of locks and deadbolts

**Ring doorbell:** Amazon’s “smart” doorbell with HD video and microphone that lets you see, hear, and speak to people outside your door; regarded as a safety feature because it records video of everyone who comes to your door

**DIY:** do-it-yourself; refers to amateur home renovators or other home projects

**HGTV:** Home & Garden Television, an extremely popular cable TV channel with many shows on real estate investment, home renovation, and DIY culture

**master bedroom:** the main/biggest bedroom of the house. Controversy over the racialized history of its name has led to many real estate agents to rebrand it in 2020 as the “primary,” “premiere,” or “main” bedroom

**master suite:** a master bedroom and adjoining bathroom

**open concept:** a configuration where the kitchen, dining area, and living area are all combined in one large room (sometimes called a “great room”) without walls dividing them

**Victorian:** colloquial term for a house built in the Victorian architectural era (the reign of British Queen Victoria). West Oakland has many Victorians built around 1900.

Characterized by the ability to close off every room in the house. Also see Queen Anne

**Queen Anne:** a kind of Victorian that is especially ornate. Characterized by tall, narrow houses with lots of “gingerbread” decoration/trim, tall windows, steep asymmetrical roofs, a large variety of accent colors, and sometimes turrets/towers

**foreclosure:** a house that is being seized from the owner by a bank or lending agency because the owner hasn’t been able to make mortgage payments

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