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East of Palo Alto's Eden: Race and The Formation of Silicon Valley

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# East of Palo Alto's Eden: Race and The Formation of Silicon Valley

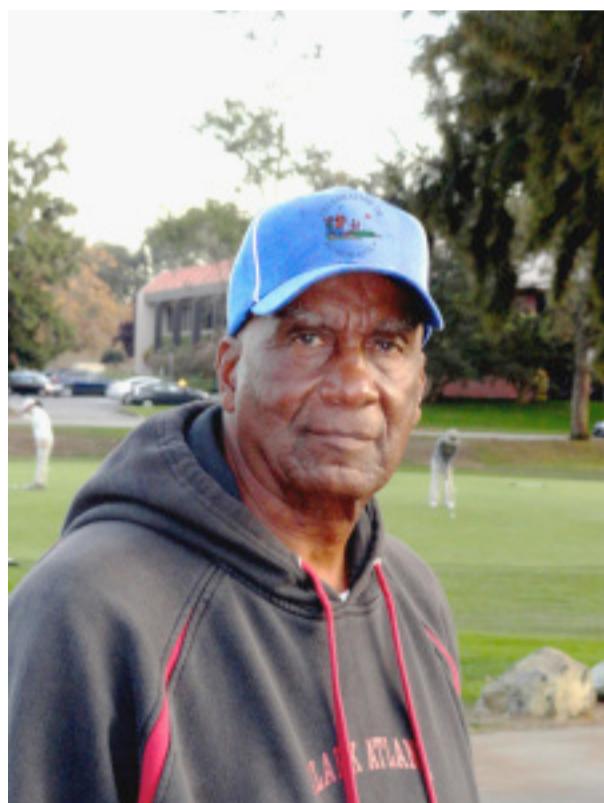
Kim-Mai Cutler, TechCrunch

*What if Silicon Valley had emerged from a racially integrated community?*

*Would the technology industry be different?*

*Would we?*

*And what can the technology industry do now to avoid repeating the mistakes of the past?*



I met Bob Hoover one sunny Friday afternoon when he was rearranging golf club sets in the back of a trailer in East Palo Alto.

Hoover, one of the original black residents of East Palo Alto, hasn't retired even though he's well into his 80s. He splits his time between teaching golf to the children of the neighborhood and counseling former prisoners on re-entering the work-force.

The city where Hoover lives, East Palo Alto, is the last 2.5-mile stretch of affordable housing in the heart of Silicon Valley. It is perfectly wedged between the new Facebook headquarters, the rest of Menlo Park, where the venture firms of Sand Hill Road are based, and Palo Alto, where the tech industry first sprouted around Stanford University more than half a century ago.



*Map: Jake Coolidge, created at the Stanford Spatial History Project*

East Palo Alto has been portrayed as a haven of affordability for a low-income and primarily black and Latino community and alternately as a stubbornly intractable core of poverty and violence amid Silicon Valley's glittering wealth.

In 1992, the city earned the moniker "Murder Capital of the U.S.A." after having the highest homicide per capita rate in the country. Three years later, its high school students became the center of the Michelle Pfeiffer movie "Dangerous Minds," with the Coolio single "Gangsta's Paradise" on the soundtrack.

But today, with Facebook constructing a Frank Gehry-designed office complex that will let the company support roughly 7,000 workers while Palo Alto and Menlo Park balk at building housing even though median home prices have soared beyond \$2 million, East Palo Alto may change enormously over the next decade.

Moreover, the questions being asked today about why the tech industry lacks racial diversity, and what the long-term consequences of gentrification are in the U.S.'s most economically vibrant regions like the San Francisco Bay Area are deeply intertwined in a way that is hard to perceive unless you step back.

This is a story of how two neighboring communities followed entirely different trajectories in post-war California — one of enormous wealth and power, and the other of resilience amid deprivation. It's about how seemingly small policy choices can have enduring, multi-generational consequences.

A year ago, I told you my family's history in Silicon Valley. Let me tell you another story.

## 1950s: Residential Segregation In What Would Become Silicon Valley

A U.S. Air Force veteran who served on a gunner crew in the Korean War, Bob Hoover came to the Bay Area in 1959 as a young master's degree student at Stanford University. His wife was earning her doctorate from Stanford's department of education.

He arrived in Palo Alto at roughly the same time as my grandfather. But my grandfather, who grew up in a poor Jewish family in Los Angeles during the Great Depression, was white.

Hoover was black, which means he couldn't live wherever he wanted. He would dial up dozens of apartment listings.

"You'd call them, ask them if the apartment was available. They'd say yes," Hoover said. "But when I would show up and they'd see my face, they would suddenly say it had 'just been rented' or something to that effect."

Hoover's experience wasn't uncommon. Homes at the time often had deed restrictions written into their contracts that explicitly prohibited their sale to African-Americans.

In fact, East Palo Alto's existence as a predominantly black community probably began around 1954.

That fall, a man named William A. Bailey and his family became the first blacks to move into a new subdivision called Palo Alto Gardens. The Bailey family's arrival on the 150 block of Wisteria Drive touched off protests from neighboring white homeowners. One hundred twenty-five people packed the normally quiet Palo Alto Gardens Improvement Association on November 29, 1954, to express outrage over the idea of a black family moving into their neighborhood.

When the association's president William Diebel pushed for tolerance and acceptance, its white property owners threw him out and began drafting a "gentlemen's

agreement” requiring that all prospective buyers be approved by the association.

They also pooled together \$3,750 to convince Bailey to leave. But when he refused with backing from the NAACP, one-fifth of his white neighbors immediately put their houses up for sale and left.

The same issue affected Asian-Americans. When progressive suburban developer Joseph Eichler’s company sold a home in 1954 to an Asian-American family in Palo Alto, word spread through the neighborhood and five homeowners approached the company demanding immediate refunds.

“Get out,” Eichler’s business partner, Jim San Jule, told the white homeowners. “We don’t even want people like you in our subdivisions.”

Hoover had tried to buy an Eichler home in Palo Alto too, but no one was willing to sell to him. Decades later in Walter Isaacson’s biography, Steve Jobs, who grew up in a Modernist suburban tract home designed by an Eichler competitor, would later credit Eichler’s architecture with inspiring him to produce minimalist designs for the masses.

Hoover and Bailey had come to California as part of the Great Migration, a movement that saw 6 million African-Americans leave the violence and humiliation of the South for industrial cities in the North and on the West Coast.

Gertrude Wilks was one of them. She was born on a plantation in 1927 as the child of Louisiana sharecroppers. When she was a child, she said, her mother would reveal scars on her body from an attempted rape, as a warning never to get caught alone with a white man. She remembers teaching her father how to read. She remembers seeing him write his own name down for the first time.

Wilks, who moved to Richmond with her husband when she was 20 years old, later convinced the entire family to move out of Louisiana. Her father and brother had ended up in a fight provoked by a white neighbor, who then threatened to burn down their house in retribution. When she found her family, they had been sleeping in the woods near the house. Their cow had been poisoned, their hogs and most of their dogs had been killed. One brother had been shot in the leg.

California was better in certain ways.

“You could really be free,” she said. Wilks’ father was able to vote for the first time when he arrived in Los Angeles.

But the state was “not so golden,” as she put it. California was never as overt or horrific as the Jim Crow South. But the Californian way worked tacitly through hous-

ing, jobs and education policies. On top of racially restrictive covenants, realtors around the San Francisco Bay Area were engaged in a practice called blockbusting. Hoover remembers it well.

“They’d come in and say there’s a black man going to buy a house here. You’re going to have a hard time selling your house, so you better do it now,” he said.

Real estate agents would buy the houses at fire-sale prices, then turn around and sell them to African-Americans for a profit. Wilks remembers a real estate agent steering her away from buying a home she liked in Palo Alto. She later found out that she could have afforded it, but had already ended up in East Palo Alto.

By the mid-1960s, East Palo Alto had gone from being almost all white to being majority black. Then when the federal government widened Highway 101, the main artery between San Francisco and what would become the rest of Silicon Valley, that deepened both the physical and cultural divide between the two areas.

To top it off, Palo Alto annexed the lands directly to the south of East Palo Alto for a golf course and an airport. East Palo Alto would instead end up with the Romic waste management facility, which opened in 1964. It would process hazardous chemicals from semiconductor and hardware production in Silicon Valley for decades, sometimes leaching cyanide into the city’s sewage water and spraying chemical mists above the city during periodic accidents.

Meanwhile just three miles away, Stanford University had been struggling financially since World War II. The university’s reputation and endowment wasn’t what it is today — certainly not the elite institution that railroad tycoon Leland Stanford envisioned building when he signed Stanford’s founding grant in 1885.

The name “Silicon Valley” wouldn’t even exist for another 20 years.

But Frederick Terman, the Stanford dean of engineering credited with transforming the school into a locus of power within the tech industry, had a couple key insights. He had returned to California after finishing his Ph.D. at MIT under Vannevar Bush, who pushed for the creation of the National Science Foundation and wrote an influential 1945 essay on the “Memex” that would shape the concepts of the mouse, hypertext and links many decades later.

With his connections to Bush and the East Coast, Terman saw that Cold War research money would become a valuable source of capital for Stanford’s engineering school. Under his leadership, the value of government grants and contracts to Stanford grew from \$3 million in 1951 to over \$50 million in 1964.

Then, he thought that Stanford could use its plentiful land to kill two birds with one

stone by turning some 200-plus acres into Silicon Valley's first industrial park. An architectural precursor to many of the suburban corporate campuses throughout the region, the park cultivated the symbiotic relationships between industry and academia that Stanford is so well-known for and brought in revenue through commercial rents. Many of the industry's most influential companies would move in, including Varian, Hewlett-Packard, Lockheed's space and missile division, and Xerox PARC.

While Stanford did start to push for more minority student enrollment in the 1950s, racial attitudes were very different at the time – even in progressive California. Both Terman's father, who popularized the use of IQ testing nationally, and Nobel Prize winner William Shockley, another seminal figure in Silicon Valley history who was behind the creation of the transistor, were outspoken eugenicists.

## 1960s: Black Power and The Civil Rights Movement

The new black community forming in East Palo Alto had little in resources, but residents did what they could to build their own institutions.

An unincorporated zone of San Mateo County, the area had just a fraction of the tax revenues per capita that the surrounding cities did, as wealthier, middle-class whites fled and took their incomes and capital elsewhere. While the sales tax data below is from a decade later, it gives you a sense of the disparity.

East Palo Alto was bringing in about one-fifth of the sales tax revenue per capita that Palo Alto and Menlo Park were.

TABLE 15

COMPARISON OF SALES TAX REVENUE

## EAST PALO ALTO AND THREE COMMUNITIES

City	Population 1977	Total Sales Tax Revenue	Total Sales Tax Revenue Per Capita
Menlo Park	27,400	\$1,320,108	\$48.18
Palo Alto	61,850	\$3,980,054	\$64.35
Redwood City	55,800	\$2,809,303	\$50.35
East Palo Alto	18,000	\$ 150,000	\$ 8.33

Sources: State Controller (R-21)  
 State Board of Equalization (R-16)  
 McDonald & Associates

East Palo Alto had about one-fifth of the sales tax revenue per capita to support its public services and schools. Source: San Mateo County, 1980

In a 1968 application that San Mateo County wrote for a grant from President Lyndon B. Johnson's Model Cities program, it said:

"The adjacent cities do not desire to annex East Palo Alto with all of its costly problems such as unemployment, low level of income, overcrowded housing, low education attainment, high number of welfare recipients (highest in the County), drainage, street repair, and lack of certain facilities.

The real problem of East Palo Alto is one of non-integration of the Negro into the affairs of wider society. The Negro of East Palo Alto has not been able to express himself within the hierarchy of communication that would bring about his desired action. Therefore, his desires have been frustrated."

In spite of the lack of resources, East Palo Alto community members and blacks across the San Francisco Bay Area pushed back against discriminatory housing practices, built schools and lobbied for access to jobs at the peak of the Civil Rights

era.

## Building schools

Wilks put her children in the Ravenswood School District. The lone high school the district had built in East Palo Alto had a student body that was 90 percent black, but the teachers and administration were 90 percent white. In the 1950s, the NAACP had resisted this districting, arguing that East Palo Alto was falling behind a “concrete curtain.” But they weren’t successful.

Even though her son was getting good grades, Wilks realized the curriculum her son was being taught wasn’t even going to lead to literacy by the time he graduated from high school. She became vice president of the PTA and would overhear teachers say, “It is no use bothering to give them work. They just don’t care and neither do their families. Most of them have no fathers.”

Feeling educationally cheated, Wilks organized a “sneak out” program with other local moms and white friends from neighboring Palo Alto to get 100 local children into their better-resourced schools. She then founded the Nairobi Day School to give kids supplementary weekend tutoring in reading.

wilks-school

Gertrude Wilks (right), the daughter of Louisiana sharecroppers, moved to East Palo Alto and was one of its most prominent leaders in the 1960s. She was involved in the movement to get Stanford University to implement affirmative action.



Bob Hoover's then wife, Mary, who had done her doctoral work at Stanford on language, formed an entire methodology for teaching literacy to black students called the Nairobi method.

But the "sneak out" program wasn't the answer, either. One afternoon, a white man followed Wilks's daughter and two of her daughter's friends into the women's bathroom at Cubberley High School. While holding a gun in his hand, he used a racial epithet that had been scrawled on their lockers and told them to "go home." Wilks knew of an empty house and the very next day, she opened what would become a full-time high school there.

Hoover also started a community college. He had met Stokely Carmichael, a protege of the Civil Rights movement who had a famous ideological split with Martin Luther King, Jr., over the notion of "black power." Favoring integration, King felt that the slogan "black power" would spread the idea that the movement was about black domination instead of black equality.

By this time in the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had gained so much force that a lot of people in the industry were looking for ways to show that they were good corporate citizens.

— Bob Hoover of David Packard

But he understood that Carmichael's ideas stemmed from frustration after watching urban black communities across the United States become entrapped by ram-

pant housing discrimination, poorly funded schools and social exclusion from job networks. In his final book, King would write that, “the suburbs are white nooses around the black necks of the cities.”

Hoover recalls Carmichael asking him, “Why would you be so committed to turning over the minds of your children to people who have oppressed them for 400 years? We need to build our own institutions.”

Even so, they were building a college amid enormous hurdles. At the time, East Palo Alto’s unemployment rate was about twice the national average, 63 percent of the population was under the age of 25, and only half of the adults had a high school education.

When Hoover had problems fundraising, he turned to David Packard, the co-founder and CEO of Hewlett-Packard. They had been co-chairs of the local chapter of Common Cause, a political advocacy group pushing for transparency in government.

So much had changed in a decade.

“By this time in the late 1960s, the civil rights movement had gained so much force that a lot of people in the industry were looking for ways to show that they were good corporate citizens,” Hoover said of Packard.

Packard, a lifelong Republican running one of the Valley’s most iconic technology corporations, ended up filling out the initial round for Hoover’s Black Power college.

Packard’s commitment was real, Hoover said. HP and its black leaders, including Roy L. Clay, Sr., championed hiring from historically black colleges.

“He came to every single meeting,” Hoover said. “He brought in so many other CEOs into the organization and it created a lot of job situations for our community.”



Bob Hoover (left) in the early 1970s leading Nairobi College, which taught courses from physics to Swahili and was partially funded by Hewlett-Packard co-founder Dave Packard.

By 1969, Nairobi College offered 25 courses on everything from physics to black legal problems to Swahili. Classes were taught everywhere from people's apartments to the teen center, and all students were required to complete four hours of daily community service in the schools, health and welfare centers.

A wave of Afro-centric institutions opened up across East Palo Alto. If they couldn't find it, they were just going to build it themselves.

Yolanda Rhodes, a soprano who grew up in East Palo Alto, remembers seeing the children of the Shule Mandela school play around town. It was different from her upbringing, when she said she felt bombarded with messages and images that blacks were bad or worthless.

These kids were different.

"There was something very special about them," she said. "They had a sense of internal power. They were charismatic and articulate. You'd see them and think who's that? Oh, they're from that Bantu school."

## Nairobi

In 1968, younger East Palo Alto community members even ran a campaign to rename the city 'Nairobi,' reflecting its black ethnic make-up. Kenyatta and Uhuru were alternatives.



But the initiative failed because it split the community along age lines. Older African-Americans thought the name 'Nairobi' was too visibly associated with living in a ghetto. Had the voting age been lowered to 18 by that point, it might have passed.

## Affirmative action

Getting African-Americans into universities was another battle. In 1960, the year after Hoover arrived, just two of Stanford's freshmen were black.

One day in March 1968, four teachers from the East Palo Alto Day School took 50 children on a field trip to see an African art exhibit at Stanford.

A university-led review could not ascertain exactly what happened later, but a teacher testified that the children had been searched and forced to open their bags, making them feel as if they were being accused of shoplifting. Wilks fired off a letter to

Stanford's administration.

Two weeks later, Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated. At a campus memorial for King, Wilks, the East Palo Alto children, and a group of black Stanford students sat in the front rows.

"Not long after I had begun to speak, the entire population of the first several rows of the audience rose as one person," recalled Richard Lyman, who was Stanford's president at the time. "I thought they were about to walk out in protest, but they walked up onto the stage instead."

They had a series of demands, including one that Stanford recruit minority students from the surrounding communities in East Palo Alto, East Menlo Park and Santa Clara County.

And so, affirmative action at Stanford was born.

## Housing discrimination

But even if blacks started to find good, higher-paying tech jobs or get into universities in the late 1960s, housing discrimination still deeply impacted their ability to find homes. Ocie Tinsley, who moved to Santa Clara Valley to work in research and development for Lockheed Martin, recalls being stuck living in hotels for two months while his white co-workers were able to immediately find single-family homes.

African-Americans across both counties organized to get fair housing ordinances passed in city after city starting with Milpitas in 1954, then in San Jose and others.

California got its first statewide fair housing law passed in 1963 with the help of Northern California's first black legislator William Byron Rumford. But it was soon overturned by a ballot initiative, which Ronald Reagan praised in his gubernatorial re-election campaign.

"If an individual wants to discriminate against Negroes or others in selling or renting his home, it is his right to do so," Reagan said in a press release at the time.

Finally a week after King's death in 1968, the federal government passed its own fair housing law.

The passage of these laws meant that by the time that scores of highly educated East and South Asian immigrants began to arrive in the Silicon Valley beginning in the 1970s and 1980s, they could live wherever they could afford it. This is even

though San Francisco was home to some of the country's first racialized zoning laws, which limited the spread of Chinese-American run laundries and were later struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court.

By the time my mom and her father stepped off a Greyhound bus and set foot in Silicon Valley for the first time around 1980 as Vietnamese war refugees, no one could tell us where we could or couldn't live.

No one could shunt us off to neighborhoods and schools that were arguably set up to fail.

## Immigration

Moreover, it was the Civil Rights movement that helped to open the door to immigrants from outside Northern and Western European countries.

For about eighty years, immigration from mainland China had been all but shut off. Taiwan was limited to 100 visas per year.

But by the 1960s, the old immigration quotas, which were based on national origin and designed to maintain the U.S.'s existing racial composition, had become a "nearly intolerable" form of discrimination in former President John F. Kennedy's words. After Kennedy was assassinated, his successor President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Nationality Act and the Voting Rights Act less than two months apart.

The immigration law would change Silicon Valley forever. In 1960, Santa Clara County, which is home to Google and Apple, was 96.8 percent white.\* By 2010, it was 32 percent Asian-American and 26.9 percent Latino or Hispanic.\*

Under the new system, immigration policy would select immigrants on the basis of their skills or their existing family ties in the U.S. It kicked off a "brain drain" from the world's most populous countries, India and China, which both had governments that were less than 20 years old at the time. A shaky sense of political stability combined with poor economic growth and disastrous projects like The Great Leap Forward encouraged the crème de la crème of these countries to seek better fortunes abroad.

Many of the most technically educated migrants favored by the new U.S. immigration policy ended up in Silicon Valley. Reforms and explosive economic growth have since tilted the balance back with the emergence of new tech hubs in Bangalore and Beijing.

But if the 1965 law had one effect on the Asian-American population, it had an entirely different impact on the Latino community.

Until 1965, Mexican migration had largely been channeled through a temporary worker initiative called the bracero program. The old approach was flawed; labor activists like Cesar Chavez, who lived for many years at the southern end of what is now Silicon Valley in San Jose, criticized it for allowing farm owners to take advantage of low-income migrants who worked under terrible conditions.

But the new system was also problematic. It put numerical caps on immigration flows from the Western hemisphere for the first time. These caps were far below what the realistic economic demand for labor would be, especially in lower-wage, lower-skilled segments of the workforce.

For example, in 1956, 65,000 Mexicans legally entered the United States as documented migrants while another 445,000 came as guest workers. By 1976, the guest worker program had been abolished and legal immigration from Mexico was capped at 20,000 people per year.

The economic prosperity of the 1960s that allowed the U.S. to have difficult conversations about race, war and gender gave way to a more uncertain environment with higher unemployment and inflation.

This, of course, led to large flows of undocumented immigrants, who were then vilified in the mainstream media for breaking the law and being a drain on public services. The border was then militarized, and the Border Patrol's budget went from \$151 million in 1986 to \$1.4 billion and 21,000 officers this past year.

Paradoxically, this led to the undocumented migrant population becoming more permanent because of the risks of getting caught going back and forth.

Silicon Valley loves a good immigrant's tale. One-quarter of the region's technology companies between 2006 and 2012 had at least one founder born abroad, according to the Kauffman Foundation.

But not all immigrants arrive in America equally.

## 1970s: Setbacks for desegregation and the emergence of “Silicon Valley”

In the 1970s, Silicon Valley finally earned its name after a weekly trade newspaper called Electronic News ran a series on all the semiconductor companies throughout the region. The founding of firms like Kleiner Perkins in 1972 made venture the engine of capital that would fuel successive generations of technology companies.

But East Palo Alto was still an island amid a growing plenty.

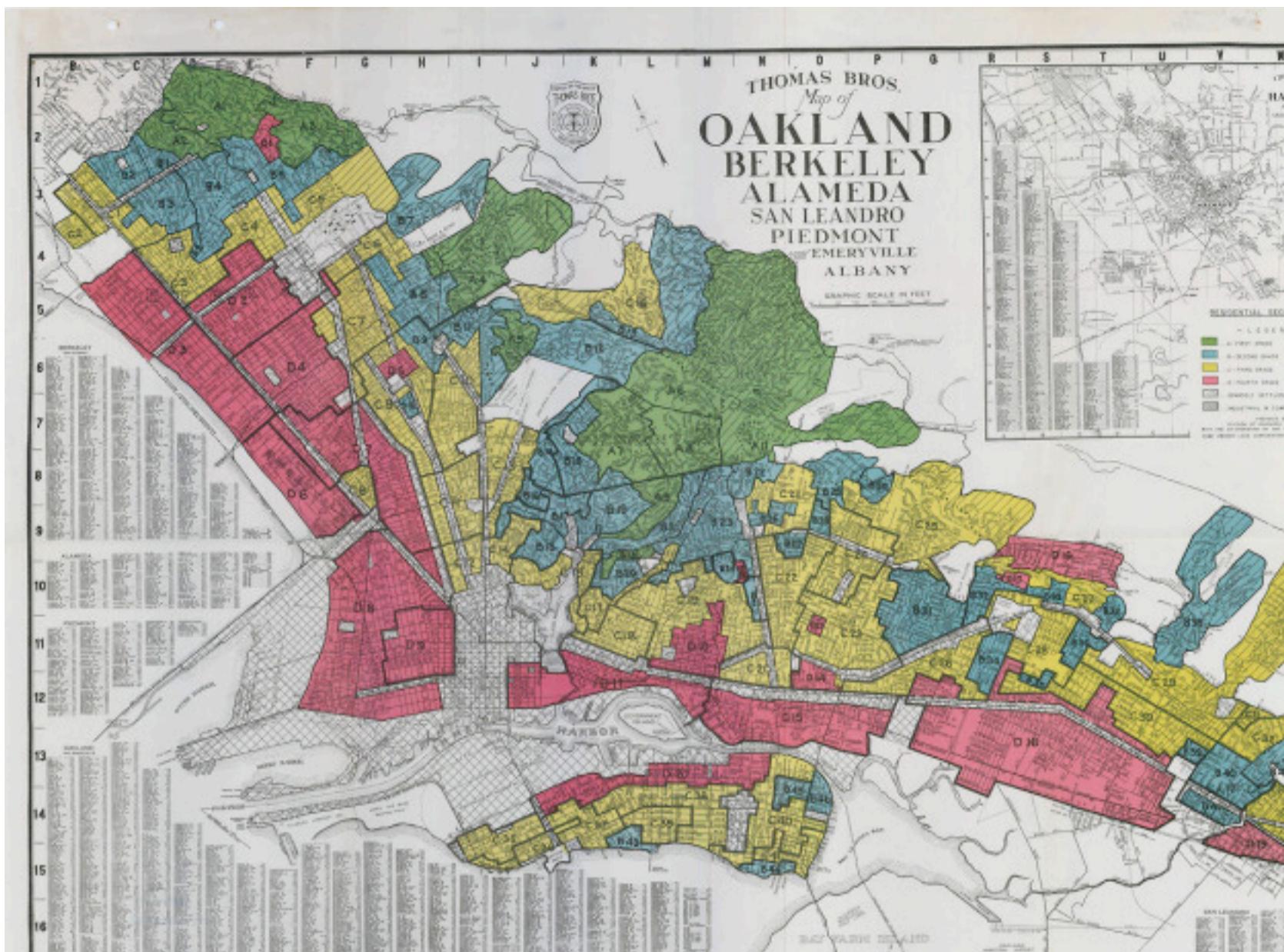
The legal victories around fair housing and school desegregation gave way to the more difficult reality of actually implementing these gains. The economic prosperity of the 1960s that allowed the U.S. to have difficult conversations about race, war and gender gave way to a more uncertain environment with higher unemployment and inflation.

In 1970, the Office for Civil Rights found that the school district covering East Palo Alto was in violation of desegregation laws. The district had three months to desegregate all six of its high schools or face the loss of federal funding.

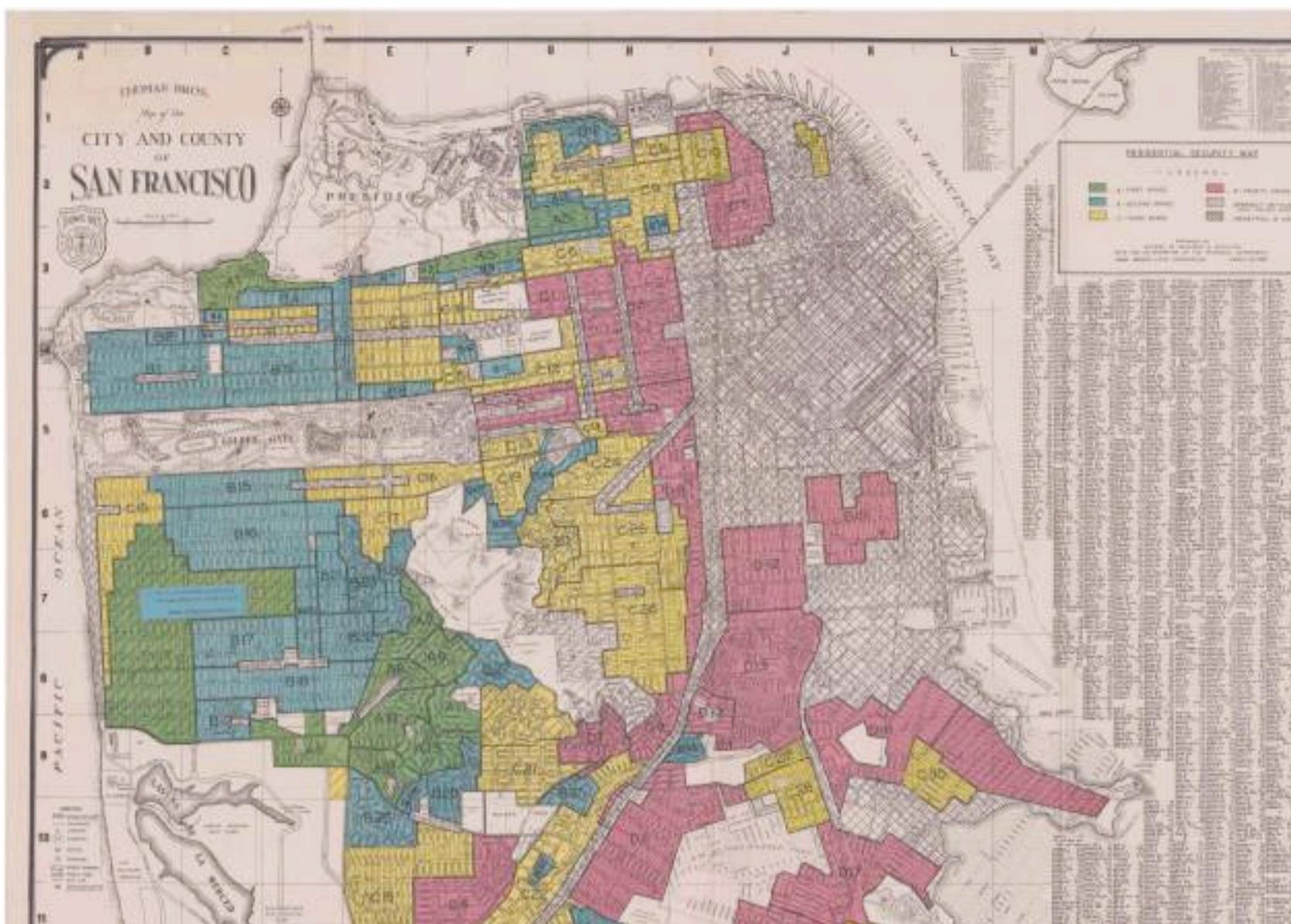
In order to attract more white students, East Palo Alto's high school, Ravenswood, added rock climbing, organic gardening and Hebrew classes. Initially, it was somewhat successful with roughly 400 more students joining in 1971. But the overall forces of white flight and declining enrollment were too powerful, so the district shut down the school in 1975. The same year, the two Nairobi schools got firebombed and burned down; investigators found two Molotov cocktails around the buildings.

Another African-American mother named Margaret Tinsley, who, like Wilks, was worried about low-quality schools, sued to get children into better-funded neighboring districts. The case took a decade to settle, but it eventually won the right for 166 East Palo Alto students to get into outside schools using a lottery. Today, East Palo Alto's high school students get bussed to some 18 different schools outside the city.

Undoing de facto housing segregation turned out to be much harder than simply changing the laws. For several decades, the Federal Housing Administration and private banks engaged in a practice of redlining, where they would back mortgage lending to certain neighborhoods that happened to be predominantly white and excluded others that housed minorities. You can find redlining maps of cities across the entire country including San Francisco and Oakland.



Old redlining maps from the 1930s of San Francisco and Oakland. Areas marked red were considered the most risky for mortgage support. In effect, redlining meant that these neighborhoods, often populated by minorities, could not secure comparable or sometimes any access to mortgages or capital. That in turn capped property values and revenues for public services.



The availability of capital drove differentials in property values between neighboring communities, making it harder to jump from one to the next. Because homeownership was the primary way that U.S. federal government encouraged Americans to protect and grow their wealth, this practice basically left out entire groups of people from capital accumulation. On top of discriminatory job practices from decades ago, it has lingering effects to this day; last year, the median net worth of a white household in the United States was \$141,900, compared to \$11,000 for blacks and \$13,700 for Hispanics.

The federal government tried to put an end to redlining through the Community Reinvestment Act in 1977. It had immediate effects. While the median East Palo Alto home price rose sluggishly compared to its neighbors from \$18,000 to \$23,000 from 1970 to 1976, prices doubled to \$46,000 by 1979 with the new ban on redlining.

But it was too late. Segregation had hardened into neighborhood price differentials, and only the most educated and upwardly mobile blacks could move out into the rest of the Silicon Valley suburbs.

Integration would turn out to be a double-edged sword.

"Before blacks could live anywhere else outside East Palo Alto and Belle Haven [in Menlo Park], everybody lived in the same community," Hoover said. "But once inte-

gration came, the middle-class and professionals left. So you were left with a low-income, poorly educated community with opportunities only for very low-wage jobs. Not only are your role models and economic engine gone, your leadership is too."

When Hoover was a child, he would go to black barbershops frequented by black doctors, lawyers, dentists and teachers from the community. He would overhear their conversations and imagine himself as one of them some day. But for East Palo Alto children of the 1980s, many of the middle and upper-class black families would have left by that time.

California also had its own dynamics.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a wave of growth-control movements sprouted throughout the entire San Francisco Bay Area as homeowners pushed back on apartment and multi-unit housing construction. Cities enacted rules that limited the number of houses that could be built per year and put protections on undeveloped land. In addition, the California Supreme Court issued rulings that said that municipalities didn't have to compensate property owners for downzoning their land and required environmental reviews for any sizable development.

Ostensibly, these growth controls were about environmentalism, but they also served to protect property values and prevent suburban governments from having to service lower-income residents. Today, Palo Alto has a median home price of \$2 million, the highest jobs-to-housing ratio in all of Silicon Valley with three jobs for every housing unit, and 42 percent of its land under conservation protections against development.

One result of all this anti-development legislation was that the behavior of coastal California home prices started deviating from the rest of the United States in the 1970s. California homes started off the decade priced at roughly 30 percent more than the rest of the country. By 1980, they were nearly double. It was an enormous sea change from just 20 years before, when the state issued one out of every five housing permits in the country.

With property prices soaring, the state's voters rebelled by passing Proposition 13, which slashed property tax revenue by more than 50 percent the following year.

Beginning in the late 1960s, a wave of growth-control movements sprouted throughout the entire San Francisco Bay Area as homeowners pushed back on apartment and multi-unit housing construction.

Because homeowners could now lock in low property tax rates under Proposition 13, the initiative insulated them from the negative tax consequences of not building enough housing. There are scores of empty houses in West Oakland, another heavi-

ly redlined and African-American neighborhood just one BART stop from San Francisco, because it's inexpensive to leave the houses vacant and ride the property price appreciation on a flip instead of redeveloping the land at a higher tax assessment.

Proposition 13 also made it harder to move, reducing turnover for new families looking for housing.

"Real-estate inflation is the tax that one portion of society – older, more affluent homeowners and corporate landowners in coastal areas – levies on the rest of society, especially younger, less affluent families," Mike Davis once wrote in "City of Quartz," a spatial history of Los Angeles.

Indeed, Palo Alto's population has aged rapidly, going from a median of 29.5 in 1970 to 41.9 years in 2010. Many of the "lower-income" households in nearby Atherton, which is the most expensive ZIP code in the country this year, are house-rich but cash-poor seniors living in multi-million dollar properties.

One of the other problems with Proposition 13 was that it widened tax revenue differentials between urban and suburban areas and wealthier and lower-income communities.

If the alienation and disaffection of California's urban ghettos produced the strident voice of leaders like Oakland Black Panthers founder Huey P. Newton, California suburbs would respond with Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, who refined the art of racially coded appeals veiled in the language of individual rights, tax cuts and minimal government.

Since public school districts at that time received half their funding from property taxes, and schools in wealthier neighborhoods could get around the cuts through PTA fundraising, Proposition 13 gutted funding for urban school districts.

In the wake of Proposition 13, East Palo Alto would finally incorporate as its own city after a two-decades-long struggle in 1983. There were bitter debates over whether the community would generate enough tax revenue to support services like law enforcement, which had previously been provided by the county government. Wilks controversially opposed incorporation and even filed suit with the help of Pete McCloskey, a U.S. Congressman who founded the storied Silicon Valley law firm that had just represented Apple in its IPO, Wilson Sonsini Goodrich & Rosati.

One concession made to win support was to institute rent control, making East Palo Alto the only city between San Francisco and San Jose to have such an ordinance. Rent control is almost universally decried by economists because it can allocate units inefficiently. But in the specific case of East Palo Alto, it has to be understood as a political response to policies that systematically denied African-Americans

pathways into homeownership for decades.

Now, a newly incorporated city without its own high school and little in tax revenues, East Palo Alto was about to enter its most difficult decade yet.

## Mid-1980s to early 1990s: Descent

Before he left the U.S. for West Africa out of fear that he would be assassinated like King and Malcolm X, Stokely Carmichael left Hoover with an ominous message.

“Our communities are going to get flooded with drugs and we’re going to eat ourselves up from the inside,” he said.

Growing up in the 1980s, it often feels like certain ideas or communities are a permanent part of the urban landscape. They aren’t. Homelessness emerged as a major political issue in San Francisco only in the early 1980s.

Likewise, the archetype of the black drug dealer or the “gang-infested” ghetto surfaced around the same time. With its position right off the 101, East Palo Alto would become the area’s main drug hub at a time when the industry’s iconic leaders like Bill Gates and Steve Jobs were duking it out in the PC and Mac wars of the early 1980s.

Back in the 1970s, cocaine was considered the “Champagne of drugs” at a cost north of \$2,500 an ounce and up. It spread among the elite from Wall Street to Hollywood, but a new technique involving cooking it with baking soda and water made the drug far more affordable in the form of smokable rocks, or crack cocaine. That introduced cocaine to a whole new, lower-income audience and made it far more addictive in short bursts.

Crack cocaine devastated urban black communities at a time when they were at their most vulnerable. The residual isolation of housing segregation combined with the loss of manufacturing jobs to both the suburbs and overseas countries meant that there were few alternative job or economic opportunities in these neighborhoods. Poor schools meant that kids were ill-prepared for an increasingly limited blue-collar job market. Instead, Hoover said kids could make the equivalent of \$500 a day selling crack or heroin.

One by one, he watched the kids he had taught in Little League, the Nairobi schools and college fall away.

“Drugs just destroyed our children,” Hoover said. “We had a vision for this community in the 1960s and 70s. When the drugs came, it stopped it dead in its tracks.”

Between 1984 and 1994, the homicide rate for black males aged 14 to 17 would double nationally. The gains made over the previous two decades in closing the black-white achievement gap in high school graduation rates reversed.

At the same time, the Reagan administration cut commitments to public and subsidized affordable housing from the peak of the 1970s. Today, the federal government forgoes roughly \$70 billion in tax revenue each year through the mortgage interest tax deduction even though three-fourths of its benefits accrue to the top income quintile in the country.

Meanwhile, the annual Housing and Urban Development budget, which is supposed to support low-income communities is roughly two-thirds of that at \$47 billion. The decline in federal funding for housing is partly why cities like San Francisco are having such a tough time finding funding for affordable housing development and have to “tax” new housing construction through inclusionary requirements and fees.

These cuts came at a time when cities were grappling with revenue loss from “white flight,” the emergence of drugs like heroin and crack cocaine, de-institutionalization of mental health facilities and the return of veterans from Vietnam War. It was like a perfect storm for urban communities in the Bay Area.

“In the 1980s, everybody was struggling and barely making it. Then suddenly there were guys in cars with all this capacity to get the things you couldn’t have,” said Heather Starnes, who moved to East Palo Alto in the late 1980s and runs a nonprofit called Live in Peace, which teaches music, college prep and coding through a new program called StreetCode Academy. “It starts out real innocent and then suddenly, your mom’s on it.”

David Lewis, after whom Hoover’s prisoner re-entry program is named, came into drug dealing after teachers wrote him off because of his dyslexia. With a father who was an alcoholic, he had few role models and dropped out. He ended up in jail for 17 years for various convictions of drug use and robbery before beating his habit and starting a nationally renowned drug rehabilitation program in East Palo Alto.

“I considered myself at 15 to have a full-blown drug addiction, but I still had this burning desire to succeed,” he said in interviews before he was murdered in 2010. “And the people that I saw succeeding, they weren’t people who were going to school. They were people involved in criminal activity.”

Gangs came into the picture in East Palo Alto around the mid-1980s. A crude analogy would be to think of it like M&A; gangs would roll up the drug business in East Palo Alto the way that any new market gives way to consolidation as it matures. The

gangs protected rights to dealing spots that ensured a constant flow of revenue.

The federal government responded to media reports of the emerging “crack epidemic” by passing the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986, which penalized crack cocaine 100 times more harshly than regular cocaine. For possession of five grams of crack cocaine, there was a minimum five-year sentence. A person would have to carry 500 grams of regular cocaine to earn the same ruling.

In hindsight, academics and activists, such as “The New Jim Crow” author Michelle Alexander, say that this paved the way for a criminal justice system that unjustly sweeps minorities into the prison system, making it difficult for them to recover or find employment later. Today, 59 percent of federal and state prisoners are either black or Latino.

The situation kept escalating until its culmination in 1992 when there were 42 murders in a city of fewer than 24,000 people. About 40 percent of the deaths were from outsiders going into the community to buy drugs.

You couldn’t have had a starker contrast between the city and the rest of Silicon Valley, which was on the verge of untold wealth with the arrival of the commercial Internet.

East Palo Alto was branded the “Murder Capital” of the U.S.A.

## 1990s to 2000s: Recovery and the Dot-Com Boom

The crisis forced everyone into action.

When bullet casings started showing up in the backyards of Menlo Park and Palo Alto, the neighboring communities, some of which had resisted for decades to keep East Palo Alto children out of their better-funded schools, donated police officers to the city’s understaffed department.

The three mayors of East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Palo Alto struck up a partnership and helped form the anti-drug ‘RED Team’ or Regional Enforcement Detail. County, state and federal officials also became involved. All in all, the law enforcement coalition would make more than 1,000 arrests over the next two years.

East Palo Alto residents also took matters into their own hands. Armed with just two-way radios, Hoover and other activists started monitoring street corners, taking down license plates of drug buyers and reporting drug sales to the police. They’d go to a single street corner and patrol it every morning and night for six months.

“We became like the police ourselves,” Hoover said. “I went out on the streets. My wife was always afraid that someone would kill me. But the thing is, I had known all of these kids selling drugs since they were little children.”

He’d sit and talk with them. “Our position was always — what you’re doing is destroying this community and it has to stop. If you are willing to stop, we will help you find something else to do.”

Homicides fell by 86 percent the following year.

Silicon Valley’s most prominent companies and families started making charitable commitments. Some of it enabled handfuls of children to make it out into four-year universities.

These programs only take the kids that they’re pretty sure are going to be successful.

— Bob Hoover

In 1995, Laurene Powell Jobs, Steve Jobs’ widow, co-founded College Track after realizing that many of the East Palo Alto children had no idea about how to apply or prepare for college even if they had ambitions to be the first in their families to get there. Sharifa Wilson, who was mayor of East Palo Alto in the early 1990s, says that between 400 and 500 students have since completed college since the program started. “Laurene is thoroughly committed to equity,” Wilson said. “I have a tremendous amount of respect for her.”

Some of the charity was opportunistic.

In 2000, Carly Fiorina, then CEO of HP, was concerned that the company wasn’t getting enough publicity for its philanthropy. The Friday before then President Bill Clinton was supposed to visit a new technology center in East Palo Alto called Plugged In, a communications manager for the company dialed up its executive director Magda A. Escobar.

They asked Escobar to call the San Jose Mercury News to play up how much the company had given to the center over the years after a story had incorrectly attributed a donation to Sun Microsystems instead of HP.

While Escobar was grateful for the call, if publicity was what HP wanted, it would need an attention-grabbing figure. She suggested \$1 million toward a permanent home for Plugged In would get HP on the front pages. The following Monday with Jesse Jackson, Clinton and Escobar also onstage, Fiorina got the headlines she wanted.

However, unbeknownst to everyone at the time, the NASDAQ and S&P 500 had peaked a few weeks earlier. The dot-com bubble would collapse. Startups and jobs across the region would get obliterated.

Fiorina's donation ended up being a life raft for Plugged In. But the overall \$5 million commitment that the company made to the city, which was the size of a standard Series A round, became a source of political stress.

The money enabled Plugged In to keep going for years after similar efforts around the country failed for lack of funds. However, Plugged In eventually closed doors in 2008 after it merged with another national non-profit with the intent to use the rest of its \$1 million nest egg for continued growth. Like a startup acquisition that went nowhere, it got shut down. It would take years until the emergence of StreetCode Academy for a new community technology center to emerge again in East Palo Alto.

While the new charity efforts of the 1990s and 2000s helped, they also introduced complications.

"Charity is a form of power," Escobar said.

Kids, for example, were easy to fundraise for.

But parents, which are certainly at least half of the equation, were not.

"It's the missionary mentality," Hoover said. "We have to send the saviors from across the freeway. These programs only take the kids that they're pretty sure are going to be successful. You're taking the top 5 percent, so what happens to the other 95 percent? They won't touch the kids that really need help."

In 1995, two days after Netscape debuted to a \$2.9 billion market cap on public markets, Jerry Bruckheimer would release *Dangerous Minds*, a Michelle Pfeiffer vehicle about a white former Marine who goes into school system to reform East Palo Alto high school students.

For the children from the most recent generation in East Palo Alto, there are just extraordinarily difficult emotional and financial hurdles.

"The kids that were basically born from 1986 onward have a whole different reality than any other generation of African-Americans prior to them," Starnes said. "It is extremely hard. Our kids don't know life without black people being portrayed on TV as drug dealers or prisoners."

Starnes ended up helping to raise three children whose parents weren't around. One

was born to a 12-year-old mother. Another grew up to be a sheriff in Alabama, but still grapples with forming close emotional relationships.

“Having relationships with crack addicts is complicated. They are a shell of their former selves – all the beauty and brilliance begins to be defined by addiction. People who would have died for you are overtaken. They become people you don’t recognize,” Starnes said. She remembers that people with addicted relatives had to take precautions like padlocking their refrigerators, doors and cabinets to prevent stealing for the addiction.

The third child was a baby named Angelika.

One weekend when she was six years old, Angelika went over to spend the night with the rest of her family. Starnes was close with pretty much all of them; three of them were like godchildren.

At 6 a.m. the following morning, the area in front of the house’s only door inexplicably burst into flames.

Thirteen people were sleeping in it at the time. Four of them were able to escape, but the other nine were trapped behind anti-burglar bars bolted onto the house’s windows.

Anjelika and Starnes’ other godchildren, Donta’ and Ja’mearce’, died. The fire department ruled that it was an arson based on the flammable liquid they found all over the carport. But after nearly two decades, a \$50,000 reward and more than a hundred interviews later, they were never able to identify a perpetrator.

Starnes left East Palo Alto, thinking it would be for good.

“People could never fathom the weight that is carried in a community like this,” she said. “Poverty is exhausting, it is hard enough to live, raise a family and then you add all of this trauma. Our children. They’re just full.”

Many other families made the same choice. With housing prices reaching record levels during the dot-com bubble of the late 1990s, many black families had decided that they had had enough. They sold at a profit and left for the South or suburbs somewhere farther out.

East Palo Alto transitioned into being a majority Latino community. The cheaper housing prices and abundance of low-wage jobs in Silicon Valley attracted immigrants from Mexico and Central America.

Dreams Awake from Sub64Films on Vimeo.

Doroteo Garcia was one of them. A native of Oaxaca, he was making the equivalent of about \$40 every two weeks selling auto and electrical parts back in Mexico. When he heard you could make \$5.75 per hour, which was the minimum wage in the mid-1990s, it sounded like a lot.

In 1996, he left his wife and two sons behind and headed north. Today, he is a janitor at Stanford University, making \$30,000 a year. He pays \$1,100 a month for a one-bedroom rent-controlled apartment that he shared with one of his sons until he went off to college in Seattle. He still sends \$100 home every month.

"I knew nothing about Silicon Valley," Garcia said. "People told me how much you could make, but nobody told me how much you'd have to pay."

Even with East Palo Alto's newfound media attention and some charitable support, the 1990s weren't a particularly hospitable time for minorities in the state of California; voters tightened access for underrepresented minorities to university admissions and toughened penalties in the state's criminal justice system.

In 1993, Facebook's first angel investor Peter Thiel and David Sacks, who would eventually sell Yammer to Microsoft for \$1.2 billion, wrote a piece entitled "The Case Against Affirmative Action" in the Stanford alumni magazine:

"....racism is not everywhere, and there is very little at a place like Stanford. Certainly, no one has accused Stanford's admissions officers of being racist, so perhaps the real problem with affirmative action is that we are pretending to solve a problem that no longer exists."

Both immigrants, Thiel would have arrived in the United States sometime around 1968, the year when de jure housing segregation ended, and Sacks was born the son of an endocrinologist in Cape Town, South Africa. (Sacks declined to comment for this story. But a recent article in The New York Times on women explains how his thinking has evolved over the past 20 years.)

A few years later, California voters would pass Proposition 209, which ended racial and gender preferences in hiring and admissions for public institutions. Today, African-American students make up a little bit more than 130 students out of every 4,500-person freshman class enrolled at UC Berkeley.

Around the same time, California voters also passed a Three Strikes Law, which would give prisoners 25 years to a life sentence after three felonies, and Proposition 187, which cut off health care, education and social services to undocumented immigrants.

While Proposition 187 got stalled, the Three Strikes Law has contributed to the state's prison system ballooning by more than 750 percent since the 1970s. Today, California's prisons hold nearly twice as many inmates as they were designed for.

## Today: Gentrification

Now that East Palo Alto has brought its crime from the high-water mark of the early 1990s, the irony is that the community is now prone to gentrification.

East Palo Alto represents the last piece of land that is substantially more affordable than every community around it. Its median home price is \$534,000, compared to \$2.1 million in Palo Alto, \$4.6 million in Atherton, \$1.6 million in Menlo Park and \$1.1 million in Mountain View.

In the mid-2000s housing boom, real estate pressures came to a head. Lenders started going door-to-door in East Palo Alto neighborhoods in an attempt to get homeowners to refinance their homes or to buy property using subprime mortgages.

It was strange for longtime residents who remembered the days when African-Americans had virtually no access to credit. Now banks could pass off the lending risks to someone else by securitizing these loans.

"There was this surge of predatory lending with all of these subprime loans that were pressed upon the community," said Carol Lamont, who has worked in Bay Area affordable housing for more than two decades and managed East Palo Alto's rent control ordinance until this year.

Twenty-two hundred of the 6,600 single-family homes in the city went into foreclosure, according to AbleWorks, an East Palo Alto nonprofit that was able to salvage about one-third of its foreclosure cases.

Tameeka Bennett, one of the city's most prominent young activists and community organizers, saw her parents lose their home of more than 20 years after taking a refinancing deal from the Bank of America. She didn't know what they had done until it was too late.

"They didn't understand that this would take the whole 30-year process and reset it," said Bennett, who is now commuting more than two hours a day from Oakland to lead the community she once grew up in. "The whole thing didn't work out well for them."

Around the same time, a Silicon Valley real estate developer named David Taran started buying up more than 70 parcels in a strip along the highway separating Palo

Alto and East Palo Alto. It contained about 1,800 mostly rent-controlled units, or roughly half of the city's rental housing stock.

He then tried to raise rents by hundreds of dollars through a loophole in the city's rent-control ordinance.



But the 2008 financial crash caused Taran's Page Mill Properties to default on a \$250 million loan. Some of the entity's investors sued, calling his plan "morally offensive" and arguing that Taran had misrepresented the way Page Mill would use the city's rent control laws. CalPERS lost \$100 million on the deal. Taran could not be reached for comment.

East Palo Alto tenants thought they had won a reprieve.

Instead, the properties got scooped up by an even bigger entity, Sam Zell's Equity Residential, one of the largest real estate investment trusts in the country. Over the summer, Equity Residential was sending roughly 300 notices a month to tenants in its 1,800 units to pay rent on the first day of the month in a bold tactic to tally late payments toward evictions, according to Daniel Saver, a lawyer at Community Legal Services.

"A lot of people are just terrified that they're going to get evicted," said Saver, who recently moved to East Palo Alto as a recent Harvard Law School grad. "These are cor-

porate entities that understand how non-payment works. They're very aggressive and they're not creating exceptions for moms who are one emergency away from homelessness or eviction."

Community Legal Services has since filed a class action lawsuit against Equity Residential, saying that its late charges are "excessive" and "unlawful."

Other property buyers have been scouting for homes to flip to tech workers. Rhodes remembers meeting a friend of a friend in a Palo Alto bar who worked in real estate. He offered to pay her \$500 to drive him around the city and point out properties to buy and flip.

"Why would want I want to drive that guy around East Palo Alto?" she said. "It would be like I'm his chauffeur. I would have to listen to all his antics and give him information that he would use to exploit the city."

Unusual times call for unusual measures. Starnes, who returned to East Palo Alto after graduate school and working in Oakland's middle schools, has started compiling a list of all the elderly black homeowners in the city to try and convince them not to sell to outsiders.

Saver says that East Palo Alto needs a minimum of 2,000 permanently affordable units. He says that unlike Palo Alto and Menlo Park, residents he has talked to are open to redevelopment or upzoning, as long as it doesn't displace them.

Assuming a \$200,000 subsidy per unit, that could be a \$400 million effort in exchange for denser zoning that would allow workforce housing. It's arguable that such a deal could be in Facebook or Google's interest if they need housing for talent right near their campuses.



In spite of these pressures, parts of East Palo Alto are thriving.

Starnes, along with Stanford computer science students Shadi Barhoumi and Rafael Cosman and alums Olatunde Sobomehin and Justin Phipps, have transformed the campus of a former remedial school into a programming academy.

They teach everything from beat-boxing to Arduino and mobile app development. At a kick-off event last month, musicians were rapping onstage about APIs and a group of girls had created a mobile app for reporting blight to the city government.

I've been back several times. It's the real deal. There are kids carpooling in from as far as San Ramon to hack on hardware, play basketball and learn mixed martial arts.

Barhoumi isn't any kind of hyper-privileged Stanford kid, either. He was raised in the nearby suburb of San Mateo. His mom is an ESL teacher and his father, a former systems test engineer, picked up Uber driving seven days a week after being unemployed for years.

He has turned down lucrative internships to build the StreetCode Academy while Cosman confessed his grades were sort of suffering with all the hours they were putting into it. They funded a summer coding camp with money from donors like Mitch Kapor, Jeff Dean from Google and Jason Green from Emergence Capital.

At a recent hackathon, kids made products to share football playbooks or raise funds for their soccer teams. At a CodeCamp graduation over the summer, David Chatman, who grew up in East Palo Alto and had to drop out of college to help his mom

make ends meet, burst into tears after pitching a site he built to showcase profiles of young East Palo Alto students.

“You have no idea how I wanted this so badly,” he said, hugging Barhoumi.



Shadi Barhoumi is a Stanford computer science major who helps run the Streetcode Academy and teaches programming to East Palo Alto students.

The proximity to Stanford and Silicon Valley has had its benefits over living in other low-income communities that are farther out.

Two years after Facebook relocated its headquarters from Palo Alto to an old Sun Microsystems campus on East Palo Alto’s border in Menlo Park, Zuckerberg made a \$1 billion commitment to the Silicon Valley Community Foundation, of which \$120 million will go to local schools. So far, a little over \$1 million has been disbursed for iPads and Chromebooks to East Palo Alto’s Ravenswood District, while another \$2.5 million has gone to schools in San Francisco and Redwood City. Every summer, the company takes in local East Palo Alto high school students for internships.

Then earlier this year, Zuckerberg and his wife Priscilla Chan gave \$5 million to a local health center. The pair have tried to be much more hands-on with their local commitments after learning from a \$100 million philanthropic donation to Newark’s school system. That gift was skewered in *The New Yorker* for being spent on consultants instead of classrooms.

Last year, Zuckerberg taught a 10-week course on entrepreneurship to East Palo Alto middle-school students, who created business plans and then sold their products on the company's campus. He continues to personally mentor four of those students, who are now sophomores in high school. Meanwhile, chief product officer Chris Cox has played in an East Palo Alto reggae band for about a decade and has been deeply involved in supporting several city non-profits.

Still, there's this disconnect between the Valley's charitable efforts and acknowledging how the structure of the region's housing, job and educational markets create these disparities in the first place.

"If you're fighting for crumbs, you're never going to ask for a slice of bread," Escobar said.

Facebook is a major charitable force in East Palo Alto that supports several dozen non-profits. But its presence may also eventually price out the community it intends to help.

Similarly, the foundation of Google co-founder Sergey Brin and Anne Wojcicki underwrites the computer science and engineering curriculum at Eastside College Preparatory, a private East Palo Alto high school that has taken in about 300 local students, most of whom are black and Latino and will be the first in their families to go to college.

But Google, the company, uses low-wage labor in East Palo Alto for Google Shopping Express.

"This is the lowest I've ever gotten paid," said Lerisa Puckett, who grew up in East Palo Alto and took a delivery job from 5:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. after seeing others in the neighborhood driving the white-and-blue Google Shopping Express cars around.

A mom of three who used to be a special education teacher, she had taken five years out of the workforce to raise them. One of her kids just left for college in Texas. Another is on scholarship at a private high school in Portola Valley while a third is in a public school in Santa Clara.

Puckett, who lives in a low-income housing development in Santa Clara, regularly visits East Palo Alto to see her 81-year-old grandfather, who still drives up five days a week to San Francisco to work as a janitor in China Basin, which houses Dropbox's headquarters.

"I'd love to live here, but this has become a gold mine," Puckett said. "It's in the middle of everything. It's in the middle of San Francisco, San Jose and it's right here at

the Dumbarton bridge.”

It's not as if this is new. In 1970, half of East Palo Alto's workers were in blue collar, clerical or cleaning jobs.

The same report about East Palo Alto from 1968 that I quoted above read:

“The high-technology mid-peninsula represents in many ways, the kind of regional economic development that will befall many other areas in the nation in the years to come. In these growth cases, aggregates of low income, minority families will first provide low status service and other occupational categories – and quickly form poverty pockets or social problem areas if new patterns for integrating into mainstream living at a fast pace are not provided.”

It was something that King echoed at the end of his life when he tried to expand the Civil Rights movement into a broader movement around economic injustice and poverty. He argued that poor living standards for blacks weren't simply about neglect or any kind of rationalization that one could make about family structure or education:

They are a structural part of the economic system in the United States. Certain industries and enterprises are based upon a supply of low-paid, under-skilled and immobile non-white labor. Hand-assembly factories, hospitals, service industries, housework, agricultural operations using itinerant labor would suffer economic trauma, if not disaster, with a rise in wage scales.”

And now, models like this are firmly entrenched within the most prominent startup successes of the last five years. Ten years ago, the industry's leading growth-stage companies were pure software plays like Google and Facebook that compressed access to information for everyone. But online-to-offline models raise entirely new questions about equity.

None of the companies relying on independent contractors – Uber, Lyft, Homejoy, TaskRabbit, Google Shopping Express, Postmates, DoorDash, SpoonRocket, Washio, Handy and so on – have released the racial make-up of both their permanent workforces and their contractor bases.

To do so would be to open the Pandora's box of questions about the extent to which these companies align with or even amplify pre-existing racial and socioeconomic inequities. Based on the tech companies that have released diversity data so far, it's likely that you have a small base of full-time employees with job security and equity that are primarily white and Asian, and then a substantially larger and more diverse base of contractors that have neither.

## Can Silicon Valley Really Save East Palo Alto While Devouring It?

In the end, there's not a lot of time.

"In 15 years — maybe quicker than that — this is probably going to be a mostly white and Asian community," Hoover said. "All I can do is keep running my little golf program and trying to build something that will increase the graduation rate of our kids from high school and keep them from going to prison. They are mostly Latino kids now, but they're still my community."

Home prices have more than doubled since the bottom in 2012, and there's an informal, internal message board inside Facebook where people have discussed the merits and disadvantages of living in different parts of East Palo Alto, employees have told me. Many Facebook employees who joined after the company's IPO cannot afford the multi-million-dollar home prices in neighboring cities.

Meanwhile, Palo Alto is one of the few cities that elected an anti-growth council this past fall, while nearby cities like Mountain View, where Google is headquartered, finally elected pro-housing leadership.

During the summer, a group of Palantir employees even showed up to council meetings to beg for more housing. They, along with other younger tech workers and retiring baby-boomers, formed a group called Palo Alto Forward to vouch for more housing and transportation options.

The reaction? You can get a flavor of it in the hundreds of comments here:

I'd love to see all of these young, pro-growth residents choose a place to make their own. Milpitas? East Palo Alto? Alviso? All places that would truly appreciate your innovation, education, and desire to develop the community.

Others still oppose the desegregation settlement from the 1980s that won a small number of students, including East Palo Alto's current mayor Laura Martinez, the right to attend Palo Alto's much vaunted school system. You can hear echoes of what Gertrude Wilks overheard in the PTA a generation earlier about minority parents not valuing education:

Our children don't need [the Tinsley desegregation program] to experience diversity. There are plenty of Asian, European, and Hispanic immigrants in and around Palo Alto and they are hard-working adults. If anything, our students learn negative stereotypes by having Tinsley students in our schools because most of the Tinsley students are not at the same academic levels as Palo Alto students unless they have parents who help them at home and prioritize academics, most of whom do not.

Over the summer, I spoke with Gary Lauder, a venture investor who was the main financial backer behind a slow-growth initiative that would have capped development in downtown Menlo Park until it was defeated in November.

"I don't object to adding stuff or having the place becoming more built up," he said. "I just think that there needs to be greater emphasis on transportation infrastructure."

He then directed me to a TED Talk he gave about a new traffic sign he invented.

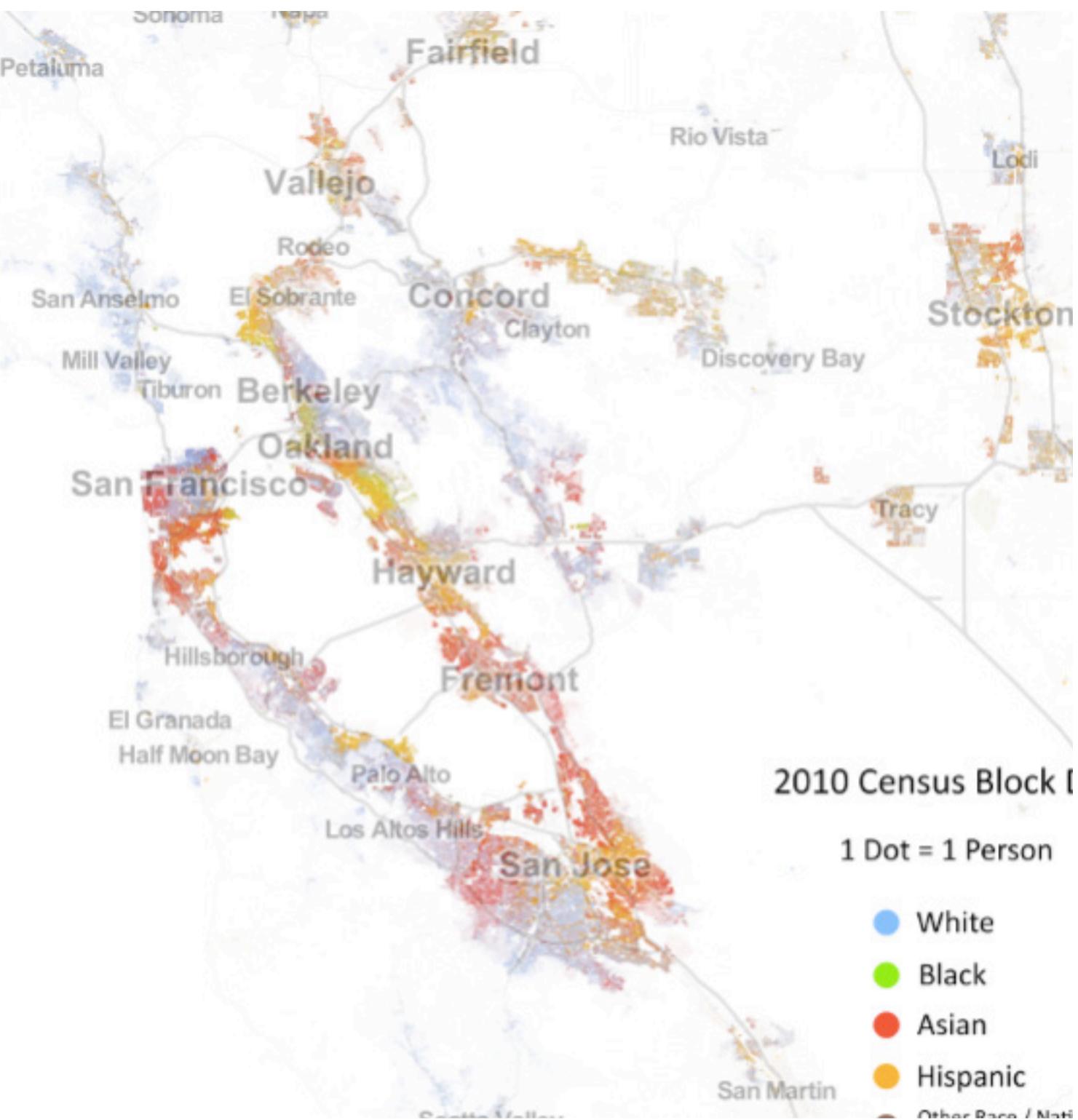
It's this chicken-and-egg logic that's often used to stall projects, instead of pushing for a new regional vision that befits a place housing one of the most ambitious industries in the world.

"There's this model of Palo Alto that people remember, envision and glorify as this sleepy little town where people could quietly raise a family and get around – this bucolic suburban lifestyle from 35 years ago," said Elaine Uang, one of the creators of Palo Alto Forward. "With a huge demand to live and work in Palo Alto over the last 20 years, I'm not sure our city has been like that for awhile."

What happened to East Palo Alto isn't that unique. It happened to black communities across the entire country over the 20th century – New York City, Los Angeles, Detroit, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., Philadelphia.

Instead of grappling with the reality that the Bay Area's mid-20th century infrastructure and single-family home design are no longer adequate for the sheer size of the tech industry today, many of the original Silicon Valley suburbs like Palo Alto, Atherton, Menlo Park and Los Altos seem content to ride record home prices and make other communities in San Francisco and Oakland bear the cost of their now anachronistic land-use choices.

You have to ask what the end game is here – when 25 percent of Palo Alto homes are sold to overseas buyers as investments while the mainland Chinese property market tanks, when Palo Alto schools are known for their suicide rates as much as their academics, when the city that gave birth to the technology industry now can't even house startups because of its sky-high commercial rents, when Latino and black communities are being wiped from the Western side of the San Francisco Bay Area and Oakland out into the exurbs of the East only to be called back by smartphone to deliver laundry or drive people around.



The San Francisco Bay Area remains residentially segregated with a primarily white and Asian western half of the Bay, while Latino and black communities live in the south and the East.

Kimberley Johnson, an urban studies professor at Barnard-Columbia who is writing a book comparing black communities in Oakland and Newark, N.J., wonders if the most economically successful American cities are belatedly reverting to the European banlieue model, with an urban core of wealth surrounded by a broad ring of poverty.

"As these populations are dispersed to the outer Bay Area, they are becoming fragmented and the political voice that used to occur is no longer there," she said.

"Lower-income communities are being displaced to Antioch and Pittsburg on the metropolitan fringe where there is a lack of public services like hospitals. These are privatized suburban spaces that weren't designed to cater to the needs of lower-income populations."

In urban governments, we sit around one table – the poor, the rich, the black, white, Latino and Asian. While you can't romanticize the conditions of the inner cities 20 years ago, the larger political body of an urban government gives minorities the power to operate as a bloc and wrest resources or capital from a larger pool. The conversations San Francisco and Oakland have had over the last year have been hard, awkward and definitely far from perfect. But the point is that we have them.

Suburbs, in contrast, draw lines as they see fit and operate oblivious to the impacts they have on surrounding communities, which are often segmented by race and class. They can get cut out the way that East Palo Alto got cut out of Silicon Valley more than 50 years ago and left on the other side of the highway.

What happened to East Palo Alto isn't that unique. It happened to black communities across the entire country. Residential segregation has been deeply corrosive to American society; it is the font from which economic and educational disparities and misguided criminal justice policies have arisen. To repeat it in the opposite direction with low-income communities surrounding an inner urban core of privilege would be a mistake.

It's also a huge reason contributing to why there are so few minorities in the tech industry.

Silicon Valley loves to celebrate exceptional black and Latino entrepreneurs like Walker & Company Brands' Tristan Walker – as it should. But it fails to see the structural problems that make these people the exceptions. Even when it happens right on our doorstep.

You can't point at people and call that progress. African-Americans have been part of the technology industry for decades. There were two black members of the Homebrew Computer Club, which led Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak to creating Apple. One of them, Gerald A. Lawson, created home video game consoles with interchangeable cartridges and even declined to hire Wozniak for a job at Fairchild Semiconductor. If Silicon Valley had started from a residentially integrated place, there probably would have been many more people like him.

Since the dot-com boom, it's not clear if the industry has improved. In fact, it might even be getting worse. A San Francisco Chronicle investigative story into the make-up of 33 Silicon Valley tech companies from 1998 showed that they were 4 percent black and 7 percent Latino. Last year, Google's workforce was 2 percent black and 3 percent Latino while Facebook was 2 percent black and 4 percent Latino.

"We don't have a pipeline problem. We have an investment problem. If we had everything they had over there – computers, iPads...." Starnes said, pointing in the

direction of the freeway.

Three miles away, Palo Alto High School recently unveiled a 23,000-square-foot, two-story Media Arts Center in a grand opening ceremony that featured Arianna Huffington and actor and alum James Franco. The building is the product of a \$378 million Strong Schools Bond that Palo Alto voters passed in 2008.

And so what started as the dividing line of Highway 101 became this absurd socio-economic chasm.

If you visit Gertrude Wilks today, a banner for the non-profit she founded 50 years ago, Mothers for Equal Education, still hangs above her garage door.

A black man is president, but Wilks, who had a hand in making affirmative action happen at Stanford, has buried three of her children. One went to prison at 22, and then emerged at 27, walking with a cane and with glaucoma in his eyes. No lawyer would take his case. One went to Harvard for graduate school, and then died of cancer. Then the third died of cancer too.

Meanwhile, after six decades, Hoover never gave up on his community. His center has been taking in about 150 former prisoners a year. He says counseling them back into the workforce is like his work mentoring teenagers from years ago. Being in prison has taken away their agency. They are told when to eat and when to sleep. They have to re-learn how to make decisions for themselves, how to manage their finances and how to manage their emotions.

He often remembers something Stokely Carmichael told him decades ago:

“If you’re going to do this work, you have to realize that most of the stuff we’re working for is not going to happen in our lifetime.... For someone like me who has been doing this for more than 50 years, it’s frustrating. Sometimes you think, racism is always going to be here. It’s so deeply ingrained in American psyche and culture. I don’t know if we’re going to overcome it. I guess for me – I do whatever I can to build this community. But in the end, most people like myself who have done this work for a long time have ended up helping a lot of individuals – young people – who through our nurturing, through our teaching and mentoring, have learned how to be successful in society. They’ve gone out in society and their lives are pretty good. But you can’t create a large enough number of those people and have them all come back to this community.”

*\*Historical census data didn't count the Latino population in 1960. By 1970, 12.1 percent of Santa Clara County's population were "persons of Spanish origin or descent," so there was probably some percentage of the population that was Latino at that time.*

*The featured photo at the top is an aerial of East Palo Alto and the Dumbarton Bridge from Doc Searls.*

*Thanks to documentarian Michael Levin of Rebooting History, The Spatial History Project at Stanford University, for help with this piece.*

# Treating Millions for HIV - The Adherence Clubs of Khayelitsha

E.W. Capion M.D., The New England Journal of Medicine Vol 372 No 4

Twenty miles from the gleaming, modern buildings of Cape Town, South Africa, is the township of Khayelitsha, which was created 30 years ago under the apartheid policy of racial separation.

This immense, sprawling, crime- ridden “shacktown,” the country’s largest after Soweto, remains home to more than 400,000 black South Africans, many of whom work in Cape Town or its comfortable suburbs. On a sunny October morning, 15 locals, each carrying a small, green medication booklet, gather in the home of a woman who’s hosting a meeting of an adherence club for HIV-positive people. Concrete houses are being built in parts of Khayelitsha, but this small, oneroom home is similar to countless others jammed together along winding, dirt-path alleys: roof and walls made of corrugated steel, a dirt floor covered by linoleum and throw rugs, furnished with two beds and several simple chairs. There is a tiny refrigerator, an electric hot plate, and a small flat-screen TV, all connected to extension cords dangling from the low ceiling. The attendees chat quietly with each other in isiXhosa and then crowd in and sit down for a meeting that focuses on staying on the antiviral medications that control their HIV.

The nurse from the nearby HIV clinic weighs each patient, checks the health records, and helps to answer their questions about side effects and how to get enough medication for long holiday trips to another province. Packages from a central pharmacy are passed out, and the attendees open the big plastic bags to check that they have a full 2-month supply of the correct antivirals. The hostess, who works as a personal health care aide, is wearing a purple “I’m HIV+” T-shirt. Sitting in front of the group, she quietly urges them to keep taking their medications every day to keep the virus suppressed. She has been on treatment for years and seems to get respect from this group, which is nearly all women. And they all know that her only son was murdered in the gang violence in Khayelitsha.



*An ART Adherence Club Meeting in a Club Member's Home.*

The adherence-club meeting that I attended is one component of a strategy being pursued in South Africa to improve long-term compliance with antiviral treatment at lower cost than clinic visits and with less inconvenience to patients. There has been progress over the past decade in HIV treatment especially in the treatment of pregnant women. The clinic team says with pride that they no longer see heart-wrenching cases of children with AIDS. But the huge, silent epidemic goes on and on.

With 6.2 million infected, South Africa has more people with HIV than any other country. About 18% of all adults in South Africa are HIV-positive, with the highest rates found among young sexually active women. The rate among blacks is about 44 times that among the 10% of South Africans who are white. Although more than 2.4 million HIV-infected South African adults and 156,000 children are now in treatment, the epidemic continues to grow. The population of South Africa is about 20% the size of the U.S. population, but it has seven times as many new cases of HIV per year. The hope is to bend the curve downward, but that has not yet happened.

HIV-screening programs are moving to small, after-hours centers, partly in an effort to reach more men. And treatment is being initiated earlier in the course of infection. Originally, patients began receiving antiretrovirals when their CD4 T-cell count fell to 200 per cubic milliliter; now they begin at 350 per cubic milliliter, and the threshold is being moved to 500. For people receiving treatment, annual exams include measurement of the viral load — the goal being suppression to an undetectable level. Prevention initiatives stress the use of condoms as well as attaining effective antiviral suppression to prevent transmission.



*Distribution of Prepacked ART by Club Facilitator Fanelwa Gwashu.*

Success against HIV requires affordable strategies that can achieve and maintain viral suppression, year in and year out, in millions of patients. Adherence clubs were first developed as demonstration programs by Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) as a way to reduce clinic congestion, simplify logistics, and help with motivation (see Perspective article by Ellman, pages 303–305). The clubs encourage acceptance and openness about HIV in the community, which helps with both screening and treatment. Patients appreciate this community-based approach because it means less need for transport and no more long waits in a clinic for medication refills. The providers in HIV clinics can focus on patients with medical complications, failing regimens, or co-infection with tuberculosis. Some adherence clubs have been developed specifically for young people or for men only, since those groups are the most challenging to engage and retain in treatment programs. Improved medication adherence leads to less drug resistance and longer duration of efficacy of the initial regimen, which now usually consists of tenofovir, emtricitabine, and efavirenz provided as a single-pill generic at a cost of about \$8 per month.

Lynne Wilkinson, the MSF field coordinator in Khayelitsha, explains that the previously MSF-provided HIV services at 11 clinics have all been handed over to the local government health departments, along with the responsibility for ongoing funding. The support for HIV-treatment programs from the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is being phased out for South Africa because it is seen as a middle-income country,<sup>3</sup> though it has immense internal disparities in income and a huge economically disadvantaged population. Khayelitsha became the site of the

first wide-spread, effective treatment of HIV in Africa at a time when the South African leadership refused to recognize the need for antiretroviral therapy and encouraged sick South Africans to treat AIDS with garlic, lemon, and beetroot. This year in the Western Cape province, 27,800 patients are receiving their HIV treatment through adherence clubs, and the approach is being adopted in other parts of South Africa. The program offers a model for treatment in countries with far fewer resources. Similar community models of care have been adopted in Mozambique and are being piloted by MSF in Malawi and Zimbabwe, countries with even broader treatment coverage for their HIV-infected populations but with similar challenges when it comes to maintaining patients in treatment for a lifetime.

Effective, widespread treatment of HIV in Africa was once thought to be logistically and economically impossible. Programs in multiple countries are showing that it can be done. But the problems involve attitudes as well as economics and logistics. After the adherence-club meeting in the small home in Khayelitsha, we gather outside. Someone asks our gracious host if she can take her picture for an article in a local magazine. She pauses, and for the first time she seems uncomfortable. Then she says yes to a picture but asks that her name not be used. She has worries about her employment outside Khayelitsha. "These things can get around. You cannot trust what some people out there might do."

# Michael Haneke, The Art of Screenwriting No.5

Luisa Zielinski, The Paris Review 211

Michael Haneke was born in 1942 to an Austrian mother and a German father. He spent his adolescence in Wiener Neustadt in the care of his aunt and grand-mother before leaving for Vienna to study psychology, philosophy, and drama. It would be some years before he made his first feature film. *Der siebente Kontinent* (The Seventh Continent) (1989) tells the story of a young, well-to-do family and their dreams of immigrating to Australia. Predictably—in retrospect, for viewers familiar with Haneke's work—that never happens. They flush their money down the toilet. They kill the goldfish and, next, themselves.

Since then, Haneke has maintained impressive consistency both in his choice of topics and in the stark, unflinching visual language of his films. This has earned him critics and admirers of equal ferocity. He is, depending on whom you ask, the minister of fear, a master of horrors, Europe's greatest auteur, or simply a sadist. Although his films are considered violent, nearly all the physical violence occurs offscreen. His camera omits the brains-on-the-windshield clichés and torture porn of Hollywood. It lights, instead, on the everyday cruelties to which audiences are not yet numb: the petty acts of bullying, the failure to listen, the delusions of class and privilege.

Haneke's early films, such as *Benny's Video* (1992) and *71 Fragments of a Chronology of Chance* (1994), largely escaped the attention of international audiences. Then, in 2001, *La Pianiste*, his adaptation of Elfriede Jelinek's *7716 Piano Teacher*, was awarded the Grand Prix at Cannes, affording Haneke worldwide exposure. The next years saw the release of *Cache* (2005) and the American remake of *Funny Games* (2007), Haneke's most severely cynical work, whose Austrian precursor had been released in 1997. For both *7726 White Ribbon* (2009) and *Amour* (2012), he received the Palme d'Or at Cannes; the latter also won him the Academy Award for Best Foreign Language Film. In addition to his work in cinema, Haneke occasionally directs opera and teaches at the Filmakademie Wien.

Most of this interview was conducted in Haneke's vast study in the Vienna apartment he shares with his wife, Susi, an antiques dealer. Over the next ten months, he patiently fielded my follow-up questions: curtly via e-mail, exuberantly on the phone. In person, Haneke was an impeccable—if occasionally strict—host. He floated vague promises of wine on the first night, only to deny me a glass: “We must work, Frau Zielinski!” On the second night, however, I arrived to a bottle of Mayer am Pfarrplatz Wiener Gemischter Satz. We finished it.

Wine or no, Haneke is a spirited conversationalist who carefully weighs his bons mots and can send himself into fits of giggles. He speaks in the drawl of the Viennese haute bourgeoisie, which to Prussian ears sounds opulent and somewhat impenetrable—necessitating, as Haneke quipped, a double translation of this interview, from Austrian into German into English.

INTERVIEWER

When you were young—say, a teenager—did you ever imagine that you would become a filmmaker, or was your focus on other arts?

HANEKE

Like everyone in the throes of puberty, I started writing poems. But originally, I wanted to drop out of school to train as an actor. I'm from a family of actors—my mother was an actress and my father was an actor and director. One day I even decided to skip school and flee Wiener Neustadt for Vienna to audition at the Max Reinhardt Seminar. Everybody there knew my mother, and I considered myself amazingly gifted—it never occurred to me that they wouldn't take me. But that's what happened. I was livid. In the end, I did have to get my high school diploma. Then, as a student, I became more serious about writing. I also worked for radio and various magazines as a critic—I ended up reviewing literature and films although I didn't actually know all that much.

Around the same time, I started writing short stories. When my son was born, my parents decided to cut me off and I was forced to earn money. I tried to look for a job in publishing and ended up sending off some of my stories to a well-known publishing house. They immediately asked me to submit more. But what I really wanted was a job as an editor! Well, there wasn't one available. At the time I was upset, but I simply kept on writing.

INTERVIEWER

Who were your literary heroes?

HANEKE

My son's name is David. Why? Because my literary god in those days—and this is highly unusual in German-speaking countries—was a writer named David Herbert Lawrence. I thought he was a real genius and I devoured everything he wrote. Just around the time my son was born, I started working on a novel. I recently stumbled upon the manuscript in an old suitcase in the attic of my country house. Until I read it again a few weeks ago, I wasn't able to remember what the novel was about. Of

course, I remembered having written one, not least because I had the opportunity to read from it at a small theater in Vienna. That event was of tremendous importance to me—my parents even showed up. In any case, when I read through the manuscript a few weeks ago I was positively surprised. It's actually not all that lousy! It's a novel steeped in the experience of having read Lawrence. It's incredibly sensitive—sensual, even. Reading it today, I almost can't believe that I wrote it.

## INTERVIEWER

Still, it was a while before you made your first feature film, when you were forty-six. How did you go about learning that particular craft?

## HANEKE

When I was young, I would go to the cinema three times a week. I was really quite the moviegoer back then—quite in contrast to today. Everything I know about cinema I learned in those years through careful watching. I often tell my students that they don't know how privileged they are. Today, you can simply buy a DVD and follow a scene shot by shot. When I was young, that wasn't possible. If there was something you didn't get or one particular cutting sequence wasn't quite clear, you had to go back to the cinema ten times. Nowadays, you can analyze everything in the comfort of your own home. In any case, I was a real cinema addict when I was young.

I also interned with a TV station in Baden—Baden after the publishing house rejected me. They had been looking for a new dramaturge for years and ended up hiring me, since apparently only imbeciles had wound up there before me. I went on to become Germany's youngest TV dramaturge and began to cultivate a more professional interest in film, too. Over the course of those three years, I learned everything I needed to know about scriptwriting. And what taught me, above anything, was reading awful scripts. For two of those three years, piles of these rather appropriately named “unsolicited manuscripts” would await me each day. The bad ones were the most instructive. First, you notice that something isn't quite working, so you ask yourself

why it's not working. Reading terrible scripts teaches you all the great tricks. The good ones leave you in awe—you're so impressed that you forget to figure out just why they're good. If I am told today that my scripts are very professional, then that is mainly due to my work in those years. It helped me a lot, even though it gave me no pleasure at all. It is actually quite exhausting having to plough through shit all day long.

Directing was another thing I learned during my time in Baden—Baden. My first forays happened at the local theater—I was involved with an actress who worked there. You have to keep in mind that Baden—Baden is a true backwater. The actors

were mediocre at best, and it took a long time for me to figure out how to get them to strike the right tone. Directing and dealing with people is a matter of experience, and I learned it the hard way in that backwater town. I believe there are even schools in America where they teach writing and directing. And there are virtually thousands of books on the subject, too. But that just doesn't cut it. You learn writing by writing and directing by directing. Clever books don't teach you how to write or direct.

Don't get me wrong—clever books are great, but all art takes practice.

INTERVIEWER

You've talked a lot about writing. It seems to me that even today, as a filmmaker, you're still quite attached to the written word.

HANEKE

Yes, I generally think of myself as an author. The French have this beautiful word, *auteur*, to refer to filmmakers who are responsible for the content of their own films. I've never been interested in directing other people's works.

INTERVIEWER

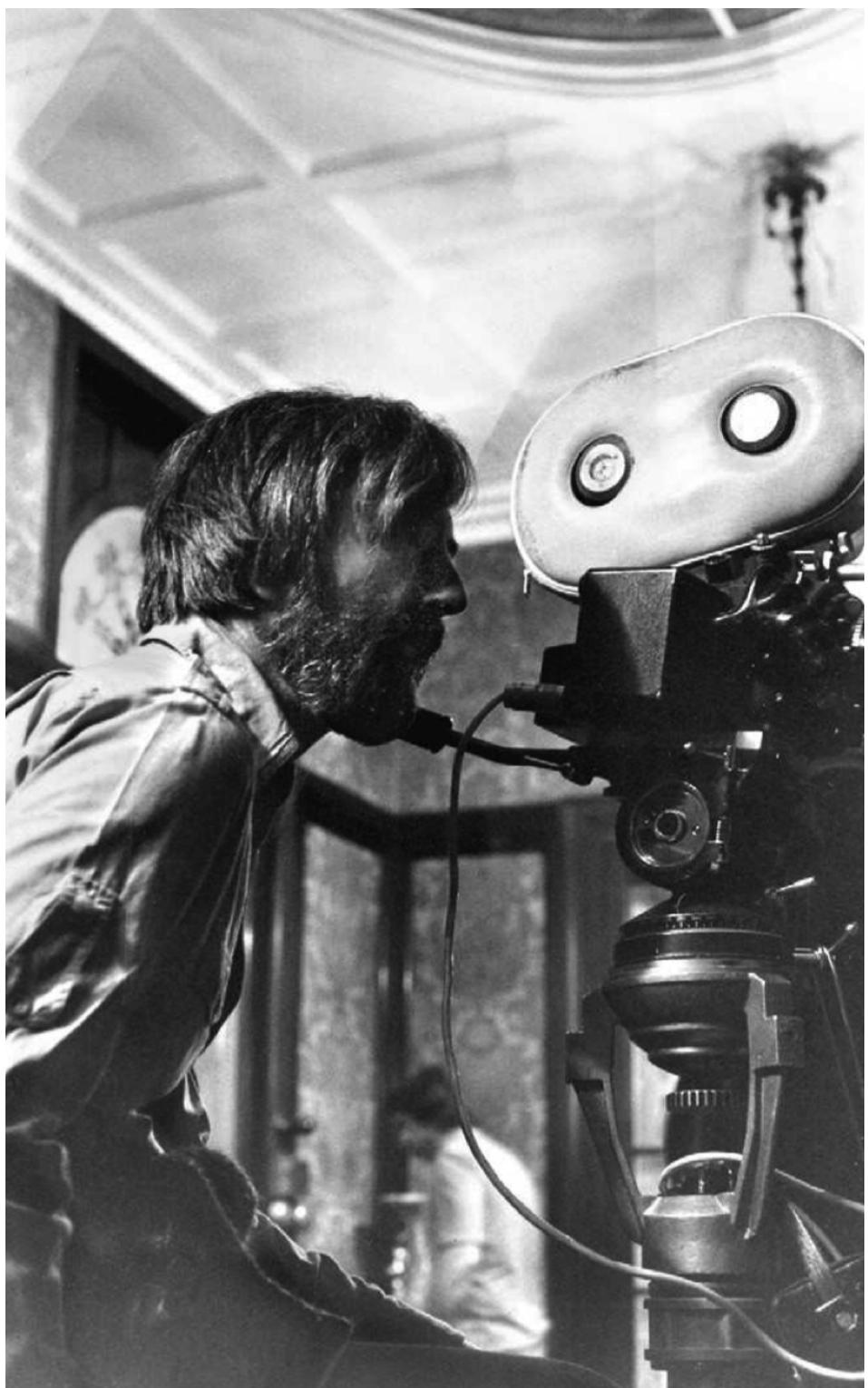
What about Jelinek's novel *The Piano Teacher*, which you adapted for cinema in 2001?

HANEKE

I still wrote the script myself. For me it's a matter of principle that I have never directed other people's scripts, not even while I was working in TV. There were a few cases where scriptwriters would provide me with material, but I would always turn that into something else entirely. Those writers weren't very happy, unsurprisingly, but as director I had the upper hand. That's also when I noticed that I'm not made for collaboration. There are people who can work together on a script—the Coen brothers, for example. To me that's a complete mystery.

INTERVIEWER

Still, tell me a little more about the process of adapting literary works for the screen. *7700 Piano Teacher* isn't the only example in your oeuvre. There's also your made-for-TV adaptation of Kafka's *Castle*. What struck me about the latter is that it's almost aberrantly faithful to the novel.



*Directing Lemminge, Teil 1 Arkadien (Lemmings: Part 1, Arcadia), 1979.*

## HANEKE

The Piano Teacher was the only time I adapted a novel for the cinema, and that in itself was something of a coincidence. I didn't write the script for myself, but for a friend who had acquired the rights. My friend tried for ten years to secure a budget for the film, but it didn't work out. In the end, I was persuaded to direct the film myself, even though that hadn't been my original intention at all. I agreed to do it on the condition that Isabelle Huppert play the lead role. And she did.

In any case, there are considerable differences in adapting literature for TV and cinema. At the outset the process is quite similar—you will need to read and analyze the book and understand the individual plot lines in order to rearrange them later according to your cinematographic vision. My adaptation of The Piano Teacher departs considerably from the novel in terms of structure, and that is due to the fact that it is an adaptation I conceived for cinema. But whenever I adapted literary

works for TV, I adhered painstakingly to the original. There is hardly a line in *7793* Carla that isn't quoted verbatim from the novel. This is in large part thanks to the "educational mandate" of state-funded TV in Germany. The work of a TV director consists in making the viewer want to read the novel. It's different with a cinematic work. In that case, the book becomes the filmmakers intellectual playground while the novel and its author recede into the background.

INTERVIEWER

When you sit down to write a new script and jot down the first scene, do you already know what the last scene is going to be?

HANEKE

I know much, much more than that! I only sit down to write when I've laid out the entire film. Before that, I work according to the classic method. I spend time collecting all my ideas, and once I feel that I have enough, I start dividing up all these individual thoughts on small Post-it notes, assigning a specific color to each character. Then I start arranging those notes on a large board in order to figure out the arc of the story. I end up scrapping roughly three-quarters of my notes. But it's only natural that you throw out even good ideas—there is simply no way you can put everything into a story. Only when my story is complete, in the sense that I know all the major plot lines regarding the major characters, do I sit down to write. And that's just so much fun! It's really a pleasant process. Once you're on the right track, you can indulge yourself. Before that, you can't see the forest for the trees. When I have a thousand options, I actually have none at all. Film requires you to plan each detail meticulously, and this is exactly why it's so different from writing a novel.

INTERVIEWER

Can you say more about that difference, between making films and writing novels?

HANEKE

With film, you have to get the timing exactly right, because timing is everything. It's different with literature. One of my favorite books, Musil's *The Man without Qualities*, doesn't have much going for it in the way of timing. Unless you're interested in its smallest details and digressions, there's no point in reading the novel. A film, on the other hand, lasts for one and a half to two hours, and you have to be able to tell your story within that framework. Every single minute has to work. And that's precisely the art of filmmaking—having the eye to tell whether something works or not. It is true for authors of any sort that, on the one hand, you're incredibly skeptical toward your creative output, while on the other hand, you get drunk on every single one of your ideas. "Kill your darlings" is one of my favorite sayings, and it's

what I always try to teach my students—don't take every single fart you rip so damn seriously. Think about how you'd react if you had to watch it.

If you make realist films—as I do—your task is to render your story into something that is credible and plausible. It starts with the plot—whether your story is believable or not. Then there are the actors—do they manage to convey the story to you in a way that seems realistic? If they don't, the viewer is never going to buy the scene, no matter how well you wrote it. That's the hard thing about my job—you end up competing with reality on so many levels. You're always up against your viewer's personal experience. Every viewer knows what somebody looks like when they're taking a bath or walking out the door. Their own experience enables them to recognize whether a scene works. In turn, they won't believe your story if you didn't pull it off. You have to exercise great care—not just with the script, but in every small detail.

INTERVIEWER

If writing is the end of the process for you, what is the beginning? Where do your ideas come from?

HANEKE

That's hard to say. The inspiration for each of my films was very different—there is no common denominator in the genesis of my ideas. *The White Ribbon*, for example, germinated out of an idea that I had more than twenty-five years ago. I wanted to make a film about blond children in the North German flatlands. That was all. I just had a fantastic image.

INTERVIEWER

And you just kept that in the back of your mind? How did you nurture that idea over the course of twenty-five years?

HANEKE

I continuously noticed and thought of things that I wrote down somewhere. But at the beginning, there was simply the image. I only specified the place and its political relevance much later, because originally I hadn't even thought of those aspects. I started reading countless books about life in nineteenth-century Germany. An incredible number of ideas in that film come from those nonfiction books describing life in the village and contemporary parenting techniques. The idea of making children wear a white ribbon, for example, wasn't mine at all. I lifted that straight out of a parenting manual from the eighteenth century showing parents how to raise their children in the spirit of purity. I thought

the idea was ingenious and I just had to use it! So I continued to collect notes in this manner until I felt I had enough material. And as with my other films, at that point I sat down and began arranging my ideas in a strict chronology. It is quite banal, but I always say that you have to know the story you want to tell and how you will make it work within the timing of your film. That's the only way you can make a film that is captivating throughout.

INTERVIEWER

What about *Cache*? Like *The White Ribbon* it's a film that—correctly or not—is often read politically. Were you inspired by the history of the French-Algerian conflict, or did the inspiration come from elsewhere?

HANEKE

It's hard to say what exactly inspired me. What is true, however, is that most of my films tackle the theme of guilt and how people deal with it. I wanted to make a film about a man confronted with a guilt he carries from his childhood. In the film, the main character betrays his childhood friend, and that bears terrible consequences for the friend. But that's not even the crux of the story. That's just what kids are like—selfish, with no view to the repercussions of their actions. And there is no problem with that either. It's normal that children are egocentric and happily throw someone else to the wolves. The interesting question, to me, is how you deal with such guilt when it comes back to haunt you as an adult.

While I was working on the story I happened to see a documentary about the Paris massacre of 1961, and it left a huge impression on me. I calculated that against Daniel Auteuil's age—since I was writing the character for him—and it worked out perfectly. It was a stroke of fortune that the film gained political relevance beyond the individual case of those two men. And yet, it's also true that you can find such blind spots in the history of any culture or country. I was offered the chance to remake the film in America, but I really didn't want to do that. I'm sure I would've found something that would work there. But that's not what I wanted.

INTERVIEWER

Your biggest concern then, if I'm not mistaken, is with your characters' individual psychologies?

HANEKE

Absolutely, and that's really the only thing I know anything about. I would never set out to make a political film. I hope that my films provoke reflection and have an illuminating quality—that, of course, may have a political effect. Still, I despise films

that have a political agenda. Their intent is always to manipulate, to convince the viewer of their respective ideologies. Ideologies, however, are artistically uninteresting. I always say that if something can be reduced to one clear concept, it is artistically dead. If a single concept captures something, then everything has already been resolved—or so it appears, at least. Maybe that's why I find it so hard to write synopses. I just cannot do it. If I were able to summarize a film in three sentences, I wouldn't need to make it. Then I'd be a journalist, I'd get to the heart of the matter in those three sentences, and my readers would know what it's all about, and that would be that. But that is not what I find interesting.

Look, life itself is the object of art. You aim to construct a parallel world in your novel or your play. The truly captivating thing is the story that unfolds between your protagonists. Of course, for somebody with political convictions—and we all have those—there is no way they aren't going to seep into your artwork. Celine, for example, was a right-wing extremist. And that was visible in his work, but he still wasn't completely inept as a writer. There are thousands of examples, from both the left and the right. At the academy, I always lecture on propagandistic films of various origins so as to sensitize my students to their particular way of functioning. In my films, however, politics happen only subcutaneously, and it is never my intention to say, Look, this is what I'm trying to tell you, now swallow it. My objective is ahumanistic one—to enter into a dialogue with my viewers and to make them think. There isn't much more you will be able to achieve in the dramatic arts. And frankly, I don't know what else you should be able to achieve.

## INTERVIEWER

You often portray genteel bourgeois characters, many of whom are artists, musicians, literary critics—people who would claim for themselves a certain sensibility, perhaps even the capacity for reflection you just spoke of. Yet you depict these sensitive intellectuals as blinding themselves to realities they believe they understand. So beyond politics, I wonder whether there is a sociological interest that makes you question the bourgeoisie in particular.

## HANEKE

That is automatically true, as I am a child of the bourgeoisie. I only ever write about things with which I'm intimately acquainted. I would never ever make a film about a dockworker, for example, because I have no insight into his psychology. I cannot make films about topics with which I'm not familiar. My concern is with common human problems such as guilt or recklessness—the stuff of our everyday lives. Of course, I always set out to create a context that sparks added interest. If there is an opportunity to do that, as there was with *Cache* and *The White Ribbon*, then I'm grateful for that. But my first concern is always how people relate to one another. And that is my artistic interest on the whole.

INTERVIEWER

But would you say that drawing from one's own experience and background is always good—or even necessary?

HANEKE

I've never seen good results from people trying to speak about things they don't know firsthand. They will talk about Afghanistan, about children in Africa, but in the end they only know what they've seen on TV or read in the newspaper. And yet they pretend—even to themselves—that they know what they're saying. But that's bullshit. I'm quite convinced that I don't know anything except for what is going on around me, what I can see and perceive every day, and what I have experienced in my life so far. These are the only things I can rely on. Anything else is merely the pretense of knowledge with no depth. Of course, I don't just write about things precisely as they have happened to me—some have and some haven't. But at least I try to invent stories with which I can personally identify.

My students, meanwhile, pitch only the gravest of topics. For them it's always got to be the Holocaust. I usually tell them, Back off. You have no idea what you're talking about. You can only reproduce what you read or heard elsewhere. Others who actually lived through it have said it much better than you ever could. Try to create something that springs organically from your own experience. For only then does it stand the slightest chance of being genuinely interesting. Incidentally, this is also why in our day and age the movies coming out of the developing countries are much more interesting than our own. These films portray an authentic experience, and they do so with real passion, while we, the viewers, only know of these things second—or thirdhand. And yet, we can feel when something is real—as a viewer, you can feel the pleasure or despair of a certain scene. We, in our protected little worlds, are much more numb because we are in luck not to experience danger on a daily basis. But that's precisely why the film industry in the so-called first world is in such a rut. There is just so much recycling. We don't have the capability to represent authentic experiences because there is so little we do experience. At the most basic level, all we're concerned about here are our material possessions and sexual urges. There really isn't much more to our lives.

INTERVIEWER

Wouldn't you say that it can be valuable—and not so easy—to write about your material possessions and sexual urges in a way that brings the world of our experience to life? Maybe that's our challenge, in New York or Vienna or Berlin.

HANEKE

I would agree with that wholeheartedly.

## INTERVIEWER

It seems to me that in the context of your oeuvre, *Amour* marks a slight shift of focus. If previously your films dealt with problems of communication and cruelty, then *Amour* is surprisingly tender in comparison, displaying something that's akin even to genuine understanding and love.



*A still from The White Ribbon. “I despise films that have a political agenda. If something can be reduced to one clear concept, it is artistically dead.”*

## HANEKE

And even so, we've got problems of communication—between father and daughter. But in the married couple I did set out to construct an ideal case. They truly love each other and have respected each other and remained close for over fifty years. That, of course, isn't very common, but I needed that to raise the stakes in the plot. It was important that this be a couple that has you say, Wow, I would love to have that, too. That was simply necessary from a dramaturgic standpoint. Had I set the film in a social context lacking such financial security, it would've been an altogether different film. *Amour*'s protagonists still take part and pleasure in high culture. They are comfortable, they go to concerts with their friends. I wanted this film to speak about the end of life without being a social drama. Because no matter how rich and cultured you are, if you are sick and nearing death, you're not going to be having such an amazing time—that was my point of departure. I wanted to ask, How do

you deal with the suffering of the person you love? That is an unbearable situation.

INTERVIEWER

Would you say that *Amour* is your most personal film?

HANEKE

All my films are personal to some extent, even if that isn't obvious. Again, I am only able to describe what I've experienced for myself. I hold within me both my perpetrators and the victims. But if we are talking about this specific instance, then yes, *Amour* is my most personal film.

My aunt who raised me committed suicide at the age of ninety-three. She had already attempted to kill herself a year earlier. Back then she had even asked me whether I would be willing to hold her hand while she swallowed the tablets. I refused, of course, telling her that it would be illegal for me to do that and that I would go to prison, not least because I was heir to her estate. Admittedly, I was quite relieved to have such a good alibi—I don't think I would have had the strength to be with her in that moment. So when she first attempted suicide, she took tablets, but I found her in time and took her to the hospital. She regained consciousness after two days. I was sitting next to her when she turned to me and said, My God, why would you do this to me?! For her next attempt, she simply waited until I was off to some festival. That time it worked. Of course, that's different in the film. I set out to portray something more complicated—what would I do if the other was no longer able to communicate what she wanted, or didn't want.

INTERVIEWER

The truly moving thing about *Amour*, to me, is that even once the wife's sickness has removed the possibility of verbal communication, there remains a kind of communication that transcends speech. In my reading, the husband continues to act in the spirit of the pact those two had forged. But I realize that's only one option among many.

HANEKE

Of course. But as with all my films, there are various possible readings. Some said he killed her out of compassion. Others thought it was simply too much for him. Life is not simple enough for us to be able to discern one unambiguous motive underlying the old man's decision. Reality is always riddled with complexity and contradiction.

I've seen it many times in my circle of friends—that when someone is caring for a

sick partner, they will just fall apart. Not the one who's sick, but the partner who is taking care of him. If that goes on for months or years even, those people end up hardly recognizable. People who care for a loved one get crushed under an immense burden. But such are the unpleasant sides of life, and there's nothing we can do about that.

INTERVIEWER

And yet you delve into those "unpleasant sides" with great indulgence!

HANEKE

Film is drama, and the essence of drama is conflict. There are two dramatic forms—comedy and tragedy. There is also conflict in comedy, and good comedies can be more hard-hitting than tragedies. I think it is the task of the dramatic arts to reveal the conflicts at the heart of our existence, and that has been true since the ancient Greeks. What that means for one's own oeuvre, however, is a question of mentalities. There's a glass that's half full and one that's half empty. I'm always going to see the one that's half empty. I have an eagle eye for the negative side of things.

INTERVIEWER

In light of the consistency and care with which you seem to choose your topics, I was quite surprised when you said in another interview that story should always be secondary to form. Isn't it always a film of something?

HANEKE

But whether it's a good or a bad film depends entirely on its form. Everything is a story. The Holocaust is as much a story as is the tale of Rumpelstiltskin. Now the real question is, what do you do with it? What will you make of your story and how are you going to tell it? That alone determines how it will be received. A naked woman is a naked woman, but Velazquez's naked woman is different from Picasso's naked woman. The form determines the artwork and distinguishes it from the work of a dilettante. Everybody can draw a naked woman, and that's true across all the arts. The story serves as inspiration, but it is not the decisive factor. You can make a terrible movie about the most meaningful subjects, or you can make a wonderfully devastating film about your grandmother's cafe. There are countless examples—books that seem to deal, on the surface, with the tiniest trivialities and yet bring to life entire worlds. With your choice of topic comes responsibility, and the more sophisticated and profound your topic, the greater our responsibility.

INTERVIEWER

How, then, did you find your form?

HANEKE

It found me! I think that happened through conscious reduction. I've always been most impressed by people who can boil things down and talk with great clarity. The smartest people are able to explain the most complex matters in a way that makes you feel like it is quite simple after all. I've always aspired to that. It's okay if a topic is highly complex, but you have to strive for the greatest clarity in form.

INTERVIEWER

But in your work there is clarity only in the sense of your films' precise organization and visual style. You're almost stubborn in your refusal of narrative closure—there are always countless possible interpretations.

HANEKE

Yes, but only if you tell your story with enough precision will the question of interpretation become a pressing one. To make films that are as open to interpretation as my last few is a hard trick to pull off. It would be much easier providing all the answers. That's the essence of bad mysteries—someone is marked out as the culprit, then the plot twists, and it turns out that it's actually someone else. As a viewer, that leaves you angry, because you feel like you've been lied to. And that is terrible. As a director I'm not allowed to lie. It is my task to render all these various interpretations. I've heard countless theories on my films—all of which do actually work. Of course, that takes some effort, but in the end, that is also the joy of the craft. If everything was geared toward one neat ending, then I wouldn't have to bother making the film. I used to read a lot of Chandler. He's an amazing writer and quite entertaining, but you really don't know what's going on in the last twenty or thirty pages. Consider *The Big Sleep*, which was turned into a movie. When they asked Chandler what happened in the end he responded, I have no idea, either!

INTERVIEWER

I'd bet good money that this would be your answer if someone were to ask the same about your films.

HANEKE

Absolutely. There are always multiple interpretations because I'm trying to make my viewers have to pick an option. That is my attempt to activate the viewer—I present my stories in a relatively open way so as to coerce the viewer to contribute his own

reflections. That, by the way, is also the most respectful behavior toward the viewer. When I'm in the position of reader or viewer, I tend to avoid the books or films that set out to tell me something about the way the world works. That bores me to death. I have always found much greater merit in the books and films that have left me confused and insecure, the books and films that raised questions and encouraged me to think, without prescribing answers. Feeling my brain kick into action is a truly pleasurable thing. And it's what I aspire to in my films.

INTERVIEWER

For you, the attempt to activate the viewer may be a matter of respect, but it still feels like manipulation.

HANEKE

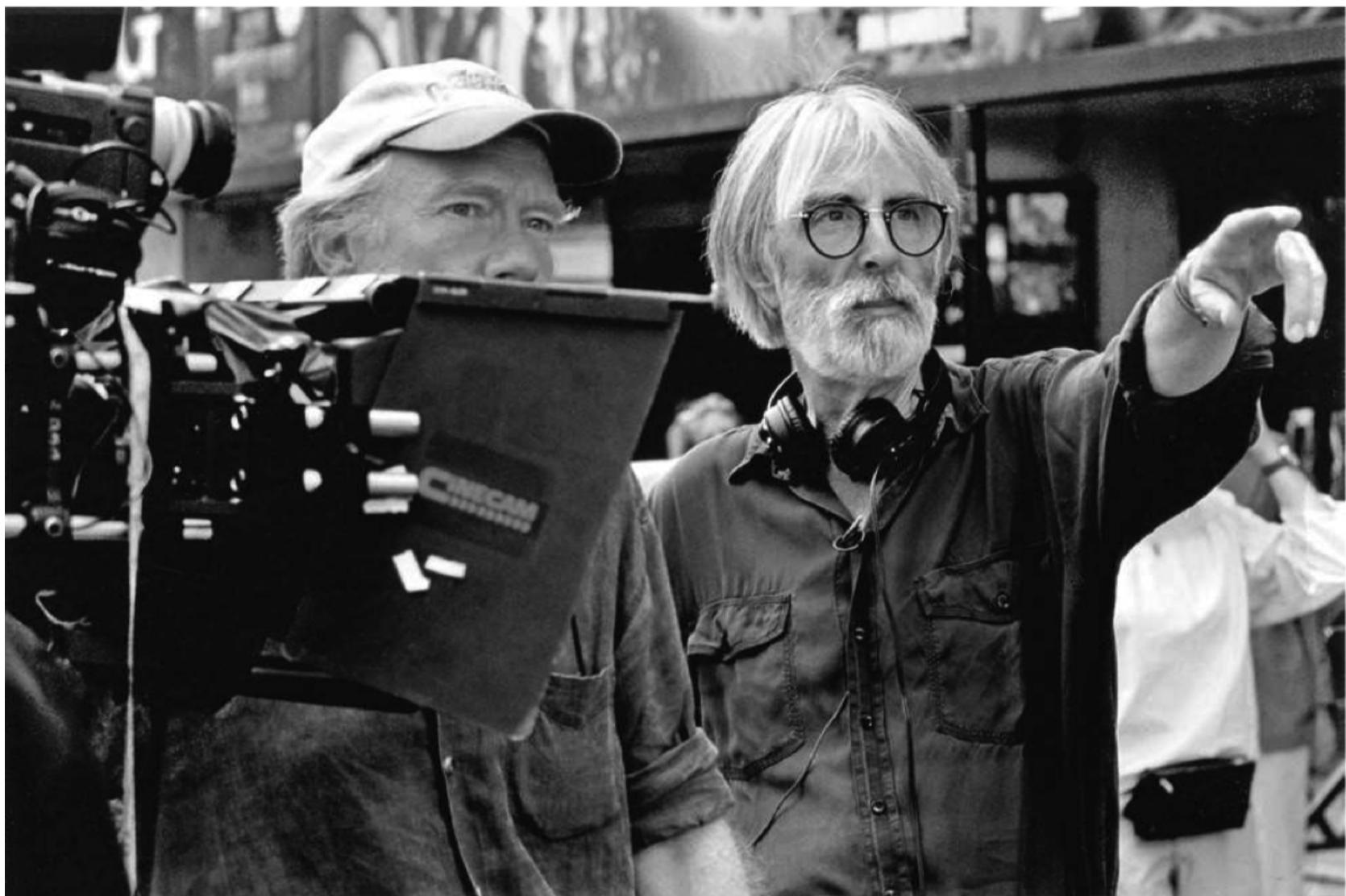
Oh, it's manipulation all right!

INTERVIEWER

You took Godard's famous quotation and changed it around—film means lying twenty-four times a second.

HANEKE

Although no one ever bothers to quote me to the end. Film means lying twenty-four times a second—in the service of truth. Film, of course, is always a lie. It never tells the truth. But film, more so than any other form of art, conveys the impression that we are beholding something real.



*On the set of *Code inconnu: Recit incomplet de divers voyages* (Code Unknown: Incomplete Tales of Several Journeys), 2000.*

INTERVIEWER

That's especially true for a realist approach such as yours.

HANEKE

Yes, exactly. But the reality I convey is a mere artifact. Of course, “reality” is nonexistent anyway, but that is not a matter for us to resolve here. Filmic reality works through illusion, and it is an illusion for which the viewer pays at the ticket booth. It endows him with the opportunity to experience—in the comfort of a cozy chair—all the adventures that he cannot and does not want to experience. And then he is free to leave the cinema at the end. Such is the basic pact between director and viewer, or between viewer and product. For film, in the end, is but a salable product.

We live in an age of media ubiquity and it is good to inspire doubts in the viewer as to our supposed “reality.” That, at least, is what I’ve set out to do. Only bad films provide answers and explanations for everything. Real life is different. Tell me, what do you know about your neighbors? Maybe some insignificant details, but I’m sure you have no idea what they really think. And then you hear about Herr Mayer or Herr Muller, and you’re astounded—He did what? That’s impossible! But why would you be so surprised? You knew nothing about him. We don’t know all that much

about ourselves either. When we talk about the Nazi period in Germany and Austria, people are always so quick to claim, I never would have done that! But you weren't there, and we are capable of anything—each one of us. All it takes is the right situation. And that is the essence of my work—revealing how little we actually know and causing distrust in everything that poses as knowledge and reality in this dictatorship of the media.

INTERVIEWER

Please admit that you're at least a little bit didactic.

HANEKE

No, I'm not didactic. It infuriates me that the world is the way it is and that I'm so powerless. I voice my opinions through my work, but not because I'm trying to convert anybody. I wouldn't know what to convert them to. I have only my own anxieties and annoyances to share. And that's all I can do.

INTERVIEWER

Out of all your films, *Funny Games* stands out as the one that seems to inspire the kind of distrust you just spoke of most explicitly.

HANEKE

It does so most brutally, above all. I don't usually set out to provoke people, but with *Funny Games* I did. The film was the direct result of my rage against viewers who will swallow anything as long as it's marketed well. I wanted to show them just how readily manipulable they are. Make no mistake, though—*Funny Games* is just a small part of my oeuvre, even if it is the most provocative part. I'm not going to pretend that I didn't derive great pleasure from this provocation, but it is not what I'm after in general. In any case, nothing infuriates me more than hypocrisy. There were many people who stayed in the cinema to the end and then complained that it was such a scandal and whatnot. I would say to them, Then why did you stay? Why didn't you leave? No, be honest, you get off on violence, and that's why you stayed. If someone genuinely thought the film was shit and left the cinema, I would shake his hand and say, Congratulations, well done, you are completely right. I would've walked out, too, you know.

Have you seen Pasolini's *Salo*?

INTERVIEWER

No—thank God. *Funny Games* was already well beyond what I can take.

HANEKE

Forty years ago, that was a key moment in my career as a viewer. Now *Salo'* isn't much like *Funny Games* at all. *Funny Games* is unbearable for its relentless cynicism—I don't actually depict much physical violence. But in *Salo'*, there are people tied up naked on dog leashes, they are force-fed bread stuffed with thumbtacks, blood runs from their mouths while their tormentors are boiling up shit in massive pots to be served up, eaten, and of course they all end up puking. It is unbearable, and Pasolini shows everything. After watching that film I was devastated and unresponsive for several days. Yet *Salo'* was how I realized what you can do in cinema—what the true possibilities of the medium are. That, to me, is still the only film that has managed to show violence for what it is. All these “action movies” are merely spectacular. They make violence a consumable good. They may be scary, but they're still a turn-on. *Salo'* won't turn you on at all—it will turn your stomach. *Funny Games* was meant as a counterpart to *Salo'*, except that I tried to treat violence in a different way—in the context of a self-reflexive thriller that doesn't depict physical violence but works through psychological cruelty alone.

INTERVIEWER

When you remade the film ten years later in the United States, why did you opt to copy your original shot by shot?

HANEKE

I remade the film shot by shot because I didn't have anything to add to the Austrian version. That, of course, was difficult for my actors. Also, when I made the original in 1997, I already had the American market in mind—I thought *Funny Games* would work really well in the US. But then that version made it only into art-house cinemas and the big audiences stayed away. I was quite frustrated. Ten years on, however, I was approached by a producer in Cannes who asked me whether I would like to remake the film in the U.S. with American celebrities. And I thought silently to myself, That isn't such a terrible idea! I had this vision of *Funny Games* as a Trojan horse that I would carry to the birthplace of violent cinema. They asked me what I would need so as to agree to a remake and I simply replied, I'd like Naomi Watts. I had seen her in *Mulholland Drive* and thought her perfect for the role. That worked out, but the production phase was still incredibly tough. Plus, English isn't a language in which I can communicate spontaneously and with authority. It was even more difficult not being able to understand what's going on—and I'm a control freak. I always need to know everything. Now I'm in the process of making another film that is partly set in America. I must be a real masochist.

INTERVIEWER

Or a sadist, some would say, but that's on the same continuum. I'd like to hear more about the process of working with actors. Do you allow space for improvisation and debate, or are you the kind of director who sticks rigorously to his own ideas?

HANEKE

I draw up precise storyboards, and they may not be pretty, but they are ninety-five percent the same as the final film. It is entirely possible that I will end up making small changes even when we're shooting, but only if there is no way around it. For example, if I can tell that an actor struggles with one particular sentence I will try to find a way for the actor to say it so that it works. That's preferable to having him say my original sentence badly. But these are exceptions. I am impeccably prepared whenever I turn up on set. I know what I want and how to communicate that.

Again, it's a question of mindset. Some people like to improvise. I personally hate it. My films aren't fit for improvisation anyway. A strict form such as mine cannot be achieved through improvisation. When I devise my storyboards, I think long and hard about the right form for a particular scene. That is why drawing up storyboards after having finalized my choice of actors and locations takes me as long as shooting. There are millions of possibilities—for the camera to be here but not there, and so on. In a way, it's like having to find the solutions before you create the puzzle. And that is the challenge in directing.

INTERVIEWER

There is an anecdote that Juliette Binoche once wanted to find out more about a character and you responded, listen, I only know what's in the script!

HANEKE

And not only did I say that but also that I'm not on good terms with the writer and that I can't just call him up to check. She asked me, for example, what had happened to her character in the past. I replied that I don't know the writer that well and that we've had a terrible falling out. She just smiled and was slightly annoyed.

INTERVIEWER

Do your actors fear you?

HANEKE

I shouldn't think so. If they did, they wouldn't keep coming back to work with me. But what do I know—maybe they're all masochists, too. For me, actors are of singu-

lar importance. The actor is a delicate creature and must be treated as such. Technicians, on the other hand, just need to function. I may be stubborn, but I worship my actors. I've rarely blown up at an actor, whereas I tend to shout at technicians with some frequency. Especially if it's too loud. This is something I learned at the theater, back in Baden-Baden—you need absolute quiet. When you're about to shoot a scene and there are twenty people in the room, you have to make sure that everybody shuts up. If they don't, I'm going to throw a massive tantrum and that usually gets us about thirty minutes of silence. Typically, that happens on the second or third day. The other people on set just have to learn that they count for nothing. Their primary task is to roll out the red carpet for the actors so that they can shine. My actors deliver great performances, but that's partly because they're respected. This does not mean that I'll let them play a character the way they see fit. If an actor isn't able to do something, I will try to find a way. But if he doesn't want to do it, I don't care.

## INTERVIEWER

Another one of the continuities across your oeuvre is in music. Not just the way you use it, but what you use. Schubert, for example, is a regular feature. What's behind that?

## HANEKE

There's nothing behind it. It's just that Schubert and Mozart are my favorite composers. I know and love their music—and the viewers love it, too. That aside, I only use music diegetically. I never use scores, because I make realist films and there is no musical accompaniment to reality, unless, of course, the radio is on. If a film is set within a musician's household, like *Amour*, *The Piano Teacher*, or my next film, then there is ample opportunity to use music. It's also a great delight getting to rummage through my collection when I'm trying to find the right piece. That said, classical music doesn't really lend itself to use in film because it is structured too rigidly. But some of Schubert's short pieces—the Impromptus, for example—are like little dots that you can apply pointillistically, as citations. And that's what I do—I cite. And that may or may not spark associations for my viewers.

For *The Seventh Continent* I was awarded a prize for the best use of music in film. Berg's Violin Concerto plays as the father is selling the car before the family commits suicide together. The little daughter walks across the parking lot, a ship sails by, and from the car's stereo sounds Berg's concerto, whose second movement, in turn, quotes a Bach chorale—"It is enough, O Lord, when it is pleasing to you, then grant me release. May my Jesus come! Now good night, O world." Do you see what I did there? It's wonderful music as it is, but I take great pleasure in creating additional layers of meaning through such seemingly irrelevant details.

I'm always keen to stress that music is the queen of the arts because in music, form and content are identical. Oh, music is a beautiful thing. If I had been given a choice—up there, where they pick your gifts for you—I would have preferred to be a musician. But my talents didn't quite suffice for that.

INTERVIEWER

But how does one know that one's talents are indeed sufficient? Are you ever plagued by doubts about the quality of your work?

HANEKE

It is true—there lies a great danger in not realizing that the quality of your work is diminishing. You're always the last to know. It's a classic comedy trope—everybody knows, except for the cuckolded husband. And it's the same for the people who begin to stagnate at the height of their success. Everyone else is already whispering behind their backs while they are still convinced they're at the top of their game. I, too, wonder, Haneke, is it possible that the others are thinking that you're churning out crap now and that no one dares to tell you? It is hard to judge your own work, no matter who you are. If you are successful, there is the added danger that people might not be honest. My wife, by the way, is absolutely fantastic—she has no respect for me. I can hand her a script and she will tell me straight out that it's boring. And that's invaluable.

One of my favorite actors, Gert Voss, always repeated his own variation on Beckett's famous sentence—fail, fail again, fail better. I think it is astounding and important that a renowned actor should say that. Every artist should have this phrase pinned up above his bed, for it is the reality of our lives. That's hard to accept when you are young, of course. You think you'll have to do everything a hundred percent. What age teaches you is that there is no way you will manage a hundred percent. Anyone who is bright in any way knows himself to be mediocre. But you have to embrace that and recognize that there is no way around it.

When I directed *Don Giovanni*, for example, that was a great success. And yet I knew myself to be so far beneath the quality of Mozart's music. At best, you will fail gracefully. Even so, your failure is a foregone conclusion. Directing Mozart is necessarily a masochistic endeavor, in the same way that Beethoven's late quartets will always leave a performer feeling inadequate vis-a-vis the material. And yet, the demands you place on yourself only increase alongside the quality of your work. That never stops.



*On the set of Cache, 2005. “Only if you tell your story with enough precision will the question of interpretation become a pressing one.”*

#### INTERVIEWER

If the demands on yourself have only increased, then how do you feel about your earlier films? Is there anything you'd like to change or correct?

#### HANEKE

I only watch my early films when I have to—say, at a retrospective or a festival. Other than that, I tend to avoid it. I just don't find it terribly interesting. There probably isn't a director in the world who doesn't focus on his mistakes upon revisiting his older works. You're bound to notice the things that didn't quite pan out. And that's annoying, even if it's really nothing drastic. It's not that I don't like my older films or feel ashamed of them. There are some small things that I feel I didn't pull off or occasions where perhaps I got the timing slightly wrong. But then again, these tend to be things that I've noticed before. That's normal, I suppose—it's the same for musicians who will always keep an ear out for their mistakes. A singer who listens to himself will always suffer. He will never sound the way he would like to sound.

#### INTERVIEWER

So if the only option is to fail gracefully, how much longer do you intend to do that? Are you thinking of retiring?

## HANEKE

I have no intention of quitting. I wouldn't know what to do with my life! No one who is in any way serious about this job thinks about retirement—unless of course he has to. Fundamentally, there are two things in my life—my partner and my work. Of course, my wife and the women before her would have said I care for my work first and only then for my partner. However, it is true that everything else is only of peripheral interest to me. It just feels right—there is no other way. The system in which I've set up my life allows me to do my work. And that is all that matters.