

AEMP Handbook by The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP)

Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

WHO WE ARE

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) is a data visualization, data analysis, and oral history collective documenting the dispossession and resistance of San Francisco Bay Area residents facing gentrifying landscapes. Utilizing digital cartography and narrative platforms, the project provides an online geographic interface which the public can navigate through visual and audio forms, learning more about the Bay Area's ecosystem of displacement.

Beginning in 2011, the Bay Area began experiencing a dramatic increase in Eviction eviction rates, rental prices, and outward migration coinciding with the birth of the Tech Boom 2.0. Neighborhoods have become more expensive and longtime residents are being pushed out for real estate speculators to profit off of new wealth. This project studies the displacement of people but also of complex social worlds as certain spaces become desirable to such entanglements. Maintaining antiracist and feminist analyses, as well as decolonial methodology, the project creates tools and disseminates data that contributes to collective resistance and movement building.

Anti-Eviction Mapping Project
San Francisco, USA

The AEMP emerged as a data visualization and map-making project in 2013 to study relations between speculation, new technology corporations, property flipping, racial profiling, and luxury development. But the more that we produced maps, the more we became concerned with the dangers of reducing complex social and political worlds to simple dots—such data can never fully describe the personal and neighborhood displacements through gentrification.

We thus began an oral history project, collecting numerous stories from those evicted by networks of shell companies, to those who have experienced increased racial profiling, to those who have fought their evictions through direct action and won.

All of our maps and narratives exist on our website, <http://www.antievictionmap.com>, which is also the most complete archive of our work, both digital and analog. In addition to regularly hosting our own events, the project has also been featured in local galleries, panels, and workshops. Please connect with us online via our website or social media to stay updated or get involved.

A TIMELINE OF THE PROJECT

See Fig. 16.1

THE WORK WE DO

The AEMP is a fluid collective, re-imagined and injected with fresh inspiration as it welcomes a diverse array of activists, organizers, artists, and researchers into its fold. As such, the AEMP is as much a platform for regional activists to collaborate and learn from each other, as it is a content-generating research effort. Although project membership is fluid, its core mission and critical voice remain constant.

The AEMP organization is horizontally structured, and decisions are made by consensus. Therefore, the AEMP's oeuvre reflects both its fluid membership and horizontal organization. Each member adds their own skills, energy, and perspective to build on the project's work, often contributing in entirely new ways.

From a foundation of data visualization and mapping, the AEMP has gone on to launch an oral history project, publish its own zine, and paint a mural in the San Francisco Mission District's Clarion Alley. Although the collective began by mapping San Francisco data, it is now working



Fig. 16.1 Visual history of the AEMP

across the region, partnering with groups from Oakland to Santa Cruz. Project members also regularly host panels, design exhibitions of the project’s work, and participate in/organize direct actions .

The project makes all of its work publicly accessible and available online through its website, restricting none of its various maps, reports, or oral histories behind a paywall. As many of the project's maps are interactive, the best way to engage the project's map-making work is through its digital interface.

The open-access nature of the AEMP is in-line with the project's vision of being both an educational, awareness-raising resource, and an advocacy-oriented counternarrative of the displacing forces currently operating in the San Francisco Bay Area.

The pages that follow highlight some of the AEMP's past work. They serve as both a primer on what the project has accomplished thus far, and inspiration for what is to come.

RADICAL MAPPING IN ACTION: OUR PLEDGE MAP

Our Pledge Map, <http://www.antievictionmappingproject.net/pledge/>, provides a tool to prospective tenants to determine if a San Francisco housing unit has had a no-fault eviction history in the past. Based on SF rent control data that we analyzed, triangulated with the SF Planning Department, and then researched for speculative links and trends, this map offers prospective tenants and even buyers an option to boycott speculators (Fig. 16.2).

As we came to find out, the word "boycott" is derived from nineteenth-century Ireland, from when a group of tenants enacted a rent-strike against British land agent and slumlord in the colony. We invoke its history, calling for a boycott of real estate speculators displacing San Francisco tenants. This map is an excellent example of what the AEMP does: interactive, educational, and mobilizing. As we have recently acquired eviction data for Alameda County, we hope to create a similar tool for folks across the Bay.

ART FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: OUR CLARION ALLEY MURAL

Artists with the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project have teamed up with the Clarion Alley Mural Project to paint a 20-foot mural in Clarion Alley at Valencia Street. The mural depicts a rendering of the online map of no-fault evictions since 1997 and highlights the portraits of eight San Franciscans fighting their evictions. Viewers can call a phone number, 415-319-6865, to hear stories of the people whose portraits are depicted on the mural.

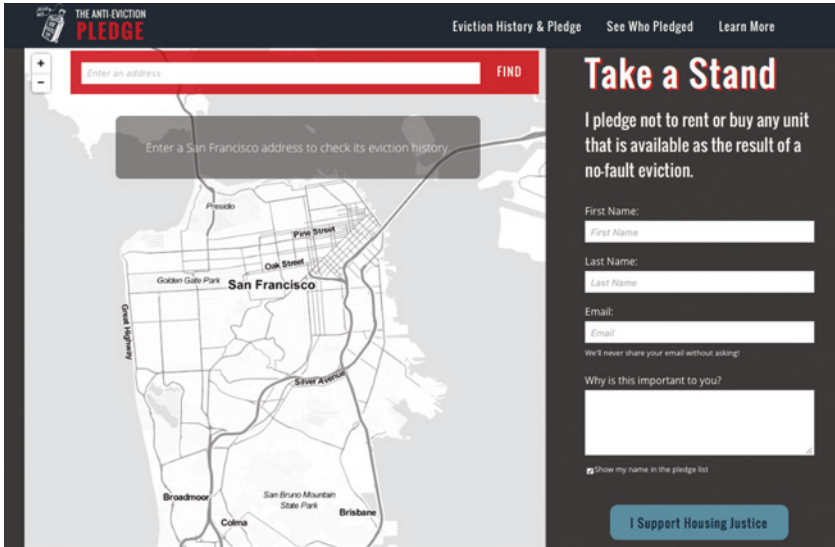


Fig. 16.2 Online Pledge Map

The mural includes a portrait of Alex Nieto, killed by SFPD in 2014 on Bernal Hill, to make the connection between gentrification and the criminalization of people of color. The left panel of the mural, facing Valencia Street, “welcomes” visitors to the alley with a remixed design of a poster developed by the SF Print Collective and pasted around the Mission in the 1990s in response to the Dot Com Boom (Fig. 16.3).

ORAL HISTORY MAP: NARRATIVES OF DISPLACEMENT AND RESISTANCE

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project’s “Narratives of Displacement: Oral History Project” aims to document the recent changes in San Francisco by foregrounding the stories of people who have been, or who were being, displaced. By collecting oral histories, the project creates a living archive of people and places, documenting deep and detailed neighborhood and personal histories. In doing so, the project creates a counter-narrative to more dominant archives that elide detail and attention to legacy, culture, and loss in the city. By combining oral history and map



Fig. 16.3 Narratives of Displacement Mural

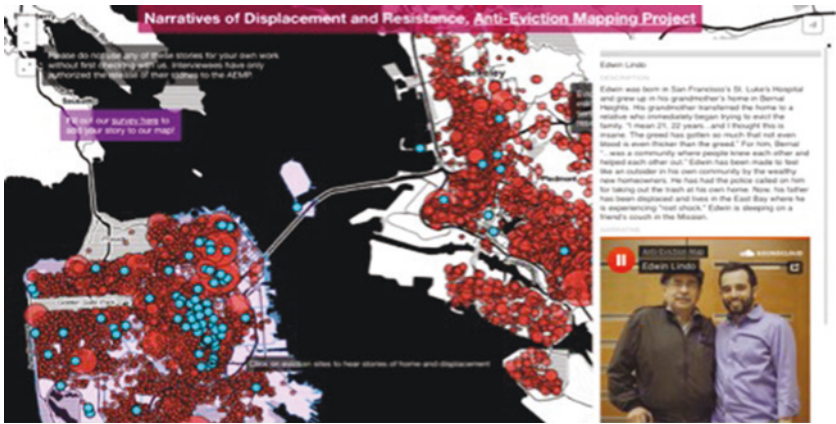


Fig. 16.4 Narratives of Displacement and Resistance Map

making, we also counter the abstracting, anonymizing forces inherent in visualizing complex experiences of dispossession as discrete data points in cartographic space (Fig. 16.4).

Our map lives online to be interacted with by the public: blue circles representing oral history narratives overlay red circles representing

evictions. Visitors navigate the map by hovering over and selecting narratives to listen to and explore. While we are interested in stories of dispossession, we are not interested in reducing people to their evictions. We recognize that displacement transpires in kaleidoscopic forms, and that loss is corporeal, cultural, haunting, and real. What we aim to do is to amplify the voices of those facing displacement, and put them in conversation with one another and with the larger displacing forces acting on the Bay Area today.

THE ANTI-EVICTION MAPPING PROJECT'S ZINE

We Are Here

The zine *We Are Here* is a collection of interviews, essays, poetry, and photos from SF's most recent housing wars. Its 105 pages contain the stories of San Franciscans who love and fight for home and community, of direct action victories, and of very real heartbreak and loss. It was lovingly made with scissors and glue by many hands in 2015. This zine transforms some of the project's majority digital work into an analog format, making the project accessible to a broader range of residents, citizens, and activists. The zine is available at AEMP outreach events (Figs. 16.5 and 16.6).

MAPPING, RESEARCH, AND DIRECT ACTION!

Fighting the Iantorno Ellis Act Evictions

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project has become a vital part of the direct action anti-displacement movement in San Francisco. Any landlord or speculator evicting tenants who are targeted for direct action needs to be researched, to find out what other properties they own, if they run other businesses, who are their lawyers, the banks they use, their finance companies, and who else is in on the deal (Fig. 16.7).

There are many examples to highlight how the research of the AEMP helped enormously in a direct action victory and the tenants got to keep their homes. One big direct action victory in 2015 was the campaign to stop six Ellis Act evictions by the notorious real estate speculators, Paolo and Sergio Iantorno. The Iantornos are long-time real estate speculators in S.F who currently own over 70 properties. You can learn more about



Fig. 16.5 Zine Photo

the Iantornos and other speculators on the AEMP website, under the Gentrification Tab in the Evictors section.

The AEMP worked together with Eviction Free S.F. (a direct action mutual aid group) and some of the tenants threatened with eviction by the Iantornos to organize a campaign of disruptive and creative direct actions. The type of direct actions used to stop the evictions consisted of call-in campaigns to the Iantorno's businesses and homes asking them to stop the evictions, three occupations of Paolo Iantorno's shoe stores in S.F. and posting on the Yelp page of the shoe stores with stories of evictions, and harassment carried out by the Iantornos. All of the occupations of the shoe stores were video documented and videos put up on the AEMP website.

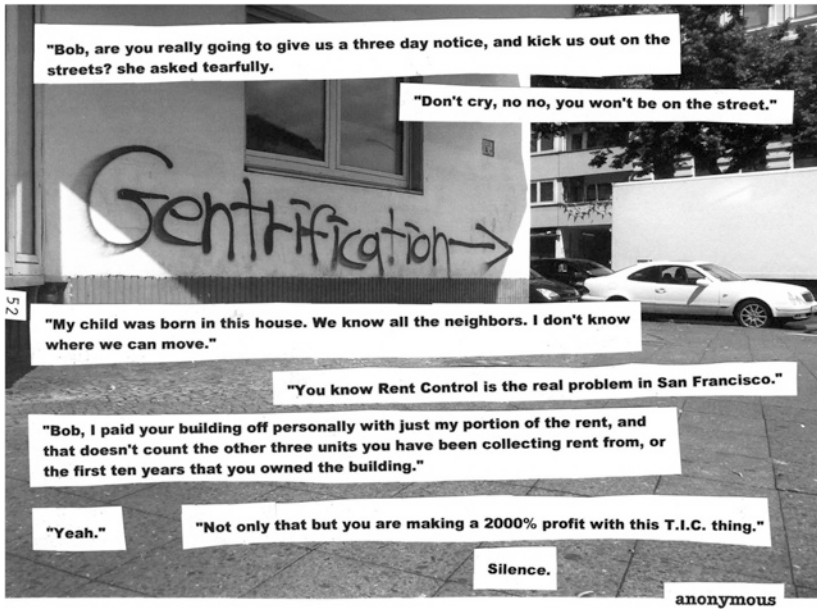


Fig. 16.6 Zine Excerpt

During a pause in the direct action campaign, the tenants worked with the S.F Community Land Trust and MEDA (Mission Economic Development Agency) who negotiated to buy five of the six buildings from the Iantornos to be land-trusted and kept “affordable”!

The sale of the buildings was a peace offering from the Iantornos as they were feeling the public pressure generated by the direct actions. Part of the sale negotiations revolved around taking down one of the videos where Paolo Iantorno is seen pushing seniors out of his store and grabbing the belongings of others, as well as taking down the AEMP profile page from the website. This major victory was covered by local press: a *SF Examiner* article published on 11 February 2016 highlighting the land trust deal and the negative impact Ellis Act evictions have on San Francisco residents.

Up the direct action victories!



Fig. 16.7 Occupying a real estate speculator's shoe store

RADICAL MAPPING

Maps are never neutral. They assert boundaries, place names, presences, and absences. We recognize the representational power of maps and strive to create ones that reveal a counter-history taking place at this moment.

While real estate companies may distribute their maps depicting renamed and whitewashed neighborhoods, our maps hold the stories of long-time residents who hold decades of memory, including all of the old names. While big tech advertises their private shuttle routes throughout the Bay Area, we can overlay those bus stops with the rise of market-driven evictions and displacement.

These maps not only counter the stories that justify the Bay Area's elite, but they work to affirm the experiences of those whom gentrification was never meant to benefit.

With these maps, we can make visible the invisible. We can say, we are still here.

WHY AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT?

During a Project meeting, we tried to capture some of the reasons we're interested in oral history. We weren't trying to create a single definition or answer by consensus, but instead wanted to provide some inspiration for our own thinking.

Collectively, these were some of our reasons:

I was drawn to this project because...

- it's not driven by gentrifier guilt
- I was witnessing community change
- of its potential to grow
- because its connection to data visualization is powerful
- its framing is unlike academia
- it's not encumbered by the nonprofit status quo
- of its solidarity with other social justice initiatives
- the interview process is a part of just action: a way of mobilizing residents.
- it's exposing wounds in the visceral body of the city
- it sees resistance as home
- stories are powerful and connect us to time, neighborhood and home

Oral history is...

- collaborative knowledge making
- nonhierarchical
- mutually beneficial
- malleable
- unlike formal interviews
- willing to slow down
- finding space for emotional history
- an empowering process of telling your own story

FIELD GUIDE TO ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWING

*When we, at the AEMP, collect an oral history, we are not just recording another data point for a map. Oral history is a powerful tool because it resists abstraction. By collecting stories that enlighten the spatial experience and emotions tied to place, space, and memories, we can both apprehend how displacements creates individual trauma and uprooting and analyze displacement through a better understanding of the wider context that produces it. Furthermore, by allowing the displaced to speak with their own voice in their own register, the project simultaneously amplifies the lived experiences of displacement and resistance while reaffirming the dignity of those experiencing displacement—*displacement as a process of erasure*—by privileging their voices over those of the displacers. In addition to a five-minute clip, all of our oral histories can be streamed in full from our website, providing an unadulterated platform from which our interviewees can be heard.*

All of our oral histories are collected by trained volunteers. Below you will find excerpts from one of our training documents. These excerpts were chosen to illustrate our approach to oral history, and thereby attempt to close the loop between theory and practice.

The Interview

The Biographical/Storytelling Approach

Oral history traditionally uses a biographical approach in order to understand how people make meaning and stories out of their experiences. This often means that oral history interviews start by asking people about their childhood and early life experiences in order to contextualize their stories.

For this project, this would mean not starting directly with someone's eviction but perhaps asking them where they grew up and how they ended up in San Francisco in order to contextualize their "narrative of displacement."

Questions could include:

- Tell me a little bit about where you spent your childhood.
- Describe to me where you grew up.
- Tell me a story about the place where you spent your early life.

This question could then lead to a question such as:

- Tell me the story of how you moved to San Francisco.
- How did you make the decision to move to San Francisco?

You could then ask the interviewee to describe to you what San Francisco felt like when they moved here, why they stayed, how it became home, what sort of community they found here, etc.

- Helpful here is to think of yourself as the helper in this person telling their story of San Francisco and then being displaced from San Francisco. You are creating the space for them to tell you this. You don't know what details/particulars of this story there are but you are trying to give them room to narrate what important stories and details to you.
- Remember that the kinds of sensory details that make a good piece of writing also make for a good interview. Ask about sensory details and try to fill in missing information by asking questions.

Follow-up Questions

- Follow-up questions are the heart of an oral history interview. We listen and ask follow-up questions with an idea of where we want the interview to go but also with flexibility about how we get there. Even a question that changes the subject can be a follow-up question.
- Follow-up questions show you're listening. They help the interviewee to trust you, and they should help to make the interview a coherent whole within which meaning is built up as the interview continues, rather than a series of unconnected anecdotes or facts.

Closed Questions

These are questions that can be answered in one word. Closed questions are atypical in an oral history context. However, they are useful to elicit specific details that will give you more a more precise historical context and can help to jog the interviewee's memory. Some examples:

- How old were you at the time?
- What was the teacher's name?

General Tips

Asking people about important or specific days can be useful for having them narrate specific stories. Examples include:

- What was a typical day like when you lived in xyz place?
- Tell me the story of the day you got your eviction notice.
- Tell me the story of the day you moved.

It is also good to ask about what kinds of **choices** people thought they had at different points in their life and how they made their decisions or how the decisions seemed to be made for them. *This often works as a way to get at the interviewee's worldview, assumptions, and thought processes.* For example:

- When you were finishing high school what options did you consider for where to go from there?
- How did you decide to go to college/to go to a specific college/to get a job/to travel?
- What influenced your decision?
- What factors did you take into consideration?

This works for choosing a career, changing jobs, moving, having kids...

Also, “**Why?**” “**Tell me more.**” “**And then what happened?**” or a simple **open silence** often work to draw the person out. One big difference between an oral history interview and other kinds of interviews is the **pacing**. An oral history interview proceeds at a leisurely pace and has time in it for reflective silence. In normal conversations, we rarely allow silences longer than a few seconds, and it will likely feel awkward to allow silences, but they can be important opportunities for the interviewee to think during the interview, to engage in the process of active meaning-making that we value in an oral history interview.

Themes We Might Want to Touch on in These Interviews

(this is not an exhaustive list at all, just a brainstorm)

- How/why they came to San Francisco/their particular neighborhood or city
- How long they have lived here

- What sort of community they had
- What their life was like in San Francisco/their particular neighborhood or city
- What sort of meaning the city holds for them—how has this meaning changed?
- How has the city changed? (but make sure that this is based not just on their observations but maybe grounded in a particular story of a place or experience that singled to them that the city changed)
- How did they make the decision to fight their eviction? Or not?
- What is their life like now? What has changed?
- What is different? What have they learned?
- Reflections on the place they have moved to

Emotions, Talking About Loss, Being “With” Your Narrator

As Nancy Raquel Mirabel writes about conducting oral histories of the Mission as it changed during the late 1990s and 2000s: “At times the project took its toll... by conducting oral histories of displacement we recorded endings...” (Mirabel, 2009). In these interviews, we are asking people to narrate difficult and often traumatizing experiences. To interview them about these experiences you must be *with them* in the interview. That is, being able to take their emotions and your emotions seriously. This is part of what this process is about. As we try to counter the erasure that happens during evictions and displacements with people’s stories we are also re-inscribing emotions into the process, and so these interviews will be emotional. Be prepared for this. Do what you need to do to be respectful as people have emotions. Some ideas are:

- Asking them if they would to take a break and potentially turning the recorder off for a few minutes
- Don’t be afraid to have emotions with them and to express your emotions, your condolences, your upset-ness
- To share your own stories and experiences

In addition, remember that these stories will have an effect on you as well. Take time to process them emotionally and be kind to yourself.

APPENDIX OF TERMS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Displacement Removal that refers to the physical presence of the person, but also to the cultural, linguistic, relational presence that exists outside of communities of people. It is a movement that results from a lack of economic and social power.

Costa-Hawkins Act Costa-Hawkins mandates that rent control may not be applied to units constructed after 1995, single family homes or condos. Furthermore, it prohibits “vacancy control.” Vacancy control occurs when rental units voluntarily vacated by their previous tenants are restricted to the previous rent-controlled rate instead of allowed to rise to market rate.

Ellis Act The Ellis Act is a state law which says that landlords have the right to evict tenants in order to “go out of business.” All units in the building must be cleared of all tenants—no one can be singled out. Most often it is used to convert to condos or group-owned tenancy-in-common flats. Once a building becomes a condo, it is exempt from Rent Control regardless of the age of the building and even if a unit owner subsequently rents to a long-term tenant. As we found, nearly 80 percent of Ellis Act evictions filed between 2011 and 2014 were conducted within five years of property ownership, revealing the speculative nature of this eviction type.

Eviction Process If a landlord is going to evict tenants, and that eviction is permissible by law (even if we believe it is unjust), the landlord must follow a series of legal procedures in order for the eviction to be a valid and legal eviction. It is highly common for landlords to evict or attempt to evict tenants in illegal ways—such as excessive rent increases or refusing to make repairs—and if tenants are unaware of their rights and of this process, it can result in tenants being forced out of their homes under illegal conditions.

In order for an eviction to be legal, a landlord must serve a proper written notice, in paper, either by mail or on the door of the tenant’s home. A landlord serves a notice to “cure or quit” when they believe the tenant has violated a specific provision of the rental agreement or lease. This is most often a three-day notice to “cure or quit” OR a 30–60-day

notice terminating tenancy. Even if tenants are covered under Just Cause law, a landlord may evict tenants for a reason of “no-fault” to the tenant, such as Owner-Move-In or Ellis Act evictions.

If a valid three-day notice is served, the tenant must respond in three calendar days to their landlord to “cure”—as in fix—whatever violation of the lease agreement the landlord raised to justify a “just cause” eviction, including nonpayment of rent. If the tenant believes the notice is invalid (insofar as they have not breached their contract as they are being accused of), they can also send a letter to the landlord, certified mail, responding to the eviction notice to contest it within three days (e.g. they *have* paid rent but the landlord has not accepted their rent checks). If the tenant does not respond within three days or “cure” the issue within three days, this does NOT mean the tenant must leave on the fourth day.

At this point, the landlord must file a Summons and Complaint for Unlawful Detainer with the court. Some landlords do not file the UD right away, some landlords do. Once the tenant receives the summons for UD, the tenant has five calendar days to file their response to the lawsuit in court.

- If a tenant *does not* respond, they lose as part of a default judgment. At this point, they will receive a Sheriff’s Notice, letting them know the date they must vacate the property. In San Francisco, courts may grant a one-week (sometimes longer, but rarely) *stay of eviction* which allows the tenant a bit more time to secure another form of housing.
- If they *do* respond within the five days, they will then be assigned a date for a settlement conference between their attorney and their landlord’s attorney. If their case does not settle at this conference, their case will then go to trial. If they win their trial, they will stay in possession of the property and will recover the cost of the lawsuit. At this point, the tenant is expected to pay all back rent, unless the jury decides that they can pay a decreased amount due to the landlord needing to making repairs or improve habitability of the unit.

Alternatively, a landlord can also serve a 30- or 60-day notice terminating tenancy to legally evict a tenant after a breach of contract. If the tenant does not terminate their tenancy, the landlord will file a Summons and Complaint for Unlawful Detainer. The same process follows as described above.

If you receive an eviction notice, or are threatened with eviction in any way and are not sure how to respond, seek counsel with your local tenants union or tenants rights clinic! You can fight your eviction! See our resources for more info.

Foreclosure When housing is bought on credit via a mortgage, foreclosure occurs when the property owner cannot meet their debt obligations to their lender and thereby forfeits their right to the property. Foreclosure is a lengthy process, and they take at least three months to complete after the lending bank first files a notice of default to begin the process. Foreclosures often occur when large life events—such as illness or death or sudden changes in employment—make it difficult to make mortgage payments on time. Real estate speculation during the 2007 housing bubble and subprime mortgages also drove many buyers into overpriced houses whose mortgage payments became unaffordable as their mortgages matured and house prices went underwater when the bubble burst.

Gentrification *Causa Justa::Just Cause*, a grassroots community-based organization that organizes around housing, immigrant rights, and building black and brown leadership in our movements, defines gentrification as “a profit driven race and class remake of urban, working class communities of color that have suffered from a history of disinvestment and abandonment. This process is driven by private developers, landlords, businesses, and corporations and supported by the state, through both policies that facilitate the process and funding in the form of public subsidies. Gentrification happens in areas where commercial and residential land is cheap, relative to other areas in the city and region, and where the potential to turn a profit, either through re-purposing existing structures or building new ones is great.”

Mutual Aid Peers coming together in a spirit of cooperation and equity to build a mutual network of support—the opposite of charity—to be self-managed, self-organized, self-determined, and self-governed in a humane, person-to-person way with dignity and respect. In all of its partnerships and collaborations, the AEMP operates on a principle of mutual aid.

No-Fault Eviction Some Bay Area cities have “Just Cause” eviction ordinances on their books which restrict when evictions can legally occur.

Just cause for eviction can either be by the fault of the tenant (e.g. breach of contract), or be by “no-fault” of the tenant. No-fault causes for eviction in San Francisco include Ellis Act evictions, owner move-in, demolition, capital improvements, or sale of unit converted to a condo. Without Just Cause eviction ordinances, there are no barriers to landlords evicting rent-controlled tenants at will to raise the rent to market rate for the next tenant.

Fault Eviction A term created by the legal arm of the real estate industry to create a false distinction between those who can afford to pay rent (“good renters”) and those who can’t (“bad renters”). Many of us are one paycheck or health emergency from a “fault eviction.”

We know: No-Fault Evictions increased 42% between 2011 and 2012 and increased another 57% between 2012 and 2013.

Oral History The AEMP uses Oral History methodologies when interviewing folks for the project. We choose to conduct oral history interviews, rather than more journalistic interviews, because we want to create a space for folks to share the stories of their whole lives, how they make meaning of their life, their community, and the forces that have impacted them, not just a specific story about their eviction, for instance. Oral history interviews are guided by the person being interviewed and aim to get a sense of the “life story” of that individual, as they want to tell it. Oral history interviewing has the potential to break down the power dynamics of more journalistic interviewing processes, as the interviewee is in control of the interview, and there are several consent processes built into ensure that interviewees are comfortable and willing to share their interview and whatever other media it becomes a part of.

Relocation Payment Tenants subject to no-fault evictions in some cities with Just Cause Eviction Ordinances are entitled to a relocation payment to defray moving costs and ease the transition into a new dwelling. In San Francisco, these relocation payments are approximately ~ \$5,500 per tenant up to ~ \$15,000 per unit. Tenants asked to temporarily relocate during substantial capital improvements are also entitled to relocation payments of ~ \$300 for up to 20 days.

Rent Control/Stabilization Rent control/stabilization ordinances limit the amount that rents are allowed to increase each year. Rent increase

limits are usually based either on a fixed percentage maximum increase or tied to inflation. When rents are not controlled or stabilized, they are at the discretion of the landlord and often allowed to float at “market rate,” whatever price they can command on the housing market. Without rent control, there is no reason landlords cannot illegally evict tenants through informal means, such as excessive rent increases, that would lead to a breach of contract on the tenant’s part and formal, legal eviction proceedings. In San Francisco, rent control only applies to multifamily properties built after 1979 and is tied to inflation. In California, Costa-Hawkins put further restrictions on which units are eligible for rent control.

We know: In light of the new wave of economic displacement currently facing the San Francisco Bay Area, cities across the region are being pushed to adopt new rent control ordinances (e.g. Richmond, the City of Alameda) or strengthen existing ones (e.g. San Jose).

Tech Bus Private double-decker luxury commuter buses, more commonly known as “Google Buses” that take highly paid tech workers from S.F and Oakland to their workplaces in Silicon Valley. The private shuttle program has created a two-tier system of commuting using public bus stops and creating higher rates of displacement near to shuttle stops. They have effectively made S.F a bedroom community for Silicon Valley.

We know: The AEMP found that between 2011 and 2013, no-fault evictions increased 69% within four blocks of private shuttle stops, as real estate becomes more valuable when advertised in proximity to these stops.