PART 2 : HISTORY OF BAYVIEW HUNTERS POINT

by DAVID JAFFE

The Second World War and the development of the shipyards brought a major Black migration to Hunters Point transforming it from a semi-rural town to an urban neighborhood. The indifference with which the city treated the new residents led to an explosion of local organizations that shaped the economic, political and social character of the community. As early as 1908, when Admiral Perry's fleet came to San Francisco, the U. S. Navy wanted to make Hunters Point a naval shipyard. In 1939 the navy purchased the shipyards and leased them to Bethlehem Steel. Two weeks after the

bombing of Pearl Harbor, on December 18, 1941, the Navy took control of the drydocks and turned Hunters Point into one of the major military shipyards on the west coast. By the end of World War II the Navy owned 1000 acres of land and five berths, 17 miles of Railroad track, 200 buildings and six drydocks (Rifkin). The Hunters Point Naval Shipyard could accommodate the largest ship in the world. Between 1941 and 1973, when the shipyard closed, the navy engaged in shipbuilding and repair, employing 17,000 workers at its peak. This boom in production led to dramatic changes in the population and ethnicity of Hunters Point.

In 1940 the population of Hunters Point was 14,011. By 1950 that population had grown over 260% to 51,406. During this same period the population of San Francisco in general only increased 18% (Dukes and Dukes and Associates, Inc., 1975-1976). The majority of these new residents were Black Americans from the South. In 1940 there were only a few Black families in Bayview Hunters Point. But by 1960 Blacks had become a ma-

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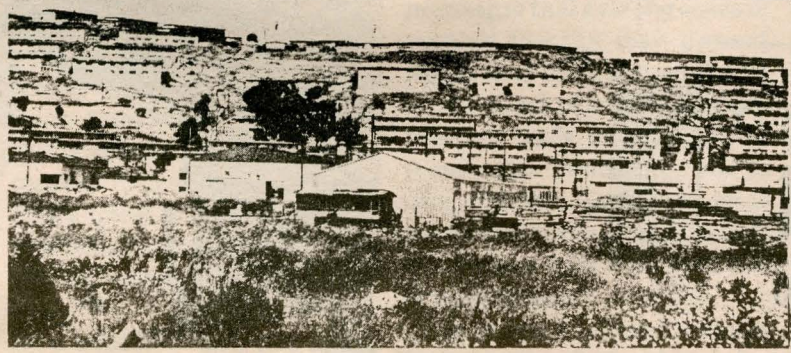
jority in Bayview Hunters Point with 52% of the population.(This grew to 69% by 1970). The navy actively recruited Black civilians from the south to move from their homes and to come to San Francisco to work in the shipyards. Poor blacks followed the prospects of steady work at good wages. There were other reasons why Blacks came to work in Hunters Point. According to Sam X Jordan, who came here in 1947, there was an illusion in the South that Black people were not discriminated against in the east and the west. In San Francisco, before the war, Blacks lived among Whites throughout the city Harold Brooks, who moved here during the war, explains this integration. "When you have a small number of any minority group they do not present the threat that larger numbers do..." There were approximately 5,000 Black people in San Francisco in 1940. Therefore the city gave the appearance that it did not discriminate. However, Jordan soon found that, "it was the same old same old. In Texas you knew where you stood, whether you were liked or not liked and they treated you accordingly. When I got here I found the same problem, it was just done a little differently. A guy would call you mister and then he would still stick a knife in your back." Despite the underlying prejudice Blacks continued to flock to Hunters Point throughout the 1940s.



View from the South.

To house all the new workers, the navy constructed temporary shelters around Hunters Point. To the suprise of San Franciscans who had built vacation homes on Hunters Point hill, the Navy destroyed these homes and constructed housing projects in their place. Brooks calls these projects, "shantytown developments," and the city and federal government built others on Third and Army, Carroll and Third and at Double Rock. As so often happens with "temporary" housing, these paper-thin-walled projects remained as housing for the many Blacks who came to Hunters Point for years after the war.

During the immediate post war period the area took on a decidely southern Black ethnic flavor. Immediately after the

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war most Blacks in Hunters Point lived in the housing projects while most Whites lived in the private homes where they had been for years. Soon after the war realtors started a rumor that the neighborhood was going to become all Black. They told this to the White homeowners, who, for a variety of reasons then sold their homes to the realtors and purchased new homes in the suburbs of the peninsula. The realtors bought the homes very cheap and then sold them to the Black people from the housing projects at a higher price. Furthermore, the San Francisco housing authority, during the postwar period, converted temporary housing into low-income public housing. During this period low-income Black people came to live in Hunters Point from other parts of the city

Throughout the late 1940s and 1950s the Navy and the city of

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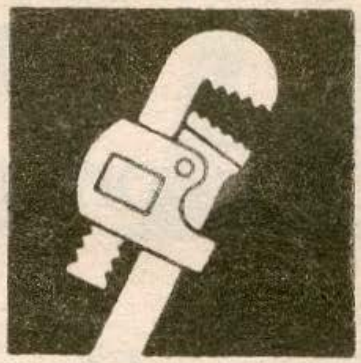

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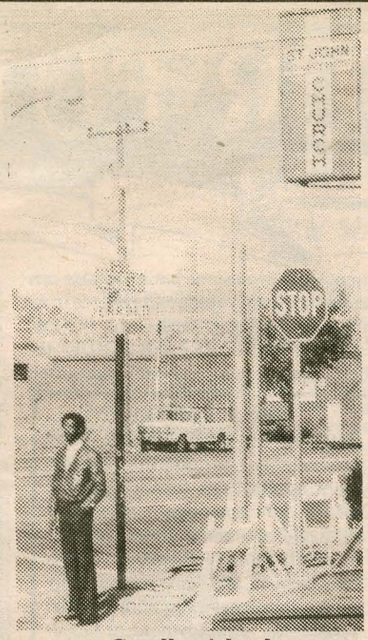
San Francisco continued the practice of using Bayview Hunters Point land while ignoring the people living in the area. The Navy used land in Hunters Point as a shipyard but did nothing to improve the housing situation of its workers. Likewise the city of San Francisco did little to accommodate the new residents. According to Brooks, "The powers that be in San Francisco thought that when the war was over these people would go back to where they came from. They didn't consider that the people who came here were from the bottom of the barrell in their southern towns...this was like the promised land for people...." So the new Black majority was to be a permanent reality, whether the city acknowledged it or not.

Symbolic of the tendency of the city government to ignore Hunters Point during the late 1940s and 1950s, while using local property, was the construction of Candlestick Park, San Francisco's first major league baseball stadium. During the mid 1950s mayor George Christopher decided San Francisco needed a major league baseball team. In the tradition of Crocker and Stanford, several prominent San Francisco businessmen organized and built a stadium near Candlestick Point. They chose Hunters Point to build because of the relatively inexpensive space and because the city already owned 36 acres of the land. The contractor, earned much city money because he owned much of the land where dirt was taken for landfill for the stadium. The 60,000 seat stadium located on the edge of Bayview Hill might have been a boom for local businesses. However, according to long time resident Betty M. Jones, "Candlestick doesn't bring any business to Bayview Hunters Point." Like its predecessor, Bayview Park, Candlestick was created without consulting the local population. Unlike its predecessor, Candlestick does not require fans to pass through Hunters Point. The James Lick Freeway, opened in 1955, allows visitors to Candlestick to pass right over Hunters Point, without ever encountering any of the local restaurants, record stores, or clothing shops. The city's only intention was to create a space for a major league baseball team, not to aid the residents of Hunters Point. Visiting Candlestick today during a game is a surrealistic experience. In the stadium, especially during a recent Monday night football game, is the best that American capitalism can offer; bright lights, high-tech tv equipment, elaborate entertainment, and massive consumption of food, drink and souvenirs. Merely yards to the north lies a dark Hunters Point, ignored most of the time by the majority of the people in the stadium, and only mentioned with fear if acknowleged at all. From the view of Candlestick it is as if Hunters Point exists merely as a gap between the park and downtown San Francisco. From the view of Hunters Point, Candlestick is a place with bright lights, big crowds and lots of attention. Attention that the city never bothered to give to the rest of Hunters Point.



In spite of, and sometimes because of this neglect, community spirit grew strong during the late 1940s and 1950s and blossomed into an array of community organizations during the 1960s. The Black residents of Hunters Point were subject to discrimination on a variety of levels after World War II. As mentioned above, Black people could not buy or rent homes outside of certain areas like the Fillmore District or the housing projects in Bayview Hunters Point. Therefore many of the new residents to Bayview Hunters Point had to deal with sub-standard temporary shelters as their permanent living spaces. With the war over there was fierce competition between unemployed Blacks and Whites for jobs. Much prejudice came to the forefront during this period. "We can keep it under raps as long as their is plenty to go around but when jobs start to diminish, prejudice comes out," commented Brooks. This prejudice manifested on Third Street, ever the thermometor measuring the climate of the neighborhood. According to Brooks, "All along Third Street the only places you could go into were the grocery stores and some real estate offices Barber shops and beauty salons you were not welcome that is why we had our own barber shops." Discrimination also existed in the job market. As Black workers were laid off from the Naval Shipyard after the War, none of the White owned businesses on Third Street would hire them. Most of the businesses in downtown San Francisco including the banks and the hotels practiced similiar discrmination. While a system of welfare did exist, it encouraged men to leave their homes by providing more money to single parent families. Because Blacks were not allowed to go

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into certain areas or buildings the Black community lacked places other than churches where they could congregate and discuss problems. Furthermore, their were no social programs for the Black population. In typical fashion, the only services provided by the city were several inadequate programs located at the area recreation department.

It was this lack of services that led to the first activist community groups after the War

The first of these groups, The Crispus Attucks Club, was founded in the late 1940s and located at 1201 Mendell. The Bayview Hunters Point Neighborhood Community Center located at the site of the club, started because, "there needed to be a community group without strings that could address a lot of the needs and concerns of the community, and could also provide programs to uplift the neighborhood," said Brooks. The first effort of the organization was to block the development of a proposed freeway that would have dissected Bayview East and West and weakened community

ARDATH NICHOLS

cohesion. The community center later developed social programs helping people deal with prob-

lems in employment, housing , education and health care. The center also had youth programs, one being "Youth City" during the early 1950s. Youth City was an experimental program that set up a court system with youth as prosecutors and defenders. The police department cooperated with the program and, according to Brooks, "It worked all right...it was a way to avoid a record."

Building on the success of the neighborhood center, some neighborhood residents started the Bayview Hunters Point Citizen's Committee in 1960. This organization, co-chaired by Mrs. Ardath Nichols and Dr. Arthur Coleman, combatted discrimination where it existed in the neighborhood. Echoing Adam Clayton Powell Jr.'s cry, "Don't shop where you can't work," the citizens committee began an effort to wipe out discrimination on Third Street through economic boycotts. The first target was the Purity Market, which did not hire black workers. Several groups including the Negro American Labor Council(NALC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People(NAACP) and the Congress on Racial Equality(CORE), met at the neighborhood center and decided that the most vulnerable time for a market is Friday and Saturday when they get load of fresh vegetables and other items that are not on consignment. As Brooks, then a field secretary for the NALC, put it, "They either sell the goods or eat them." The Citizens Committee organized a picket line in front of the market on Friday before the delivery came. With picketers urging shoppers to spend their money elsewhere, the economic boycott brought an agreement from the market within a half day.

Encouraged by their success, the citizens committee next took on the Super Save at Mckinnon and Third. This picket was more difficult because the owner, Mr. Wong was an Asian man and the Unions came and told the picketers that they should not boycott a minority owner. However, only Asian union workers were employed in the store, thus bringing the fairness of the union into question. The boycott went on for two weeks, with the union advising Mr. Wong and the picketers calling for Black workers in a store patronized mostly by Blacks. At the end of two weeks Mr. Wong called Brooks at the community center and they negotiated a deal to end employment discrimination at Super Save. The other stores along Third Street took notice of the the power of the Black consumer boycott and soon started hiring Black workers.

These picket lines had influence beyond Third Street. During the Super Save boycott, the San Francisco Chronicle tried to find out what the citizens committee was doing. But Brooks refused to talk with them because they to did not hire Black reporters. When he finally did speak, Brooks said, "If you want an exclusive story then it's time for you to hire some Black people." The Chronicle hired its first Black writer in 1961.

PART 2 OF A 3 PART SERIES