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“The Anti-Poverty Hoax”: Development, pacification, and the making of community in the global 1960s

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ABSTRACT

This essay provides an alternative history of U.S. community development by establishing a global context for such policies. It demonstrates that the emergence of poverty as a domestic and international public policy issue in the 1960s was closely linked to anxieties about racialized violence in American cities and wars of insurgency in the global South. In doing so, it traces how programs of pacification, both at home and abroad, sought to deal with delinquent youth, to marry policing to economic development, and to grapple with poverty and insecurity. Such a global view provides new insights into American-style community development, specifically how a double system of pacification was an integral part of this approach to urban policy. By focusing on an important precursor to the War on Poverty, the Ford Foundation's Gray Areas program, the essay also highlights how the problem of poverty came to be territorialized not only in the city but specifically in a unit understood as community. However, “community” was a space of contestation. Community action was rapidly transformed into programs of community development, especially those animated by the ethos of self-help. But, in cities like Oakland, the first of the Gray Areas cities, and described as a “racial tinderbox,” the bureaucracy of poverty became the platform for radical visions and practices of self-determination, notably by the Black Panther Party. Understood in this way, community is a key site for the analysis of liberal government. In particular, urban policy mandates such as community development and community participation reveal the enduring contradictions between ideologies of self-help and struggles for self-determination.

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Introduction

“Our slums are not foreign nations to be worked with in such manner as never to constitute a challenge to the status quo.”

Saul Alinsky “The War on Poverty – Political Pornography”, 1965: 41

In the lexicon of American urban policy, community development is a prominent force. Typically, histories of community development trace its origins to the Great Society programs of the 1960s and their efforts to negotiate the complex and contradictory entwining of civil rights movements, anti-poverty policy, and community organizing. In this essay, we expand such interpretations of community development by providing a globalized history of this field of ideas and practices. We argue that the emergence of poverty as a domestic and international public policy issue in the

1960s was closely linked to anxieties about racialized violence in American cities and wars of insurgency in the global South. By holding the War on Poverty at home and American programs of pacification and counterinsurgency overseas in simultaneous view, we demonstrate the co-constitution of urban policy and imperial policy. Indeed, pacification was not just an American practice abroad, in the hamlets of Southeast Asia. After ghetto rebellions rocked US cities in the mid-1960s, police tactics and technologies for dealing with such unrest were directly adopted from military manuals and from the police assistance and training programs run by the United States Agency for International Development in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Ultimately such tactics and technologies, rooted in global counterinsurgency, were central in the reconstruction of US urban policing in the 1970s and 1980s.

With such histories in mind, the title of this essay refers to a 1970 article published by F. Nunes in *Freedomways*, the premier intellectual journal of Black freedom struggles. Titled “The Anti-Poverty Hoax,” it is a scathing critique of the War on Poverty, billing it as a “massive sham operation of which the poor are victims, not beneficiaries” (Nunes, 1970: 15). The critique echoes an earlier analysis by

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Saul Alinsky (1965: 42) which argued that the War on Poverty was a “huge political pork barrel,” a “political pornography.” Writing from the trenches of neighborhood action, Alinsky (1965: 42) lamented that the War on Poverty was being used to “suffocate militant independent leadership and action organizations which have been arising to arm the poor with their share of power.” Alinsky identifies a key feature of American-style community development: the inherent tension between community action’s possible militant instantiations and the bureaucracy of poverty which cannot tolerate such unruly practices. In the 1960s, this tension took on a distinctive form. As community development emerged as a crucial component of the War on Poverty, so the mandate of participation, specifically “maximum feasible participation,” became central to this new policy approach. However, as O’Connor (2012: 14) notes, participation was a “troublesome” idea, on the one hand evoking a long tradition of educating and civilizing the urban poor through self-help reforms, what Nunes (1970: 15) calls a “do-it-yourself ideology,” and on the other hand tapping into movements for self-determination. Such struggles mark the shift, in the 1960s, from community action to community development.

We see the case of community development to be an important example for the examination of the nexus of power and policy, the theme of this special issue. In *Fragments of an Anarchist Anthropology*, David Graeber (2004: 9) has argued that “policy is the negation of politics. . . something concocted by some form of elite,” an instantiation of the “state or governing apparatus which imposes its will on others.” Inspired by Kropotkin, he imagines an anarchism that is “society without government,” a society constituted through “free agreements concluded between the various groups, territorial and professional (Graeber, 2004: 6). In contrast, we see policy, or more broadly liberal government, to be the terrain of politics. This politics includes the complex and contradictory entanglement of poor people’s movements and bureaucracies of poverty. Following the classic text by Piven and Cloward (1977: x), we conceptualize poor people’s movements as those “both formed by and directed against institutional arrangements.” By bureaucracies of poverty we mean the institutional arrangements through which poverty is governed as a social problem. The government of poverty can be understood as a broad field of discourses, practices, and techniques. However, we use the term bureaucracy to indicate the apparatus of urban policy through which the problem of poverty is made visible and known, acted upon, and regulated. For the purposes of this essay, our interest lies in the community development organizations that emerged in the city of Oakland after the mid-1950s, first under the auspices of the Ford Foundation, then replicated within President Johnson’s War on Poverty, and eventually transformed by poor people’s movements such as the Black Panther Party.

The significance of these institutional arrangements of community development is that they were organized around a theory of poverty and in turn a theory of the city. Alinsky (1965: 41) argued that the War on Poverty focused on the “poverty of economy” but ignored the “poverty of power.” Nunes goes a step further by pointing out the specific conceptualization of poverty at stake in community development: the delineation of poverty as a territorial phenomenon.

A unique achievement of this Scheme is that zones of poverty are demarcated. Thus poverty is no longer seen as a condition which exists at a particular stratum within the social structure, but as a phenomenon of certain areas. These areas are labelled communities (Nunes, 1970: 15).

In this essay, based on archival research using local publications and records from elite interventions into poverty in the city of Oakland, as well as records drawn from US foreign-relations and security expertise, in which poverty was thematized as a threat

to security, we argue that this territorialization of poverty is an important legacy of the War on Poverty. Our reading practice in these archives is alert to resonances that bridged geographic divides, an important methodological effort that aims to be adequate to the worldviews of poverty and security experts, whose conceptualizations of problems to be solved were not easily hemmed in by borders or jurisdictions and who were always alert to cross-border solidarities among political radicals—but this practice also attempts to be adequate to the vocabularies and practical efforts of these radicals themselves, who thought it necessary to ground their organizations firmly to gather political strength but also to share ideas, draw inspiration, and coordinate tactically with fellows separated by great distances, in order to overcome the very territorialization we are discussing. Not only did the city, and indeed the city as crisis, animate a new apparatus of policy, but also the space of community came to be the locus of policy interventions and even radical struggle.

As we demonstrate, the precursor to the territorial concept of community was that of “gray areas.” Taking shape in the programs of the Ford Foundation, gray areas was meant to serve as a social remedy for racial fractures. But the crisis of the city was to deepen. The 1966 President’s Task Force on the Cities was unflinching in its diagnosis of the urban crisis: American cities were bound by “apartheid,” a dire “segregation by race and income” that was generating “civil discontent and potential guerilla warfare” (*President’s Task Force on the Cities*, 1966: 4, i, vii). Community development, in its moment of emergence, was to tackle these questions of race and revolution in American cities. As Modarres (2003: 42) has argued, the “magic pill” of development dominated the moment, and served as an “instrument in building citizens in places where disgruntled communities had existed before.” In this essay, we demonstrate how community emerged in the shadow of global counterinsurgency and its distinctive territorial imaginations and practices.

To hold in simultaneous view urban policy and foreign policy also reveals what in the following section we describe as a “double system of pacification.” The US War on Poverty was bound up, as Goldstein (2012: 3) has argued, with “Cold War doctrines of international development and modernization . . . as well as their anxieties about anticolonial insurrections and socialist revolutions.” Nunes presents a forceful argument on this front. In keeping with Black Power discourses of the time, Nunes draws an analogy between ghetto and colony, noting that such zones of poverty do not promise “self-rule.” “Autonomy requires ownership or control of resources, and until that is achieved, we will continue to pay rent,” Nunes poignantly concludes (1970: 23). But for this critic, the ghetto and colony are more than an analogy; they are inextricably linked in a global formation of power. Nunes holds the War on Poverty and the Alliance for Progress, the Kennedy administration’s ambitious economic reform plan for Latin America, in simultaneous view, arguing that the former was simply the “domestic version” of the same plot. The plot, Nunes (1970: 24) noted, was to combine “hard and soft approaches . . . tanks and trinkets.” Thus, in American cities, he argued, “the National Guard is expanded in weaponry and in size” while “a fountain spurting cash into the ghetto is engineered” (Nunes, 1970: 15). Following Nunes, we see these interventions at home and abroad as components of a double system of pacification, in the 1960s and thereafter. Nunes was writing in 1970; while this is beyond the scope of this essay, in short time the fountain spurting cash into the ghetto would be shut off, and the expansion of law and order would transform the “Anti-Poverty Hoax” entirely.

A double system of pacification

“The objective of police is everything from being to well-being, everything that may produce this well-being beyond being, and

in such a way that the well-being of individuals is the state's strength."

Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*, 2007: 328

In the mid-1960s, under the auspices of the Johnson administration, a series of task forces examined the urban crisis that seemed to be brewing in America. The most well known of these, the 1966 President's Task Force on the Cities, chaired by Paul N. Ylvisaker of the Ford Foundation, ominously portrayed a nation segregated by "race and income."

A dangerous confrontation is building in most of our metropolitan areas between white and Negro, rich and poor, growing suburb and declining central city... A century ago, President Lincoln risked the Union in order to preserve it against the threat of internal division. Today a comparable venture in national leadership is called for to heal the rift between the ghetto and growth sectors of American society (*President's Task Force on the Cities*, 1966: i).

The Task Force called for integration, with special emphasis on "community action" as a "major innovation in Federal programming" (1966: 20). Ylvisaker's leadership of this Task Force is important to our analysis, as the Gray Areas program, which he had overseen, was the prior testing ground for his ideas on poverty, which venues like the Task Force enabled him to amplify to a national and international audience. The Task Force also recommended a dramatic increase in federal grants to cities for law enforcement.

But the concerns and recommendations of the 1966 President's Task Force on the Cities were not without precedent. By the time this Task Force was convened, interventions in the urban crisis were already well underway. The Community Action Program, established by the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, was organized around the principle of "maximum feasible participation" of poor people. Community action agencies were meant to be vehicles for community organizing and social mobilization. We argue that the most significant precursor to such programs, and more generally to the field of ideas and practices that is community development, however, was the Gray Areas project of the Ford Foundation (see also Halpern, 1995; O'Connor, 1996). Conceptualized and led by Ylvisaker, the Gray Areas program was implemented through a series of grants to five cities – Oakland, Boston, Philadelphia, New Haven, Washington D.C. – as well as to the state of North Carolina. Though it lasted through the 1960s, the bulk of Gray Areas activities and funding disbursements took place between 1961 and 1967. By 1965, the Ford Foundation had committed \$26.5 million to Gray Areas (Halpern, 1995: 89). In the following section of the paper, we discuss how Gray Areas unfolded as a community development initiative in the city of Oakland.

However, we argue that it is not sufficient to analyze Gray Areas and the subsequent War on Poverty as isolated programs. Such forms of urban policy took place simultaneously with, and often in close connection with, foreign policy, notably counterinsurgency, as well as systems of penalty and policing. We argue that together these policies formed an apparatus of pacification, not always coherent and coordinated, but with a shared existence which spoke to the urgency of the historical moment and its sense of deep crisis. Thus, in 1961, as Gray Areas was being inaugurated, Attorney General Robert Kennedy spurred and won passage of the Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Offenses Control Act, which was the first of that decade's pieces of federal "law and order" legislation. This contemporaneity indicates that liberal programs for poverty alleviation share origin points with the anti-crime measures—aimed at adolescents—associated with conservative

reaction. Moreover, these origins were already global in scope. During this same year, the Kennedy administration bolstered its efforts toward the investigation and development of remedies for insurgency in the Third World, as well as the expansion of ongoing police and paramilitary assistance in South Vietnam and 25 other countries (a number that would increase throughout the decade). The following year, counterinsurgency became official US policy, resulting in the formation of the Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) or SGCI, which brought together high-ranking civilian officials, including Robert Kennedy, and then the publication of the Overseas Internal Defense Policy. This Policy codified the imperatives of a global counterinsurgency strategy, with police assistance under the auspices of the Agency for International Development at its core, and it launched the coordination of wide-ranging efforts among the civilian agencies of the federal government toward that end.

Our analytical framework, which holds together the foreign and the domestic in a single multiscale analytic unit, reveals how the mixture of punitive policy and community development at home resonated deeply with the "civic action"—"training and equipping of engineer units for public works type projects" and "assistance in the field of vocational training," plus "medical, public health or sanitation components"—that composed the key adjunct to police and paramilitary action for counterinsurgency overseas (Johnson, 1963). Indeed, Foucault (2007: 353–354) urges us to think about the police itself as a "double system" – on the one hand, the "whole series of mechanisms" that "fall within the province of the economy and the management of the population with the function of increasing the forces of the state," and on the other hand, "an apparatus or instruments for ensuring the prevention or repression of disorder, irregularity, illegality, and delinquency."

To consider such a double system, it is worth returning to that unusual precedent of the Great Society, Gray Areas. As a theory of poverty, Gray Areas was haunted by what Halpern (1995: 90) has described as a "prohibition against dealing directly with race." Instead, the somewhat ambiguous concept of a "gray area" took the place of more explicit race-talk:

The most familiar pattern of the "Gray Areas" on the American scene is the decay noticed first in the near-downtown sections, centered usually around the railroad station or other main hubs of the old transportation systems, and spreading ring-like toward the boundaries of the central city and suburban fringe. Slums, skid-rows, etc. form a dark inner ring; from there out, the "gray" grows lighter but moves more swiftly as obsolescence of housing and industrial plant accelerates (*The Gray Areas*, n.d.: 1).

Reminiscent of the Chicago School's conceptualization of the city as concentric zones (Park & Burgess, 1925), this Ford Foundation description is devoid of people and human activity. However, as O'Connor (1996: 605) notes, a Gray Area was meant to be not only an urban zone between central business district and suburb but also a space of social transition, one in which the middle class was leaving and poor migrants were moving in rapidly. In Ylvisaker's urban imagination these migrants included "Negroes from the rural South; mountain folk from the Ozarks and Appalachians; Puerto Ricans from their island villages" (O'Connor, 1996: 606). Gray Areas were to be the sites of racial and cultural assimilation. Thus, the 1964 President's Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Problems defined the task as: "to inject a new environment in the old gray areas, an environment in excess of some critical minimum mass, so as to change the attitude of middle-income groups toward the area" (1964: 16). In other words, Gray Areas were to be a milieu of social transformation.

In keeping with our global methodology, we, however, trace an alternate genealogy of the term, “gray area.” In his description of gray areas as a “neutral language,” Ylvisaker credits the term to Raymond Vernon, who directed the Regional Planning Association’s New York Metropolitan Regional Study, and his interest in “the gray area developing between downtown and suburb” (Morrissey, 1973: 23; O’Connor, 1996: 605). But we find that the genealogy of the term stretches beyond the Kennedy era. It goes back to an earlier Democratic administration and to foreign relations. Thomas K. Finletter, a consummate Washington insider and Secretary of the Air Force during President Truman’s second term, elaborated this usage. Finletter’s widely reviewed Cold War book, *Power and Policy: U.S. Foreign Policy and Military Power in the Hydrogen Age*, was published in 1954 just after the end of Truman’s presidency. In it, he depicted the swath of territory along “the long frontier between Freedom and Communism from Turkey on the west, and leading eastward through Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Burma, Thailand, Malaya, Indonesia, Formosa, Korea, and Japan to the Western limit of NATO in the Aleutian chain” (Finletter, 1954: 84–5) as an area that was perceived as not yet loyal to the Soviet Union but, worryingly, nor could it be said reliably loyal to NATO and the United States either. These lands composed the “Gray Areas” (Finletter, 1954).

It was the particular status of the “Gray Area” in the mind of policymakers that required counterinsurgency’s combinatorial approach: loyalties and allegiances of the populations in these territories were up for grabs, so to speak, and the task was to prevent infiltration by those who would orient allegiances toward Peking or Moscow and to provide evidence of how that allegiance to Washington, or to its proxy governments, was most beneficial to the target population. A “Gray Area” would be shaded more starkly in one direction or the other by the territorialization of loyalty. We suggest that the “Gray Areas” metaphor functioned in similar fashion in the hands of liberal domestic policymakers. The loyalties of delinquent youth at home, from Oakland to New Haven, were also in question. Gray Areas then is an important reminder of the struggles of American liberalism, what O’Connor (2007: 2) describes as the effort to “reconcile its incomplete commitments to racial justice and economic security with the global crusade against communism.”

A racial tinderbox

“A bulldozer cannot get slums out of people.”

Ford Foundation, *Public Affairs and Education: Gray Areas Program*, 1962: 3

“It is not easy to raise a good crop in a strange field with uprooted stock. . . The crop they expect to harvest is citizens with a sense of community pride, a sense of values and an appreciation of the advantages they can gain for themselves if they are willing to help themselves.”

“Family Life,” *Oakland Tribune* May 27, 1962

The Gray Areas program launched by the Ford Foundation was an ambitious experiment in community action, and the key elements of Gray Areas persisted in the frameworks and programs of the War on Poverty. For example, the 1964 President’s Task Force on Metropolitan and Urban Problems, chaired by Robert C. Wood, put forth a strong call for a shift from urban renewal, was seen to have only exacerbated “social problems” to “social goals” (1964: 13–14). This also marked a shift in focus from the blighted slums that had been the target of urban renewal to “large residential grey areas in or near the central portions of . . . urban communities.” The idea was to “recapture” these areas, to “inject a new environment” in them (President’s Task Force on Metropolitan

and Urban Problems, 1964: 16). The Task Force report called for a strategy of “demonstration cities” for the implementation of such a “human development program” (1964: vii).

But in Gray Areas cities such as Oakland the demonstration of a new approach to human development was already well underway. The Ford Foundation found there what Regal (1967: 6) described as a “laboratory to study various methods of social intervention.” Indeed, Oakland epitomized the urban crisis and its race and class dimensions. The city had been a center of Klan activity in the 1920s, and a 1966 *Wall Street Journal* article called Oakland “a racial tinderbox.” The article continued, “an influx of impoverished Negroes has put a strain on local housing, schools and job opportunities. . . there is sufficient mistrust, disaffection, and frustration building up in Negro communities to make the situation potentially explosive” (*Wall Street Journal*, January 5, 1966). It was this crisis of the city—a center of interracial conflict, overrun by Black migrants—that the Ford Foundation and later the War on Poverty sought to solve. But even before the Ford Foundation appeared on the scene, a new configuration of urban governance had emerged in Oakland in order to implement a coordinated response to juvenile delinquency.

Following interracial conflicts at two Oakland high schools, in 1957 the City Manager organized Oakland’s Associated Agencies. Composed of the City Manager’s Office, the Police Department, the Recreation Department, the Oakland School District, the Alameda County Probation Department, and the State of California Youth Authority, the Associated Agencies coordinated the policing and treatment of delinquent youth.

The Ford Foundation, impressed with “evidence of a multi-agency commitment to cope with community problems” selected Oakland as the first Gray Areas city (Regal, 1967: 3). Castlemont—the site of one of the high school “race riots”—was to be the focus of Gray Areas funding and programming. Explicitly presented not as a slum but “as an ideal area for experiment—because without help it could easily sag into new slums” (*San Francisco Examiner*, December 28, 1961), Castlemont was contested territory. Though the population of Oakland as a whole declined between 1950 and 1960, the Black population nearly doubled. As white families left Oakland and built its prosperous suburbs, Black families began to buy and rent homes beyond the boundaries of the West Oakland ghetto (Self, 2003a, 2003b: 160–61). Fears of unruly, criminal youth were closely linked to the perception that these newly arrived migrants threatened the stability of the neighborhood. The solution to these dilemmas of difference was the “renewal of people” over the “renewal of things”; the neglected “soul of cities, the people” (*Oakland Tribune*, February 25, 1964). The Gray Areas program would have a “special focus on the assimilation of the newcomer population living in the Castlemont area” (Ford Foundation to Houlihan, December 28, 1961: 1). These newcomers—imagined as rural, Southern, Black, and unassimilated—were in fact a small percentage of the population, and most of Castlemont’s new arrivals had moved from within the county (Regal, 1967: 37).

The majority of Gray Areas programming focused on school-age youth, the unruly targets of Gray Areas’ precursor, the Associated Agencies, an integrated alliance of public school system, the Police Department and the Recreation Department with local welfare, probation, and health agencies and the state-level California Youth Authority. Gray Areas in Oakland continued the work of the Associated Agencies, and combined cultural and educational programming, social science and public health research, and increased policing and management of delinquent and “pre-delinquent” youth (Regal, 1967: 96). Focused on Castlemont schools, Gray Areas offered language-arts programs, counseling for recently enrolled junior-high school students, elementary school librarians, and afterschool youth study centers with tutors. Through a grant to

Oakland Recreation Department, Gray Areas funded an integrated day camp intended to improve the racial attitudes of children, and mobile creative-arts workshops for children. The Associated Agencies, previously focused on the coordinated policing, institutionalization, and surveillance of high school-aged youth, began to strengthen cross-agency collaboration and expanded to elementary schools. Intended to “provide corrective services before delinquent behavior became ingrained”, the Associated Agencies Elementary School Project focused on boys in grades two through five (Regal, 1967: 52). The Oakland Probation Department received a grant to establish a pre-trial release program for poor adults through increased research and coordination by probation officers. Through the Health Department, Gray Areas established neighborhood groups that picked up trash, built a playground, and advocated for small neighborhood improvements. Gray Areas also coordinated a study of breakfast eating habits in Oakland, hired visiting home hygiene nurses, and offered a series of courses for pregnant teenage girls. In its second phase, Gray Areas also offered adult and youth employment-training programs.

Central to this project of integration and pacification were self-help and cultural assimilation. A newspaper headline about Gray Areas in Oakland reported, “25 Mothers Join Quest For Culture.” The article continued, “Where does one find culture? It might be most anywhere. At an airport, a museum, a rose garden... But how can parents who know so little about such things hope to help their children help themselves? (*Oakland Tribune*, June 7, 1963). Participants in Gray Areas programs were not passive recipients of aid; as a hygiene nurse explained, “the emphasis is on self-sufficiency... our main job is to motivate people to be responsible for their own care” (*Oakland Tribune*, February 22, 1963).

This emphasis on self-help aligns with the thrust of developmental aid for Third World countries. Secretary of State Dean Rusk (1961: 452) declared in an address to Congress:

It is also important that our assistance to the underdeveloped nations be correlated with their own efforts to marshal their resources. As I have said before, while we believe that our assistance should be without strings which offend or impair the freedom of others, we have every right to expect that the underdeveloped nations will themselves adopt realistic objectives for us to support. Self-help must be our principal “string”—and an insistent one.

Buttressing the insistence upon self-help for “underdeveloped” nations was a range of police interventions that accompanied development aid in the period. When self-help took the form of strident calls for, and practices of, self-determination, the security apparatuses of nations across Finletter’s Gray Areas, bolstered by US training, money, and hardware, stood poised to intervene. Domestically, the punitive response to obstreperous juveniles, coordinated in the Gray Areas of Oakland, resonated with this approach, whereby the limits of self-help were marked by suspicions of criminality or disloyalty and resulting harsh penalties.

Yet in Oakland the story of how community action became community development, with familiar tropes and practices of self-help, is also a story of political contestation and the genesis of new organizational forms. Oakland is the most dramatic example of how federal antipoverty programs were leveraged and contested in multiple and often contradictory ways. War on Poverty programs and bureaucracies in Oakland in the 1960s were both integrationist techniques of governance that successfully demobilized and institutionalized Black political organizing (Hayes, 1972) and platforms Black people successfully leveraged to build political power and terrains for militant, confrontational engagement with the state (Rhomberg, 2004; Self, 2003a, 2003b). Activists—both mid-career progressive reformers and militant

youth—seized and remade the very categories imposed first by the Ford Foundation and later by War on Poverty administrators. As Self (2000: 773) notes, Black social movements turned the city’s poverty boards and agencies into “instruments of a new political agenda for Oakland.” Such political strategies marked a rupture with the self-help programs initiated by Gray Areas. Instead, activists, particularly the Black Panther Party, drew upon the vocabulary and imagination of global decolonization to put forward a vision of self-determination. The community, as a territory of experiment and intervention, was once again transformed, this time into a space of militant autonomy.

With the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, Gray Areas in Oakland received federal War on Poverty funding to expand into a new, citywide Department of Human Resources. To meet the requirements of the “maximum feasible participation” mandate, calling for the participation of the poor, the mayor of Oakland established a citizens’ board, the Oakland Economic Development Council. The Council was initially imagined as a complacent, federally funded arm of the local War on Poverty bureaucracy. The Mayor appointed several mainline African American civil rights leaders as representatives of the community; what Gray Areas director Norvel Smith (2004: 165) called a “Black kitchen cabinet” of the conservative city mayor. But these token community representatives quickly leveraged the federal participation mandate to take control of the Council. They used the federal antipoverty apparatus to facilitate their own entry into previously closed political arenas and expanded opportunities for Black professionals (Rhomberg, 2004: 138–39). The Council included representatives from neighborhood-based Target Area Advisory Committees, intended to represent the interests of the poor. But neighborhood activists on these committees challenged the legitimacy and authority of the middle-class professionals, claiming they were not authorized to represent poor residents of Target Area neighborhoods. The War on Poverty, they argued, should address structural issues such as racism and joblessness, not simply expand existing social services. In a second coup, on the heels of the first, the advisory committee activists demanded and won majority control—per the national “51 percent control” mandate—of the Council. Self (2000: 776–777) writes, “In doing so, they shifted more than the center of gravity of the War on Poverty. They transformed the Oakland Economic Development Council from an extension of the city’s service bureaucracy into an opposition political platform... these calls for community power, and ultimately Black power, increasingly defined the battle lines within the city’s poverty program.”

By 1968, three years after the inauguration of the War on Poverty, the Council was controlled by militant community activists, who explicitly embraced Black Power and were in political opposition to city hall. The mayor refused to acknowledge the activist leadership, and after a series of battles—notably, the Council’s call for a police review board to address police brutality in poor neighborhoods—the Council dissolved its relationship to the City of Oakland, and became an independent, federally funded non-profit (Self, 2000: 777). The new director, Percy Moore, immediately organized a boycott of a local grocery store to protest the police slaying of Black Panther Bobby Hutton (Hayes, 1972). At the same time, activists in West Oakland challenged the federal Model Cities program. They seized control of the West Oakland Planning Committee, which was established to represent the poor and give the Model Cities planning process the stamp of community approval. Like the Oakland Economic Development Council, the Model Cities Planning Committee became a space for the articulation of Black political analysis, a global, multiscale imagination that positioned Oakland as one of many sites of anticolonial struggle. Planning Committee leader Paul Cobb declared, “We live on an urban plantation. We have to plan our liberation” (Self, 2000: 780). The

Panthers linked Oakland to “other colonial cities of Asia or Africa: Shanghai, Singapore, Alexandria, and Hong Kong,” stretching across Finletter’s geopolitical Gray Areas; West Oakland was implicated in the “imperialist war” in Vietnam through the nearby army base and U.S. Naval Supply Center from which soldiers and material were shipped to Southeast Asia (Self, 2000: 771). This site provided a place-specific point of organizing convergence for the largely white, student-based peace movement and Black radicals. Whereas early antiwar protests attempted to halt train shipments to these military installations in order to interfere with the “imperialist war,” some Panthers went overseas to recently decolonized locales as emissaries, attempting to build upon their Black radical forebears’ internationalism, while radicals in cities across the globe organized militant groups that took inspiration from the Panthers’ Oakland-based efforts.

Middle class Black reformers imagined first Gray Areas and then War on Poverty bureaucracies as a chance to improve Black lives and gradually, strategically build progressive coalitions to challenge the conservative business elite that controlled city government (Self, 2003a, 2003b). The failure of the War on Poverty programs to challenge structural inequity deeply informed the Black social movements, including the Black Panthers. The failure made city hall a target. In the 1970s, the Panthers helped topple the local Republican political machine, claiming that their anticolonial struggle had “traveled the full circle described by Fanon: from guerilla street battles to mainstream politics” (Self, 2000: 762).

The dilemma of advocacy

“To the extent a center engages in vigorous advocacy on behalf of the individuals it serves, it runs the risk of creating a ‘bureaucratic backlash’ which may adversely affect the effectiveness of the center’s information and referral functions. Yet, effective advocacy may well achieve institutional changes benefiting large numbers of individuals, rather than just a single cause.”

The President’s Task Force on the Cities, 1966: 5

The 1966 President’s Task Force on the Cities presented the puzzle of community action as the “dilemma of advocacy,” a clash between the political and functional goals of the neighborhood centers established by the Office of Economic Opportunity, the main federal arm of the War on Poverty (1966: 5). The Task Force, however, severely underestimated the dilemmas of advocacy as they were unleashed first by the Gray Areas program and then by Great Society interventions. As an “adjunct to government” (Magat, 1979: 122), Gray Areas had already implied an effort to institutionalize community organizing, specifically by creating a set of mediating institutions meant to manage community action. But the case of Oakland demonstrates how such mediating institutions also became platforms for militant action, and how agendas of self-help and social reform thus came to be appropriated and challenged by the quest for self-determination and the struggle against racial subjugation.

However, it would be a mistake to separate and contrast anti-poverty policy and poor people’s movements. As we have already shown, policy instruments became platforms for radical movements. And radical movements often provided the impulse and format for urban policy. This, we believe, is an important analytical approach to the study of power and policy. One example of the latter is the Free Breakfast for Children Program run by the Black Panther Party in Oakland. As analyzed by Heynen (2009), this program was a local spatial practice that rescaled the global revolutionary praxis of the Black Panther Party. The political imagination of a worldwide community of oppressed peoples living in colonized ghettos but connected through struggle was thus translated into

“bodily reality” of social reproduction (Heynen, 2009: 407). At the same time, the Breakfast for Children Program became, as Heynen (2009: 406) notes, “both the model for, and impetus behind, all federally funded school breakfast programs currently in existence within the United States.”

Similarly, it is difficult to keep separate the seemingly contrasting agendas of self-help and self-determination in community action and community development. The Black Panther Party is an example of a movement concerned with community liberation, with community defined both as the embodiment of poverty in Oakland as well as imagined as a global collectivity organized around decolonization. But other forms of Black Power in Oakland were to think differently about community development and the instruments of the state. In the years that followed the turmoil of the 1960s, a generation of middle-class professionals gained political power in Oakland, benefiting from both the direct-action strategies of the Black Panther Party and the liberal programs of the War on Poverty. As Self (2000: 106) notes of such men, they “consistently held Black power in one hand and integration in the other.”

With such entanglements in mind, we arrive at the following conclusions about community development as it was crafted and negotiated in the shadow of global counterinsurgency. First, it is instructive to study the shift from community action to community development in relation to the contrasting and yet conjoined agendas of self-help and self-determination. Such an approach provides an alternative history of discourses of self-help that became much more predominant in urban policy later on, marking not so much a moment of rupture in their emergence but instead a firm rootedness in long traditions of government. Our focus on Gray Areas as a precursor to the Great Society is meant to foreground this long view and to present the 1960s as a moment of great ambivalence in the arc of urban policy.

Second, we argue that a history of community development must necessarily be a history of pacification, and that such a history is in turn a global history. Urban theorists such as Loïc Wacquant (2010) have paid close attention to how the management of poverty is articulated with punitive regulation. Although Wacquant is concerned with contemporary formations of neoliberalism, and the twinning of prisonfare and workfare, we trace such articulations to the turbulent 1960s and the project of liberal government. The task of liberal government, we note, was at once concerned with segregation and unrest in the cities of America and with wars of insurgency abroad. In turn, the experiences of poverty and its narrowly formatted alleviation, as well as of punitive responses to delinquency or insurgency, enabled radicals and activists to empathize and strategize across borders to develop an anticolonial political approach that bridged foreign and domestic spheres.

Third, the excavation of such histories of liberal government makes possible a deconstruction of the oft-used term community and its deployment in the field of action and ideas that is community development. It is tempting, in this historical analysis, to view community as a ploy, as nothing more than what Alinsky (1965: 43), in describing the War on Poverty, presented as a “con game gimmick of ‘consensus’...by representatives of the *status quo* who want to prevent change and who are fearful of militant action.” But there was much more to the concept of community in the American 1960s. Community was also the locus of self-determination and liberation. And as Nunes (1970) pointed out, it was a distinctive territorialization of poverty and thus of urban policy. It is this aspect of community – of community as a theory of poverty and a theory of the city – that has been of interest to us. Such theories of the city, and of territorialized poverty, are very much a part of the present history of urban policy and liberal government.

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