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The Racial Triangulation of Space: The Case of Urban Renewal in San Francisco’s Fillmore District

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Geographers, planners, and urbanists have rarely focused on racialization as a relational process involving multiple groups, and most work to date adopts a black–white model of race relations. The case study of post-World War II urban renewal in San Francisco’s Fillmore District permits geographers and other urbanists the opportunity to examine racial formation as a relational process that differentially positioned African Americans and Asian Americans with respect to each other in the redevelopment process. This positioning resulted in differential outcomes for these two communities, even though both had been segregated into this multiracial and multiethnic neighborhood up until the mid-twentieth century and, as a result, shared a common history and mutual geography. This article utilizes archival research, personal interviews, and theories of racialization from ethnic studies and critical race theory literature to examine, as political scientist Claire Kim put it, the “racial triangulation” or “positioning” of Japanese Americans and African Americans in the Fillmore’s redevelopment. I argue that this positioning was a spatial process that located Japanese Americans and African Americans differently with respect to the imagineering behind the district’s urban renewal and with respect to the political process behind redevelopment. This spatialized racial triangulation, in turn, intersected with discourses of blight and Cold War Orientalism with the latter discourse eliding differences between Japanese-American spaces and Japan and resulting in the construction of a Japanese Cultural and Trade Center. Key Words: African Americans, Asian Americans, racialization, racial positioning, urban renewal.

Geógrafos, planificadores y urbanistas raramente concentran su interés en la racialización como proceso relacional que involucra múltiples grupos, y la mayor parte del trabajo realizado hasta la fecha adopta un modelo de relaciones raciales negro-blanco. El estudio de caso correspondiente a la renovación urbana posterior a la II Guerra Mundial del Distrito Fillmore de San Francisco da a los geógrafos y otros urbanistas la oportunidad de examinar la formación racial como un proceso relacional que posicionó diferencialmente a los afro-americanos y a los asiático-americanos en relación de los unos con los otros dentro del proceso de re-desarrollo. Este posicionamiento desembocó en resultados diferenciales para estas dos comunidades, así ambos hubieren estado segregados en aquel vecindario multirracial y multiétnico hasta la mitad del siglo XX y hayan compartido en consecuencia una historia común y una mutua geografía. Este artículo utiliza investigación de archivos, entrevistas personales y teorías de racialización de la literatura de estudios étnicos y teoría racial crítica, para examinar, tal cual lo propusiera la politóloga Claire Kim, la “triangulación racial” o “posicionamiento” de los japoneses americanos y afro-americanos en el re-desarrollo de Fillmore. Arguyo que este posicionamiento fue el proceso espacial que localizó de manera diferente a los japoneses americanos y afro-americanos respecto de la imaginación que se esconde tras la renovación urbana del Distrito y respecto del proceso político que está detrás.

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In July 2008 the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency (RDA) announced that it would officially “sunset” the Western Addition A-2 urban renewal project on 1 January 2009, thus ending one of the city’s longest tenured redevelopment projects (Fulbright 2008). The opening of a chic jazz center in the Western Addition (or Fillmore) District in November 2007 preceded the RDA’s announcement, which was seen as redevelopment’s culminating triumph and presented a seemingly graceful means to declare the project’s close and figuratively ride off into the storied California sunset. For many in the city’s African-American and Japanese-American communities, however, the announcement evoked ambivalent feelings, if not pain. Instead of bringing renewal or storied sunsets, the Fillmore’s twin redevelopment projects (A-1 and A-2) eviscerated these two communities in the name of blight removal. The RDA’s announcement on A-2 was, in fact, belated because the bulk of displacements and demolition occurred in the four decades following World War II when urban renewal was the dominant Keynesian policy for addressing urban crisis and restructuring postwar cities (Sugrue 1996; Gilmore 1998; Beauregard 2003). Between the late 1970s and the late 1990s, the project had been largely stalled, a testament to grassroots mobilization, changes in federal urban policy related to the Keynesian state’s slow death, and the contentious nature of this project, which displaced thousands from the multiracial and multiethnic Fillmore and effectively destroyed the city’s most significant African-American and Japanese-American neighborhoods.

What differentiates the Fillmore’s redevelopment from other cases in mid-twentieth-century U.S. cities is not the project’s destructive size, mixture of modernist faith and hubris, or failed good intentions but rather the multiracial nature of this project. Most accounts of redevelopment (e.g., Gans 1962; J. Wilson 1966; Squires 1989; Thomas 1997; Gotham 2002) justifiably focus on the policy’s catastrophic effects on black people and the ethnic white working class; however, African Americans, whites, and Asian Americans were involved in and affected by the Fillmore’s redevelopment.

This article analyzes the Fillmore’s redevelopment between 1945 and 1980 as a multiracial and spatial phenomenon. It examines the redevelopment process and the racialization of space beyond a black–white racial analytical viewpoint (Cho 1993; Ikemoto 1993; Okihiro 1994; Perea 1997; Caldwell 1999; C. Kim 1999; J. Kim 1999). Asian Americans, specifically Japanese Americans, played a key role in the Fillmore’s redevelopment in conjunction with their black neighbors and the white “imagineers” who redeveloped their neighborhood (Rutheiser 1996, 4). The social construction of race is not only geographically specific and historically sedimented, but it also involves multiple racialized groups and different axes and scales of racialization (C. Kim 1999; K. Mitchell 2004).

On the U.S. and Canadian West Coast, racialization of individuals of Asian descent historically played a major role in defining the meaning of race from the late nineteenth century through the first half of the twentieth century, shaping local, regional, and eventually national discourses on race (Anderson 1991; Kobayashi 1992; Almaguer 1994; Glenn 2002). Although African Americans figured in early debates about race in California and were racialized negatively particularly around questions of “free” labor, numerically black people never constituted a large population in California or San Francisco until World War II (Almaguer 1994). Asian Americans instead were the defining racialized other and the exploited racialized labor force central to the state’s nineteenth- and early twentieth-century economy after the indigenous Californian population was exterminated and its Mexican population was displaced through colonial conquest (Almaguer 1994). Like African Americans, Asian Americans were racialized in part around questions of labor and were seen at various points as economic competitors to white labor, to farmers, and to some capitalists; however, they were also seen as invaders from the East, disease vectors, enemy aliens, and sexual threats (Choy, Dong, and Hom 1995; Saxton 1995; R. Lee 1999). As a result, many West Coast Asian immigrants, particularly Chinese and Japanese, became segregated into urban enclaves where their neighbors, because of class and racial disadvantage, included Latinos, ethnic white
working-class immigrants, and African Americans (Taylor 1991; Kurashige 2002, 2008; Sanchez 2004; Wild 2005; Varzally 2008). Perceived as blighted sites of contagion, many of these communities were later targeted for postwar redevelopment (J. Lee 2004).

Thus, regionally specific racialization had ramifications for the Fillmore’s urban renewal where the RDA discursively and politically accentuated and deployed perceived racial differences to shape and fulfill its goals. The RDA’s actions, in fact, treated the two communities separately despite the fact that the core areas identified with them overlapped and in practice individuals in the two communities shared many of the same living, educational, and commercial spaces. This is not to say that the two social groups were racialized in exactly the same way, that they were necessarily allies, or that the effects of racialization meant that these groups occupied the same economic or social position in the West Coast social formation (Pulido 2006). It is to say that both Japanese and African Americans were negatively positioned within a racially stratified society where whites ascribed the meaning of race and that one of the results of these circumstances was mutual proximity and a common history of subordination (Taylor 1991; Pulido 2006; Kurashige 2008).

The two communities shared similar histories of segregation, which were enforced through everyday racist violence; employment discrimination; state policy; and developer, realtor, lender, and landlord state-sanctioned (in)actions (Sugrue 1996; Gilmore 2002b; Horiuchi 2007), the result of which was an overlapping and overdetermined common history and mutual geography between the Fillmore’s two major racialized communities even though the “regional racial hierarchy” underwent significant transformations in the mid-twentieth century (Pulido 2006, 26; Kurashige 2008). Yet redevelopment imagineers concentrated their speculative development energies on the Japantown area during the A-1 renewal phase, constructing a Japanese Cultural and Trade Center (JCTC) in the heart of this area. Although the JCTC was a highly problematic development that capitalized on Orientalized images for its appeal and elided differences between Japanese-American and Japanese people and their cultures, despite being two or more generations removed from Japan, no analogous redevelopment project celebrating black culture existed in the district’s African-American communities. Moreover, the RDA treated organizations from these two communities dissimilarly (embracing one and largely dismissing the other) during A-2 when they approached the agency to protest displacement and make claims to the state. How does one explain this differential treatment and the differential outcomes for these two communities despite their intersecting histories and geographies? What does this difference say about the spatial racialization of these two groups? In what ways did the policy’s supporters racially position, to use political scientist C. Kim’s (1999, 2002) provocative phrase, African Americans vis-à-vis Japanese Americans in the redevelopment process with respect to urban blight discourse or concepts of property? Moreover, how was the redevelopment process made more effective through the social and spatial differentiation of these two groups? This article, then, is an analysis of African-American and Asian-American relational racialization, using the case of the Fillmore’s postwar urban renewal and paying particular attention to space and scale in the racial positioning process. It adapts C. Kim’s (1999) racial positioning or triangulation theory to analyze urban renewal as a case of spatialized racial triangulation.

In the following sections I present first a brief theoretical overview of the ethnic studies theories that inform this analysis. Next I introduce the historical background for the Fillmore’s redevelopment between 1945 and 1980, paying particular attention to the histories of African and Japanese Americans in the district and to the political economic forces behind A-1 and A-2. This will be followed with an examination contrasting the JCTC’s development with a failed project known as the Fillmore Center and with an investigation of the RDA’s treatment of Japanese-American and African-American community groups in the Fillmore. This part of my analysis also includes an examination of the Buchanan (or Nihonmachi) Mall development, which was built during A-2 in collaboration with a Nisei merchant group. I conclude with some remarks on space and scale in the racial positioning of the Fillmore’s two redeveloped communities.

**Situating Racial Theory**

Although Anglophone geographers, like Anderson (1991), Pulido (1996, 2000), Gilmore (1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2007), Kobayashi and Peake (2000), Pred (2000, 2004), and B. M. Wilson (2000), have examined the mutual constitution of race and space, with the exception of Pulido (2006), they have not analyzed this process as a multivectored, relational one involving multiple racialized groups. Additionally, these analyses largely remain focused on black–white relations, a focus justified by the continued salience of anti-black racism...
but that might not reflect racial dynamics in many locations. Exceptions to the black–white focus include Anderson (1991), Kobayashi (1992), and K. Mitchell (2004), which examine North American Asian–white relations.

Some of the most incisive work on racialization today, however, focuses on multiple subordinated groups and the interrelations between them. Such a change reflects not just recognition of a multiracial future, but also of a multiracial past. Many of these works examine African-American and Asian-American relations (Taylor 1991; Harden 2003) or they analyze multiple racialized groups in a particular city or region. Almaguer (1994), for example, focused on California’s racial hierarchy and Sanchez (2004), Wild (2005), and Molina (2006) examined multiracial relations in Los Angeles. Additionally, Kurashige (2008) and Brooks (2009) investigated Los Angeles’s racialized politics of housing under changing economic and international conditions. For the most part these excellent works do not center space in their analysis. To this end my article draws from this ethnic studies work as well as the theoretical work of Omi and Winant (1994) on the social construction of race and C. Kim (1999, 2002) on relational racial positioning to engage in a dialogue between geography and ethnic studies.

According to Omi and Winant (1994) racial categories (i.e., ascribed, embodied, and essentialized social difference) are “created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” through political contested, “historically situated [racial] projects,” which link representations and meanings of race to everyday practices and to macrolevel social organization based on these meanings (Omi and Winant 1994, 55–56). Thus, urban renewal can be seen as a spatialized racial project because redevelopment imagineers deployed blight discourse, which pathologized neighborhoods of color and their inhabitants, to justify state intervention in places like the Fillmore. Furthermore, in the Fillmore redevelopment, imagineers utilized Orientalism as part of this racial project when they constructed the JCTC (without input from the local Japanese-American community but with capital and development assistance from Japan) as a supposed re-creation of Japan. This development exoticized Japantown as Japanese space and signaled the rescaling of the San Francisco postwar economy toward Asia (Committee Against Nihonmachi Eviction [CANE] 1975). In addition, Omi and Winant (1994) argued that the politically contested nature of racial projects helps explain the shift from color-conscious attempts to redress racism as a result of the civil rights movement to the current dominant color-blind approach to race that claims racism’s death to roll back antiracist state intervention. The Fillmore’s redevelopment and the differential positioning of its residents occurred during this mid- to late-twentieth-century transformation in the meaning of race.

In contrast, C. Kim’s (1999) racial triangulation theory adds a relational and multivectored element to racial formation. Her analysis utilizes the case of 1990s black–Korean conflict in New York City to theorize U.S. race relations and Asian American status within them. Instead of seeing the U.S. racial order as a “simple hierarchy” with white and black as the two poles, she described this racial order as a “field of racial positions” where different groups are racialized with respect to each other and with respect to multiple social parameters (C. Kim 1999, 107; 2002, 16). In the case of Asian Americans, she argued that they have been and continue to be discursively positioned (or triangulated) vis-à-vis both African Americans and whites in terms of racial and cultural superiority or inferiority and in terms of perceived foreignness (i.e., “civic ostracism”; C. Kim 1999, 107). Thus, although Asian Americans might be perceived as inferior to whites and superior to African Americans, they also are portrayed as outside the U.S. nation. Her point on foreignness draws from the work of critical race theory scholars, like Gotanda (1985), who argued that, despite actual citizenship, racialization as “immigrants” or “foreigners” defines Asian and Asian-American racialization.

The other key point she made is that the field of racial positions, the actions of parties involved, and the narratives that pundits and newspapers use to portray a particular racialized situation are constrained by “racial power” or “the racial status quo’s systemic tendency toward self-reproduction” (C. Kim 2002, 2). Such self-reproduction is accomplished in part through representations that portray African Americans as an unsuccessful minoritized group or underclass, which pathologize black culture as a “culture of poverty” and their politics as militant, whereas Asian Americans have been positioned as a successful minoritized group or model minority whose success is due to their culture, hard work, and lack of state confrontation (Lagueree 1999; R. Lee 1999; Kurashige 2008). This discourse decontextualizes the specific (and related) histories and geographies of these two racialized communities. Moreover, it arose at key historical moments to promote Cold War politics, delegitimize late 1960s activism, or roll back civil rights gains in the 1980s, thus using
Asian Americans to discipline African Americans and Latinos (C. Kim 1999; R. Lee 1999; Palumbo-Liu 1999; Kurashige 2008). Considerations of foreignness factored into triangulation of the Fillmore’s African and Japanese Americans where redevelopers linked Japanese-American space to Japan to justify the JCTC’s construction. Here Cold War political imperatives were particularly central to the pro-growth coalition’s decision making. These imperatives underscored Japan’s special relationship with the United States as the bulwark of its anti-Communist strategy in Asia with the Fillmore serving as an encapsulated site symbolizing and promoting this relationship. The Center also painted a pluralistic image of the Cold War city and nation to counter claims of domestic racism and social inequality. At the same time redevelopers evaluated Nikkei and African-American community groups differentially when forming partnerships with certain groups and not others. Model minority discourse as well as the local and regional intersections between class and racial hierarchies influenced how redevelopers positioned different community groups (Pulido 2006).

Although neither C. Kim (1999, 2002) nor Omi and Winant (1994) provided a detailed spatial analysis in their theories, their work can incorporate these concerns. Pulido (2006), for example, utilized their insights to examine the differential racialization of black, Latino, and Japanese-American leftists of color in 1970s Los Angeles and argues that their differences in organizing are linked to the varied social positioning and economic integration of each group within the regional racial hierarchy and changing class hierarchy. She noted that African Americans occupied the lowest economic position within the Los Angeles racial hierarchy where they also discursively defined the racialized other after World War II. In contrast, Nikkei positioning was undergoing transformation in the pre- and postwar period where they increasingly occupied an intermediate position within the racial and class hierarchies, especially in terms of self-employment and eventually the professions. In the Fillmore this difference in economic incorporation might have influenced the RDA’s decisions to collaborate with certain community groups, individuals, or both during A-2. Another key argument that Pulido (2006) made is that proximity and shared racialization did not necessarily result in allied political action—a point that Miles (2005) made regarding the intimate spaces of the home in slave-owning Cherokee multiracial families.

Thus, a spatialized analysis of racial triangulation in the Fillmore’s renewal requires attention to the redevelopment process and to its supporters’ treatment of African and Japanese Americans: how they portrayed the two communities and their spaces, interacted with different community groups, and what they built as a result of their imagineering. It also requires attention to actually existing specificities of racial positioning within changing local and regional racial and class hierarchies (Pulido 2006). Finally, it requires consideration of changing postwar national and international politics on racial positioning (Kurashige 2008; Brooks 2009).

Making the Fillmore

Historically one of the city’s most diverse neighborhoods, the Western Addition is located approximately one mile west of downtown. Its name refers to the area annexed to San Francisco’s then westernmost border in 1858 (Scott 1985). See Figure 1. Its residents, however, refer to the neighborhood by its major thoroughfare, Fillmore Street.

Although Japanese migrants had been in San Francisco since the late nineteenth century, the Fillmore’s Japantown dates from the 1906 earthquake, which forced working-class ethnic whites and people of color to this white middle-class neighborhood because it was relatively unscathed (Scott 1947; San Francisco Redevelopment Agency [SFRA] 1956; Morozumi 1977; Okita 1980). White San Franciscans viewed the Japanese immigrant presence there (approximately 5,000 residents) negatively as an invading foreign peril. This perception that Japanese migrants remained loyal to Japan persisted even though by the mid-twentieth century the majority of the neighborhood were second- and third-generation U.S. citizens and even though the Japanese government’s relationship with Japanese-American communities historically was complex and at times distancing (Ichioka 1988; Azuma 2005). Changes in U.S.–Japan relations, however, did affect Japanese-American treatment with the internment being the most egregious example.

Japanese outsider status, in fact, had been legally codified through their designation, in the 1922 Ozawa case, as “aliens ineligible to citizenship,” resulting in Issei inability to own property because of Alien Land Laws (Haney-López 1996; Ngai 2004). Thus, as a concentrated space of alterity within the formerly white neighborhood, Japantown and the surrounding Fillmore became stigmatized. For example, as Horiuchi (2007) noted, developers marketed the nearby Presidio Terrace development as Japanese-free.
In contrast the Fillmore’s African-American community was largely a product of World War II. Numerically small and dispersed throughout the city prior to the war, African-American presence in the Fillmore is tied to the forced absence and dispossession of Japanese Americans (Angelou 1971; Daniels 1990; Broussard 1993). In 1942, West Coast Japanese Americans were interned in inland concentration camps. African Americans from the U.S. South subsequently filled their vacated dwellings when thousands of migrants flooded into the city for war industry jobs. This influx hardened the city’s race relations. As a result, these migrants became restricted to a limited number of neighborhoods despite the fact that the African-American community grew from 4,836 (0.5 percent of the city’s population) to 43,460 (5.6 percent of the city’s population) between 1940 and 1950 (Daniels 1990). As a result, the city’s elites viewed this community as a problem. 

After the war Japanese Americans slowly returned to the Fillmore, eventually reaching prewar population levels. Their return brought significant numbers of African and Japanese Americans into contact with each other. On the ground relations between the two communities were mixed. In Kurashige’s (2008, 158) analysis of postwar Los Angeles he argues that the African- and Japanese-American communities “coexisted,” although there might have been differences of opinion, occasional disagreements, and instances of prejudice. Similar situations existed in the Fillmore
and were particularly acute when Japanese Americans attempted to evict African-American tenants from buildings they had owned (through citizen children or white proxies) before the war; however, cooperation and interchange also occurred: Members of each group shared community institutional space, patronized the same establishments, lived in the same subdivided buildings, and occasionally participated in each other’s festivals (Kahn Yamada, personal interview, 23 July 2004). A shared history of racialization and segregation had produced conditions for a limited politics of recognition (Gilmore 2002a); however, postwar political, economic, racial, and international conditions had changed and these altered circumstances would drastically impact the Fillmore and divide its communities.

**Redevelopment Apparatus**

When postwar redevelopment supporters looked at the Fillmore, they did not see a viable neighborhood. They instead painted a picture of racialized pathology. At a 1948 public hearing, State Senator O'Gara noted that the Fillmore was the city’s worst blighted area with metastasizing ramifications for the city’s citizenry and other districts:

> [It] is the [district] where the worst blighted conditions exist, . . . the most overcrowded . . . the oldest houses, the most unsanitary conditions, the place where crime and juvenile delinquency and domestic difficulties, and all the other things that grow out of blight and slums[s] exist in the worst degree. (City and County of San Francisco 1948, 6)

Earlier the San Francisco Planning and Housing Association (SFPHA) connected the Fillmore’s spatial pathology with the bodies of its racialized inhabitants:

> the Geary-Fillmore District. It’s not white. It’s gray, brown and an indeterminate shade of dirty black . . . [According the Census] a quarter of all those in [this area] are Negroes, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipinos. (SFPHA 1947, 3–8, emphasis added)

In portraying the Fillmore as hopeless blighted, redevelopment imagineers connected declining property values and decaying infrastructure and buildings with the supposed ill health, criminality, and welfare dependence of its residents (San Francisco City Planning Commission [SFPC] 1947). They further argued that the Fillmore was a drain on municipal resources that deserved to be spent on the city’s other taxpaying neighborhoods (SFPHA 1947). In addition, these re-
was envisioned as the regional hub for tourism and white-collar services (Hartman 2002). To facilitate this downtown expansion and economic restructuring toward services, housing for employees in this new economy had to be built and roadways improved to aid their commute from outlying areas (Hartman 2002). The Pacific Rim strategy was based on the regional elite’s desire to capitalize on the U.S. victory over Japan and competitively position San Francisco as the West Coast’s gateway to Asia.

These twin goals overdetermined the JCTC’s development and the Fillmore’s selection for urban renewal. Redevelopment supporters saw Japantown as an entrée to the Pacific Rim and the JCTC as A-1’s cornerstone development, a racial-ethnic tourist attraction akin to the city’s Chinatown. Furthermore, the Fillmore’s proximity to an expanding postwar downtown made it an ideal site to house the new postwar white-collar workforce in redeveloped high-end apartments and luxury condominiums. As a spatialized racial project, blight discourse helped facilitate the Fillmore’s selection by linking racialized spaces with racialized bodies of residents, blaming them for conditions on the ground while erasing the causal factors that created these conditions. In making these erasures and connections, redevelopers, blaming them for conditions on the ground while erasing the causal factors that created these conditions. In making these erasures and connections, redevelopers, blaming them for conditions on the ground while erasing the causal factors that created these conditions.

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Thus, redevelopers capitalized on foreignness and exoticism when they elided distinctions between populations and their spaces and selected Japantown as the center’s site (Laguerre 2000; Azuma 2005). For example, early SFRA board meeting minutes referred to the settlement as a “Japanese colony,” a characterization that references Asian-American foreigner racialization (SFRA meeting minutes, 21 January 1958; Ancheta 2006). Additionally, as the RDA Board’s Chair Everett Griffin put it to Mayor George Christopher:

San Franciscans have a deep affection for the Japanese traditions of that area and would be proud to see them recreated in the form of a trade and cultural center. It will further strengthen the fortunate status San Francisco enjoys as a major American gateway to and from Japan. (SFRA meeting minutes 22 September 1959, 4, emphasis added)

Thus, the center’s supporters relied on the already existing fascination with japonaiserie and a constructed Orient to produce this site as a cultural and trade center, at the same time erasing the history of racism directed at the city’s Japanese Americans including anti-Japanese riots and support for internment.

On opening day the three-block-long complex fronting Geary Boulevard between Laguna and Fillmore Streets contained a 1,000-seat theater and restaurant, a three-building mall, a Peace Plaza complete with pagoda, a Japanese Consulate building, and a luxury hotel. Together these components created an Orientalized spectacle, a supposed bridge to (if not a replica of) Japan in San Francisco, that not only showcased contemporary and traditional images of Japan and Japanese culture but also controlled consumption of these images (Debord 1995; D. Mitchell 2000). From the tiniest

JCTC: Orientalized Spectacle

The A-1 phase lasted from 1956 to 1973 (see Figure 2). The project itself spanned some twenty-eight city blocks and in the end displaced 8,000 individuals (of all ethnicities) and destroyed as many as 6,000 low-rent housing units, with the bulk of building seizures and demolition occurring between 1958 and 1963 (Seigel 2000). The project area covered a core area of Japantown, largely due to the JCTC’s importance to A-1.

Construction on the JCTC began in late 1965 and finished in mid-February 1968. In Disney-esque fashion, its strongest supporters, like RDA Director Justin Herman (a self-professed “Nihonophile” or “Niponophile” [sic]), imagineered the center as part tourist attraction, part commercial anchor for the redeveloped Fillmore and part symbolic bridge between Cold War San Francisco and Japan (San Francisco Progress 7–8 February 1968; SFRA 1968). While transnational ties between Japanese Americans and Japan and between Japantown and Japan have existed (and continue to exist), the RDA’s actions conflated the people and the places. Thus, redevelopers capitalized on foreignness and exoticism when they elided distinctions between populations and their spaces and selected Japantown as the center’s site (Laguerre 2000; Azuma 2005). For example, early SFRA board meeting minutes referred to the settlement as a “Japanese colony,” a characterization that references Asian-American foreigner racialization (SFRA meeting minutes, 21 January 1958; Ancheta 2006). Additionally, as the RDA Board’s Chair Everett Griffin put it to Mayor George Christopher:

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design details to the grand mise en scène, the JCTC’s success and marketability hinged on the creation of a Japanese experience. Thus, the JCTC’s developers accentuated the center’s “Japaneseness” at a number of levels. For example, the RDA asserted that the JCTC made “[i]t possible to take a trip to Japan without leaving San Francisco [and] afford[ed] the finest view of Japan this side of the Pacific” (SFRA n.d., 1). The agency and the local press also characterized the JCTC as a “Little Japan” or “miniature Ginza” (SFRA 1969, 17–22). Even as late as 1999, a New York Times columnist referred to the JCTC as a total immersion into “the very essence of Japan” (Krich 1999). This nostalgia was based partly on projected and refracted views of an ancient Orient whose supposed essence was verifiable, timeless, and reproducible and that stood in contrast to white-identified, normative spaces (Said 1979).

The center’s developers in particular reproduced these traditional images and tropes in the ceremonies surrounding the JCTC’s opening and in many of the JCTC’s details. For example, the SFRA had a priest from the local Konko Church dedicate the JCTC’s groundbreaking and opening (SFRA n.d., 1). In addition Japanese artisans handcrafted and expressly designed furnishings within the Miyako Hotel and the theater-restaurant, including hand-painted screens and tatami mats (SFRA 1968). The Miyako itself advertised its rooms suggestively claiming, “[they had] just enough Japanese décor to make it exciting” and that its two luxury suites were “totally Oriental” and would appeal to “real purist[s]” (Oakland Tribune 1968). Just what “exciting” and “totally Oriental” refer to remain undefined; however, the reader is left titillated by the suggestion of some unspoken quality or essence that is believable precisely because the language draws from
Orientalist discourse, offering the possibility of full immersion within a feminized and eroticized other world. Visitors and tourists were similarly treated to staged displays of Japanese culture in the mall’s demonstration spaces where invited Japanese artisans displayed their craftwork. Bilingual staff costumed in Japanese attire also added to the amusement park feel (SFRA 1968).

The JCTC also conveyed images of contemporary Japan and of modernity through Japanese businesses and organizations that facilitated the extension of San Francisco’s interests back to Japan. These tenants included travel agencies specializing in travel to Japan and branches of official or semiofficial offices that promoted tourism, diplomatic ties, or trade with Japan, like the Japan National Tourist Organization and the Japanese Consulate. Stores and showroom spaces likewise exhibited the latest Japanese fashions, electronics goods, and even automobiles. Similarly, the theater-restaurant hosted contemporary Japanese entertainment. Thus developers designed the center to make modern Japan knowable to its visitors and to those Bay Area companies that wanted to pursue Pacific Rim dreams because Japan was the United States’ chief Cold War ally in Asia. The JCTC was not alone as a constructed site for consuming and experiencing postwar Japan: 1968 also witnessed the opening of a Japanese Village and Deer Park in Southern California, which was marketed as an authentic Japanese village. In this sense, mid-twentieth-century Orientalism continued to be an amalgamation of projected desires that said more about its creators than about an actual region (Said 1979).

Ultimately the JCTC was an encapsulated site and sight of foreignness, a managed experience that was designed to sell what was inside the center and to be non-threatening to its visitors. For example, visitors were never far from creature comforts like air conditioning, bilingual staff, a choice between Nebraska-bred Angus beef or hand-massaged Kobe beef at Suehiro Restaurant, or a selection of kabuki and contemporary Japanese entertainment along with Western plays and musicals at the theater-restaurant. To put it crudely, the center’s visitors could sample the cultures of both ancient and modern Japan in a safe, easily accessed location without having to travel to Japan. Thus, Japan was brought safely “home” to San Francisco.

Of course, the JCTC as Orientalized spectacle was never a true facsimile of Japan. Orientalism works as an asymptotic projection that approaches but does not meet a nonrefracted reality. What is important to note is that the full force of redevelopment imagineering was poured into making this formerly blighted space occupied by Japanese Americans and African Americans an exotic and seemingly knowable managed site and sight for consuming Orientalism and for reproducing a new Cold War San Franciscan political economic order that “jumped scale” with its Pacific Rim pretensions (Smith 1992). Thus, Japantown’s fate did not end with being condemned as blighted. Rather, the neighborhood’s perceived foreignness (trapped both in an ahistorical past and in contemporary postwar concerns) became the essential ingredient in shaping what was rebuilt on the ground rather than leaving the area to be demolished, as was the case elsewhere in the neighborhood. Foreignness, in other words, became the difference that was counterposed both to blight and also to white normative spaces and that ultimately made a difference in the redeveloped neighborhood between “total clearance” and being crowned the RDA’s ultimate achievement.

The Rise and Fall of the Fillmore Center

One can contrast the JCTC’s development, marketing, and status within the redevelopment proponents’ plans with the Fillmore Center. Even before the JCTC had begun construction, the RDA began to discuss plans for an anchoring development in A-2. This second redevelopment phase encompassed a massive seventy-block area surrounding A-1 (Figure 2). Although A-2’s initial planning began in 1957, actual startup was delayed until the 1966 resolution to a lawsuit against California’s Proposition 14 initiative, which the state’s white electorate had overwhelmingly passed to overturn the Rumford Fair Housing Act in the name of protecting property rights against civil rights and which expressed a white propertied rage with reverberations that linked Nixon’s Southern Strategy with 1970s property tax revolt and contemporary neoliberalism (Du Bois 1962; Harris 1993; Pulido 2000; Lipsitz 2006; Gilmore 2007; Kurashige 2008). But rage was also welling in the communities of color against redevelopment’s policy of “total clearance,” which condemned and demolished properties with little recourse for displaced residents (Hartman 2002). In the Fillmore, a grassroots organization known as the Western Addition Community Organization (WACO) began mobilizing against A-2, using direct action and later a lawsuit to delay the project further until 1969 (Mollenkopf 1973; Crow 2000; Hartman 2002; Beitel 2003). Despite these delays, A-2 eventually displaced as many as 13,500 residents, removed 4,522 households, and destroyed 5,000 low-rent units through the 1970s (Seigel 2000). Although
Hartman (2002) and Beitel (2003) described A-2 as afflicting the Fillmore’s black community, the displaced included many Japanese Americans and other groups. Thus, changes in the Fillmore Center’s conceptualization and its ultimate failure must be interpreted within the history of A-2’s troubled existence. I turn first to a short description of WACO before discussing its impact on A-2.

WACO was not alone in its struggle against displacement. Anti-redevelopment groups began to confront urban renewal throughout the United States in the mid-1960s, refusing to be dispossessed. In San Francisco this anti-redevelopment challenge arose in several neighborhoods, including the South of Market Area, Mission District, and the Fillmore (Hartman 2002). In the Fillmore these struggles centered on several organizations in the 1960s and 1970s: (1) in the mid-1960s on an organization known as Freedom House, which was tied to the city’s civil rights and welfare rights movements; (2) in the late 1960s on WACO, which later became the Western Addition Project Area Committee (WAPAC); and (3) in the early 1970s on WAPAC and CANE (Mollenkopf 1973, 1983; Okita 1980; Crowe 2000; Hartman 2002; Sullivan 2003). Freedom House, WACO, and WAPAC were largely (but not exclusively) African-American and included some Japanese Americans along with progressive white clergy. CANE was predominantly Japanese-American but also included African Americans residing in the Buchanan Mall area. At a national scale this resistance to displacement meant an eventual shift in urban renewal policy away from total clearance toward rehabilitation and limited community participation (Mollenkopf 1983).

These turbulent events account, in part, for changes in the Fillmore Center’s plans over its lifetime. As originally conceived by the RDA, the Fillmore Center was located in a seven-block area south of Geary Boulevard, centered on Fillmore Street and bounded by Geary Boulevard and Webster, Turk, and Steiner Streets (Figure 2). There were two early conceptualizations of the center. The RDA commissioned Reid, Rockwell, Banwell, and Tarics to conduct a feasibility study on a commercial center and mall for the A-2 phase (SFRA 1962, 1963). The Agency hoped the proposed $40 million Fillmore Center would transform the “blighted Fillmore business district . . . into a community shopping center of outstanding quality” (SFRA 1961, 12; Canter 1970). By “outstanding,” redevelopment supporters meant “full economic potential” (SFRA 1961, 12). In essence this early conceptualization of the Fillmore Center was a color-blind one, which gave no overt consideration to the largely African-American and ethnic white business district it was replacing (SFRA 1963). Instead, they were primarily worried about procuring a retailer to anchor the center.

There was a countercurrent, however, to this color-blind conception of the center. One SFRA report noted: “The enthusiastic support which has appeared for the Japanese Cultural and Trade Center encourages the Agency to investigate the possibility of establishing related facilities for other national and cultural groups in a new ‘international city,’” which would “[assist the Fillmore] to regain its former position as a major shopping district and which would complement the . . . Japanese Cultural and Trade Center in Area One” (SFRA 1961, 12, 25–26).

Neither the color-blind nor the international city version of the Fillmore Center explicitly acknowledged the presence of African Americans, who, like the Japanese Americans, were excluded from the planning process and were substantively erased from early redevelopment projects beyond the salvage of existing community institutions, like churches. African-American erasure was perhaps more total; their vibrant community of stores and nightclubs along Fillmore did not merit concern beyond removal as blighting influences. Although the international city conception of the Fillmore Center supposedly incorporated “national and cultural groups,” African Americans were ambiguously situated with respect to the international scale. At best, redevelopment imagineers relegated African Americans to silent tenancy in the proposed “international city,” an expression of spatial multiculturalism, which celebrated ethnicities, cultures, and nationalities within an encapsulated cosmopolitanism (Lowe 1996). This flattened multiculturalism, in turn, disregarded both conditions of inequality that created multiracial and multiethnic neighborhoods and also the wishes of existing communities of color (C. Kim 2004).

In the end, neither of these versions of the Fillmore Center was built, largely because developers were leery for several reasons. First, the center fronted the new Geary Expressway underpass where Geary had been widened from two to eight lanes to facilitate the commute of downtown employees from Marin County and San Francisco’s western suburbs. At Fillmore, the underpass effectively made the proposed center difficult to spot from Geary, creating traffic nightmares for potential shoppers. Second, the unsettled political environment surrounding Proposition 14 made it difficult to
secure a developer. Third, the neighborhood retained a racialized reputation as a “bad one,” scaring off potential investors and leaving a Dresden-like landscape of vacant lots for years after demolition (Robert Reece, group interview, 24 August 2005). Fourth, as noted previously, federal redevelopment policy fundamentally changed during the late 1960s when the Nixon administration first altered redevelopment funding and adopted a block grant system, which rewarded cities in different locations and then formally ended redevelopment as a program in 1974 (Mollenkopf 1983; Hartman 2002). Prior to this shift, rehabilitation of existing structures and community participation had already been adopted as guiding principles for newer redevelopment projects.

Given these federal changes, the RDA began searching for community partners to develop redevelopment projects in the A-2 area. Although there had been previous cooperation with churches and community institutions in A-1, these efforts were aimed at retaining these entities in A-1. During A-2 these partnerships again centered on the Fillmore’s churches, which were recruited instead to develop low- and moderate-income housing construction, largely for seniors, in conjunction with the RDA and downtown developers. Although such partnerships clearly benefited these institutions and their constituents, in a different light they can also be seen as coopting the political dissent of key community leaders both in the African and Japanese-American communities (Beitel 2003). These partnerships capitalized on existing class differences within ethnic communities such that influential African-American ministers and Nisei merchants largely did not participate in grassroots confrontations with the RDA that WACO and CANE used to halt demolition and to gain community control over the redevelopment process. These community fault lines had earlier origins; for example, over control of War on Poverty programs between younger black community activists and established professionals and clergy (Takagi 1986; Crowe 2000). In WACO’s case, its multiracial membership of homeowners, labor unionists, residents, and student, welfare rights, and housing activists had an uneasy relationship with the black bourgeoisie. Likewise, one can interpret the split between the Nihonmachi Community Development Corporation’s (NCDC) commercial and property interests and CANE’s student activists (largely Sansei), renters, and small merchants over the Buchanan Mall’s redevelopment as a class-based and generational conflict (Okita 1980; Takahashi 1997).

In the face of federal policy change and anti-redevelopment mobilization, the stalled Fillmore Center was given new life and reconceptualized in 1970. This time the plans included African and African-American themes with a potential space for a “Black Cultural Center” (SFRA 1970b, 3). One 1970 RDA study pitched this new vision to potential developers:

While a primary function of the Fillmore Center is to serve as a community shopping area, its history and identification as a focal point for the Black community in the Bay Area opens up exciting possibilities . . .

Notwithstanding integrated occupancy, it has the larger potential of becoming a unique Center with daytime and nighttime activities attracting people of all races from the entire Bay Area. (SFRA 1970b, 1)

Thus, much like the JCTC, the 1970 version of the Fillmore Center was marketed as a racialized space, which titillated with its “exciting possibilities.” Likewise the Fillmore Center’s proposed Black Cultural Center showcased African and African-American culture:

[It] will provide a theme, a sense of style, color and vitality. . . . Proposed activities include the performing arts, exhibits of both contemporary and ancient African and Black-American art, lectures, and a library devoted to African and Black-American history and culture. Other possibilities are specialty restaurants, African consulates, African trade offices, and African and Black-American handicraft shops. (SFRA 1970a, 11–12)

The RDA portrayed both developments using highly racialized language that teased with the possibility of voyeuristic sampling of culture and also simultaneously reassured visitors that such a sampling would not be dangerous or entirely foreign; that is, it would have “integrated occupancy” and would attract “people of all races.” What separates the Fillmore Center from the JCTC is that community protest and collective refusal wrought this design change: Hence the assurances that the center would “provide opportunities for local participation in its organizing and planning, as well as in ownership of land, business development, management, training, and employment” (SFRA 1970b, 1). Although one might argue that a black cultural center was a superficial concession that commodified black culture and black nationalism and amounted to another attempt to mollify protest, WACO and WA-PAC wanted a cultural center in the development, arguing that it recognized the black community and its
struggles against redevelopment-driven dispossession. Moreover, these organizations believed they could control or at least would have a significant consultative role over the center’s development, which, in the end, proved chimeric.

The 1970 version of the Fillmore Center, however, was also never built. During this time period the RDA solicited project bids from several groups, including many with African-American investors. These investors tended to be professionals and business or community leaders (the black bourgeoisie), including Dr. Carlton Goodlett, prominent Democrat and owner of the local Sun-Reporter newspaper; Willie Brown, an attorney and California assemblyperson; Ulysses Montgomery, an urban planner; and Dr. Dan Collins, founder of San Francisco’s Urban League. Often these prospective developers submitted bids in alliance with white downtown developers; for example, Montgomery’s group had its bid restored only after community members complained about its elimination and Montgomery established business ties with two white developers, San Francisco’s Paul Broman, who codeveloped the JCTC, and Los Angeles’ Sheldon Pollack (Canter 1970). Likewise, Dr. Goodlett, who had previously been in the Fillmore Community Development Corporation (FCDC) with Montgomery and other members of the African-American business elite, joined with Willie Brown and white developers Reynolds and Brown of San Leandro to form Western Economic Land Developers (WELD; Canter 1970). None of these investor groups, however, retained the rights to develop the project site because they could not muster the necessary capital or because their visions for the project did not match those of the RDA (Mollenkopf 1973). Moreover, there was intense bickering and rivalry among these development groups, which involved periodic attempts to win the favor of WACO or WAPAC as well as open conflict with these antiredevelopment organizations (Mollenkopf 1973). According to Mollenkopf (1973), WELD eventually won WAPAC’s approval but was unable to secure funding because of opposition from Mayor Alioto and supervisor Terry Francois.

As a result, the seven-block site remained empty for years and the RDA eventually reasserted control over it (SFRA 1977). In 1977, the RDA once again commissioned a feasibility study through Curtis Associates, which addressed the lack of commercial and developer activity south of Geary Boulevard, a divide that the RDA had, in fact, manufactured when it widened the thoroughfare during A-1 and that had come to signify the African-American part of the Fillmore (Kahn Yamada, personal interview, 23 July 2003). The 1977 report acknowledged the neighborhood’s continued negative (i.e., racialized) image as a disincentive for investment:

The image of changing areas usually lags the change in the area. This is especially true for minority areas where the worst aspects of previous conditions are fixed in the minds of many as an accurate portrayal of the present conditions.

Fillmore street [sic] has an image of crime and dope, poor business environment, a preponderance of the surrounding residents being on welfare, and an area that is hostile to whites [sic]. (SFRA 1977, II–5)

The report’s writers subsequently refuted this image, citing a police captain’s comment on the Fillmore’s lack of a crime problem. Furthermore, the writers argued that the neighborhood had been changing for the better, pointing to the even distribution between new African-American and white residents (SFRA 1977).

The 1977 report recommended smaller parcel development for the area with the RDA acting as master developer. Additionally, the report dropped any African and/or African-American component to the development, despite the stated preference on the part of 400 Fillmore residents surveyed for the report that a center would “reflect the Afro-American culture of the area” (SFRA 1977, III–2). This action, of course, was interpreted as a betrayal of the neighborhood’s black community and its struggles against redevelopment. Mired in federal policy change, fights between WAPAC and the RDA, the dismantling of the Keynesian state, and inability to find a large-scale developer, the Fillmore Center would eventually be developed in parcels without a black cultural center while retaining the name “Fillmore Center” for a much smaller three-block development.

There was a profound difference between how multiculturalism was evaluated and cultivated in the cases of the JCTC and the Fillmore Center. The JCTC was developed largely because local imagineers perceived the space it occupied as foreign: Japantown was Japan, or at least they wanted to create the illusion of this elision through the construction of a cultural and trade center. As such, the exotic space of Japantown was evaluated and cultivated in the cases of the JCTC and the Fillmore Center. The JCTC was developed largely because local imagineers perceived the space it occupied as foreign: Japantown was Japan, or at least they wanted to create the illusion of this elision through the construction of a cultural and trade center. As such, the exotic space of Japantown was evaluated against other, namely, African-American, spaces in the Fillmore and against perceptions of Fillmore space being a blighted plague spot and threat to white San Francisco. In making this direct and indirect comparison, redevelopers positioned Japantown space with respect
to what was perceived as black space and with respect to the city’s white dominated spaces, which presumably were ordered, safe, and maximized to the “highest and best use” of the land. Although the Fillmore Center’s fall has to be placed first within changed structural circumstances, it must also be interpreted in light of how the Fillmore and its center were viewed as spaces and what the cultivation (or lack thereof) of this potential meant in the larger scheme of spatialized racial triangulation in San Francisco. It appears from the RDA’s own literature that black space became increasingly associated with blight and urban crisis. Thus, the Fillmore Center’s fall centrally involves how these spaces were valued and imagineered and, as we will see, how the redevelopers established relationships with the Fillmore’s racialized communities.

**Triangulating Spaces, Triangulating Lives**

The RDA’s actions with respect to the Fillmore Center can also be contrasted with those actions regarding the Buchanan Mall development. The latter A-2 project centered on a four-block area along Buchanan Street between Laguna, Post, Webster, and Sutter Streets (the geographical heart of Japantown) and was developed by the NCDC (Tatsuno 1971; see Figure 2). Unlike the JCTC, which was built by transnational developers and funding, the Nihon-machi Mall was developed in partnership with the RDA during the late 1960s and early 1970s, one of the first collaborative RDA–community joint developments under the changed federal urban renewal policy. As a community development corporation (CDC), federal law sanctioned the NCDC to formulate a redevelopment plan for the area with the RDA approving the plan and offering technical and monetary assistance.

Although subdued, Japanese-derived architectural themes and tourism also highlighted the Mall, the project primarily focused on rebuilding commercial spaces and multiunit housing belonging to the organization’s shareholders. As noted previously, these individuals were largely Nisei merchants, property owners, institution leaders, and commercial tenants, but also included the JCTC’s transnational developers, who had all purchased shares to become voting members in the CDC. In total there were 5,000 shares, with each one worth one vote. Not surprisingly, NCDC’s structure exacerbated class conflicts within the Japanese-American community, as many residents, especially renters, and small business owners could not afford shares, or they felt the NCDC did not represent their political and economic interests (Okita 1980). Thus, although the majority of NCDC’s members were longtime Japantown members, their organization was by no means representative of the entire Japantown community. These fault lines later became the basis for CANE’s 1970s mobilization against redevelopment in this area.

In claiming success with the Buchanan Mall and with NCDC as its developer, the RDA made implicit and explicit comparisons with the Fillmore Center and with WACO/WAPAC. Before elaborating further on this positioning, some comments on WAPAC are in order. Although WACO and WAPAC are related organizations, it should be stressed that they were not the same organization. WAPAC formed in June 1968 after WACO’s injunction against A-2. It was created under the Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Local Public Agency Letter No. 458, which sanctioned the creation of project area committees to facilitate community participation. At the time, WACO activists hoped to control the new organization and through it gain community oversight over A-2 even though in operation the Board of Supervisors provided the organization’s budget. Although WACO won thirty of the original eighty WAPAC board seats, WAPAC’s formation also marked WACO’s eventual dissolution, as many of its activists took key paid roles in the new organization and their activism became institutionalized within the redevelopment process (Mollenkopf 1973).

Despite the high hopes that WAPAC and WACO activists placed in the new organization, in practice WAPAC had little input on substantive redevelopment decisions aside from local affirmative action hiring at construction sites and relocation of housing. Still WAPAC continued to employ a wide range of tactics against redevelopment, including occasional direct action. Director Justin Herman viewed these actions and WACO’s earlier tactics negatively, referring to anti-redevelopment protests as unruly and implying that they represented bouts of “proletarian anger” (Mollenkopf 1973; Arnold Townshend, personal interview, 10 September 2004). In an earlier 1967 annual report, Herman, for example, repeatedly referred to WACO as a fringe group without a community base: “a small band of activists has been able at times to delay and to frustrate the building of new housing” (SFRA 1967, 12). Herman believed that WACO’s actions hurt the larger community, and furthermore wasted public funds (SFRA 1967, 12). This same annual report quoted an editorial appearing in the San Francisco Examiner to bolster its point:
A NEW and increasingly militant group is trying to stop the urban renewal program in Area Two. . . . This is an effort to turn back the clock, for the program was democratically adopted in October 1964 . . .

IT IS UNLIKELY that those now trying to kill the A-2 program have weighed many of the considerations set forth above. . . . But citizens in general should weigh them. So should the quiet majority of A-2 residents who are cooperating in the renewal program. These latter should speak out, lest the dissident minority voice be mistaken for a majority.

When they speak out, they will be speaking not only for themselves but for their city. (SFRA 1967, 8)

Such views couched these protests as irrational, disruptive, and even illegal and in so doing delegitimized and depoliticized very real grievances within the black community against urban renewal (C. Kim 2002). They counterposed oppositional efforts with a supposed Nixonesque “quiet majority” who cooperated with the redevelopment process in a nonconfrontational and orderly fashion. Needless to say the RDA rebuffed WAPAC’s attempts to oversee A-2 and become the Fillmore Center’s “community developer.”

In contrast to WACO and WAPAC, the RDA considered NCDC to be an ideal community partner because the agency perceived its quieter institutional approach to the redevelopment process to be non-threatening and because its plans for the Buchanan Mall conformed to the agency’s vision. Of course, NCDC’s cooperation has to be placed in context: State-sponsored dispossession through internment and A-1 displacement overdetermined their response to A-2. As Kurashige (2008) noted, the internment resulted in a distrust of the state for some Japanese Americans and a desire on the part of many others, as recommended by the Japanese American Citizens League, to fit quietly into the postwar world. Having returned to San Francisco, Japanese Americans faced hostility and struggled to rebuild their lives only to face the possibility during A-1 of another traumatic uprooting. Rather than lose what they had paid so dearly to salvage, NCDC’s members decided to cooperate with the RDA, capitalizing on the political opening provided through changing federal redevelopment policy. In essence its members saved their properties but, significantly, they also saved four core blocks of Japantown, which might not otherwise have been redeveloped in the same way.

The RDA saw these interactions with NCDC as successful and ideal compared to their troubled relations with WACO/WAPAC and the faltering Fillmore Center. For example, one RDA planner responded to a question about the lack of development in the Fillmore Center by arguing that NCDC was “organized” and that no such unified voice existed in the black community (Robert Reece, group interview, 24 August 2005). Such a comment, of course, begs the questions of whether or not NCDC was in fact representative of the entire Japantown community. The fact that CANE formed and gained significant community support indicates that NCDC was not the community’s sole voice. Moreover, this comment neglects both the fact that Fillmore community members democratically elected WAPAC’s board and also the fact that WAPAC was highly organized with its members participating in civil rights activism, War on Poverty programs, ethnic studies, and anti-redevelopment activism.

In addition to the previous planner’s comments, the RDA annual reports likewise compared WACO/WAPAC and NCDC. For example, the 1967 annual report displayed pictures of its community partners, including NCDC members and mainstream African American clergy. Later annual reports continued to list the JCTC and Buchanan Mall as successes but were silent about WAPAC and the Fillmore Center (SFRA 1969, 1976). WAPAC members recognized the RDA’s differential treatment between African and Japanese Americans: Former WAPAC director Arnold Townshend (personal interview, 10 September 2004) observed that the RDA’s attitude toward WAPAC was infantilizing and never seriously entertained its wishes and requests. Despite the federal mandate to form project area committees, no guidelines existed for the degree of their participation and in most locations would have strictly been limited to symbolic (i.e., rubber stamping) collaboration or at best a circumscribed role within overall strategic goals established by developers.

Thus, the RDA compared the actions of WACO/WAPAC with those of the NCDC, considering the former unruly and confrontational and the latter quiet and easier to work with. These viewpoints articulated the racialization of Japanese Americans as a model minority, whose purported success within the redevelopment process was used to discipline their African-American neighbors (C. Kim 1999, 2002). Although the origins of the model minority image lie both in attempts to delegitimize 1960s radical activism of communities of color and also in the 1980s rollback of Keynesian state policies, they were also formed earlier in the Chicago School’s studies of different racialized groups in the 1920s and 1930s, which compared Asian
and African Americans (Yu 2001). In addition, they were tempered through Cold War politics that looked, as Brooks (2009) put it, to make “foreign friends” of previously considered “alien neighbors.” Here international relations between Japan and the United States intersected with foreigner racialization of Asian Americans, even though most members of San Francisco’s Japanese-American community were two or three generations removed from emigration. In addition to being influenced by an emerging common sense understanding of Asian Americans as a model minority, the differential treatment of Japanese-American and African-American groups reflected and reproduced very real changes in the postwar economy that realigned regional racial and class hierarchies and created openings for Asian Americans who experienced increasing socioeconomic mobility in the decades after the war. These political–economic, geopolitical, and ideological shifts at multiple spatial scales shaped and reproduced how the Fillmore’s Japanese and African Americans were triangulated in terms of the redeveloped spaces they occupied and also with respect to each other and with respect to white San Francisco. Thus, redevelopment supporters positioned the success or failure of the Fillmore Center in line with the success or failure of the Fillmore Center. These imagineers expressed a spatialized version of the model minority myth in an effort to delegitimize the claims of anti-development supporters positioned the success or failure of the JCTC and Buchanan Mall in line with the success or failure of the Fillmore Center. These imagineers differentiated between Japanese-American and African Americans were triangulated in terms of the redeveloped spaces they occupied and also with respect to each other and with respect to white San Francisco. Thus, redevelopment supporters positioned the success or failure of the JCTC and Buchanan Mall in line with the success or failure of the Fillmore Center. These imagineers expressed a spatialized version of the model minority myth in an effort to delegitimize the claims of anti-development supporters. In so doing, these imagineers condemned the Fillmore as terminally blighted, portraying and essentializing both its spaces and its inhabitants as a danger to the rest of San Francisco through the use of blight discourse as a spatialized racial project. Next they differentiated between Japanese-American and African-American parts of the Fillmore, targeting the former for a unique (and Orientalist) cultural and trade center that was built through collaboration with local, regional, and transnational development interests. A postwar shift in the regional political economy toward Asia and the new status of Japan as a Pacific Rim Cold War ally overdetermined the construction of a JCTC to make Japan knowable and attainable for San Franciscans and other tourists. Here the perceived foreignness or alterity of Japantown as Japanese space was key to the imagineering of redeveloped space as Orientalized spectacle. This foreignness was central not only to Asian-American racialization in the United States but also to the racialization of space within the Fillmore. It was important as well to the positioning of this space as different from African-American identified spaces in the same neighborhood even though segregation had forced Japanese and African Americans to share a mutual history and common geography that intersected and overlapped at multiple spatial scales. This differentiation operated through the juxtaposition of Japanese and Japanese-American spaces not only with African-American spaces but also indirectly and directly with San Francisco’s white-identified normative spaces. There was, in other words, a spatialized racial positioning or triangulation

**Conclusion: Implications of Spatialized Racial Triangulation for Geography**

Sixty years later, the Fillmore is vastly different from what it was at the end of the war. As in many other urban neighborhoods, redevelopment played an instrumental role in reshaping the physical and social composition of this neighborhood. Redevelopment, in turn, was a harbinger of several significant postwar changes: It signaled the shift to a postindustrial tourism and service-based economy oriented increasingly toward international trade and operationalized through state–capital progrowth collaboration. It signaled as well state intervention reflective of the best and worst of urban liberal as it warred with the American inner city and its unruly inhabitants (Mollenkopf 1983). Its eventual failure, then, foreshadowed the limits of the Keynesian welfare state’s liberalism and modernist intervention, as elements of the New Deal coalition clashed over differing visions of the U.S. city. Its ultimate death foretold the onset of neoliberal retrenchment and revanchism (Smith 1996).

The Fillmore’s redevelopment shares these elements with many other cities and locations, the legacy of which has left a haunted landscape whose memory is slowly being eroded away through new rounds of gentrification (Smith 2002). Beyond the physical destruction wrought by redevelopment, what must be reiterated is that the Fillmore’s redevelopment unfolded at the intersection of fatal coupling, as Hall (1992) and Gilmore (2002a) put it, of difference and power. In other words, redevelopment proponents manufactured and employed sociospatial difference to reshape this multiracial neighborhood. In so doing, these imagineers condemned the Fillmore as terminally blighted, portraying and essentializing both its spaces and its inhabitants as a danger to the rest of San Francisco through the use of blight discourse as a spatialized racial project. Next they differentiated between Japanese-American and African-American parts of the Fillmore, targeting the former for a unique (and Orientalist) cultural and trade center that was built through collaboration with local, regional, and transnational development interests. A postwar shift in the regional political economy toward Asia and the new status of Japan as a Pacific Rim Cold War ally overdetermined the construction of a JCTC to make Japan knowable and attainable for San Franciscans and other tourists. Here the perceived foreignness or alterity of Japantown as Japanese space was key to the imagineering of redeveloped space as Orientalized spectacle. This foreignness was central not only to Asian-American racialization in the United States but also to the racialization of space within the Fillmore. It was important as well to the positioning of this space as different from African-American identified spaces in the same neighborhood even though segregation had forced Japanese and African Americans to share a mutual history and common geography that intersected and overlapped at multiple spatial scales. This differentiation operated through the juxtaposition of Japanese and Japanese-American spaces not only with African-American spaces but also indirectly and directly with San Francisco’s white-identified normative spaces. There was, in other words, a spatialized racial positioning or triangulation
operating in the Fillmore’s redevelopment (C. Kim 1999, 2002).

This racial positioning extended to the differential treatment of Japanese- and African-American groups in the Fillmore and to the extent of their incorporation within the redevelopment process. Community group participation within the Fillmore’s urban renewal process cleaved along differential fault lines of race and class, where Nikkei merchants in the NCDC were seen as quietly cooperative and African-American activists were seen as troublemakers and outsiders to be held at arm’s length. These views, in turn, expressed not only the differential social positioning of these two racialized groups within changing racial and class hierarchies but also a spatialized version of model minority discourse. Japanese and Japanese Americans seemingly were the ideal redevelopment partners and developments associated with them were perceived as successes, whereas African Americans were not ideal partners and developments associated with them were seen as failures or bad investments.

There are lessons that geographers, planners, and urbanists can learn from the Fillmore’s redevelopment. These lessons lie in the historical and geographical specificities of racial formation and in recognizing that this process is a relational one involving multiple racialized groups. Here C. Kim’s (1999, 2002) work is highly instructive in revealing sociospatial differentiation within the redevelopment process, which exploited the “fatal couplings of difference and power” to reshape urban space at a time when the Keynesian state was also subsidizing massive suburbanization for most (but not all) of the U.S. population (Gilmore 2002a). C. Kim’s (1999, 2002) point that racial formation is a relational process involving several social groups and different social parameters and discourses is a critical one. This article has shown that racial triangulation is also a spatial process where spatial relations inform racial positioning, and triangulation likewise helps produce space and reproduce spatial relations. In the Fillmore’s case, perceived foreignness (or the capitalizing of foreignness and its intersection with Orientalism) played a critical role in shaping triangulation processes within the district’s redevelopment but only to the extent to which Japanese Americans and their spaces were seen as othered. It is precisely this essentialized quality of foreignness that made key parts of Japantown capable of redevelopment, whereas African-American identified spaces did not initially figure into the imagineered plans for the district. These latter spaces, in fact, were slated for demolition and retained the racialized negative image of being blighted. This association with blight is why the RDA’s own literature repeatedly attempted to dispel negative images connected to these spaces and why to this day a recent brochure for the luxury Miyako Hotel refers to its location as being in Lower Pacific Heights, linking its location to upscale neighboring Pacific Heights (Radisson Hotel Corporation n.d.).

Although geographers, planners, and urbanists might well be aware that blackness remains associated with urban crisis and the inner city, the Fillmore’s case reminds us that Asians and Asian Americans played a central role in the construction of urban crisis, particularly on the West Coast, where the racialization of these groups, in part as outsiders, and of their spaces contributed to discourses of urban pathology and operated as foils for defining normative white spaces (Anderson 1991; Shah 2001; Kurashige 2008). This same foreignness, under a different postwar context, also informed what was redeveloped on the ground, as Asian capital and developers played roles in the Fillmore’s redevelopment.

In closing I should note that one of the chief reasons Asian Americans have been neglected in redevelopment studies lies in the assumption that these groups have become economically and socially successful and are therefore suburbanized. These assumptions are some of the key ones underlying model minority discourse, which, as we have seen in this article, has a spatiality to it. The irony is that such a suburban movement, particularly for the longer tenured Asian-American groups, began not only through endogenous factors but rather in part through the Keynesian state’s actions, which bulldozed these groups out of their supposedly blighted homes. The surprise we feel in learning about urban renewal’s devastating impact on Asian-American communities lies partly in the suppressed nature of this story but also partly in the assumptions we make about race and how we see race (or indeed who is supposedly raced). If anything, paying attention to the nuances of racial dynamics as a relational process involving differential positioning (whether in the Fillmore’s case or in more general ones) forces us to analyze race not just in terms of the groups that are physically present but also those that are absent, or rather those that are being used as the marker of indirect or unspoken comparison who nevertheless are also racialized (Palumbo-Liu 1999). Such attention to the fuller nuances of racial formation has applicability to our work
as scholars (not just of the past but also of our multiracial present and future). Ultimately, recognizing that racial positioning involves the production and exploitation of sociospatial difference has ramifications for our work as antiracists, and this recognition in the end is what is needed to help build a more just society for all.

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