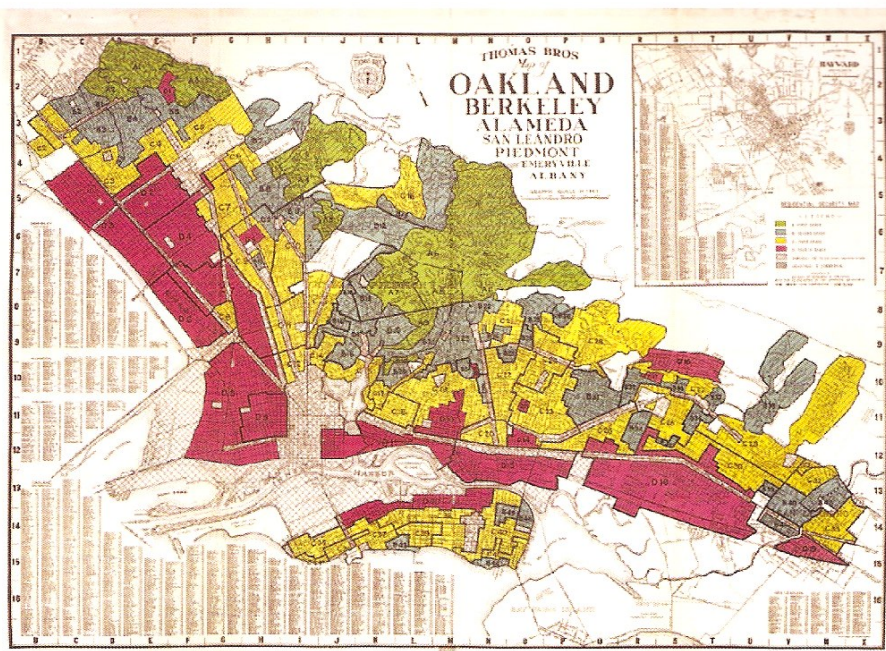


# BETWEEN THE RED LINES

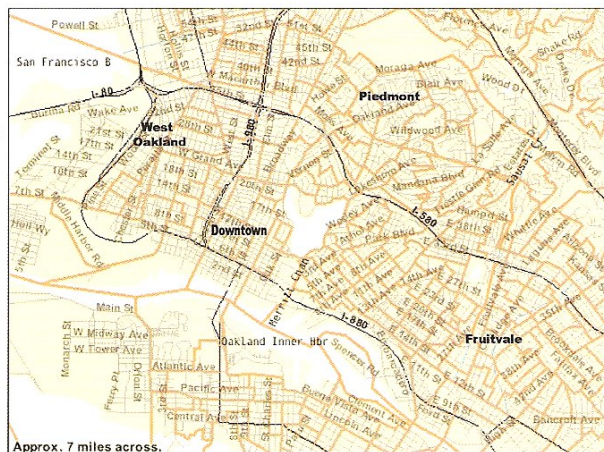
classifications  
apartheid  
homelessness  
"race"  
infrastructure



I. Marciano, R. D. Goldberg, C. Hou. T-RACES: a Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces. <http://salt.unc.edu/T-RACES>

above: the original Oakland Residential Security Map, prepared by Division of Research and Statistics, Federal Home Loan Bank Board and the Appraisal Department of Home Owners' Loan Corporation, 1939.<sup>1</sup>

green: first grade, then blue, yellow and red. hatched: sparsely settled, double hatched: industrial



neighbourhoods discussed in this article

joshua craze

In Oakland, California, there used to be red lines on the street, drawn so thick you could see them. They ran through the colour gradient, from black in West Oakland through various shades of gray, before turning into a solid white block that extended up into the foothills, to Oakland's Bible Belt, an area noted for its high concentration of churches, and for its white homeowners who actively attempted to keep out black buyers.

Soon I will take a flight, and pass from Francophone countries colour-coded blue in my atlas, into the pink of the former British colonies. Border-crossings after long journeys are the movements most commonly associated with migration. Borders inscribe differences in spatial form and mark the legal change from one state to another.

Yet national boundaries mark only the most visible of these borders. They can occur, not just when moving to a different continent, but even moving down the street. The differences entailed by Federal Housing Association zoning lines were no

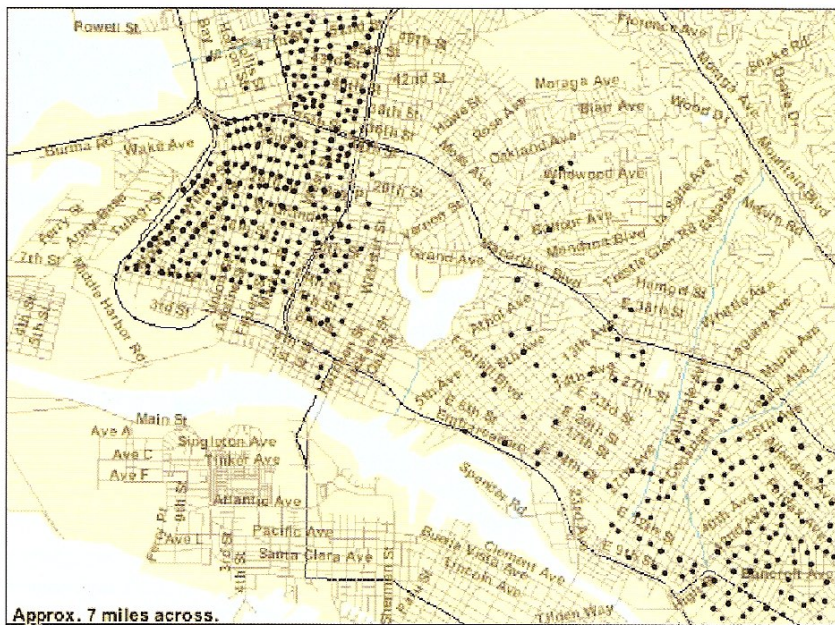
less total than those implied by national borders. Eldridge Cleaver described them as 'racial Maginot lines'; step across them and you realise you are living in two countries, not one. In the same era in which Andre Gunder Frank proposed a model of capitalist relations that saw centres exploit a third-world periphery for raw materials and labour, the Black Panthers pointed out an internal colonisation: the centre of Oakland was exploited by its periphery, just a few blocks away.

Between the managers in Piedmont and the workers of West Oakland, there were red lines. They first divided Oakland in 1937, in a housing survey for the Home Owners Loan Corporation. All neighbourhoods west of Broadway were given a security grade of red, indicating racially mixed neighbourhoods. Residents inside the red lines found it almost impossible to get loans. These lines, which functioned as an effective barrier to African-American mobility, were kept in place through a variety of mechanisms. Schemes to encourage suburban workers to move into commuting





1960 African-American population



1970 African-American population

maps drawn from US Census Bureau: Census 1990, Census 2000, Summary File 1, Summary File 3

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zones meant a predominantly white work force received favourable access to loans and capital, while African-American industrial workers in West Oakland found it impossible to acquire mortgages, creating a form of economic apartheid in which black residents were forced to stay within the red lines.

Even during the 1960s, when most of the legal forms of redlining had ended, the effects of the lines themselves continued. Oakland's post-war history has been marked by large transportation construction projects – promises of future mobility that became the means to divide up neighbourhoods and mark boundaries. In the 1930s and 40s, African-Americans had worked to purchase houses in West Oakland; by 1949, Oakland's planning commission has designated the entire area blighted. Both the Bay Area Regional Transport System, which began in the 1950s and an interstate highway linking the East Bay suburban corridor were built right through West Oakland. These transportation lines,

built to facilitate employment, became racial lines, marking steep differences in house prices. Thriving communities of owner-occupiers were designated as blighted and on the basis of that categorisation, people relocated, communities were cut in half and West Oakland fell into a downward spiral. How many times have we heard that classifications reproduce themselves?

Many of the dispossessed residents of West Oakland moved east. Today, on High Street, a major artery in Fruitvale, East Oakland and one of the red lines that indicated the beginning of the redlined lower reaches of the Bible belt, there is little evidence of racial zoning. The smell of roast chicken wafts from a large Mi Pueblo supermarket on one side of the line, and meets the smell of simmering lengua from the tacqueria opposite. The policies that institutionalised the red lines are now gone, immigration totally changed Oakland's urban space and, according to census data, Oakland has 27,000 fewer African-Americans than it did in 2000.

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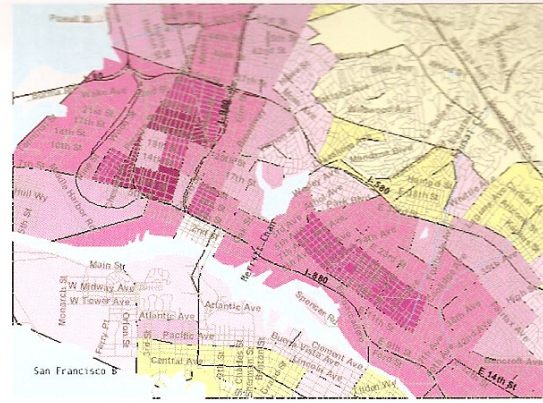
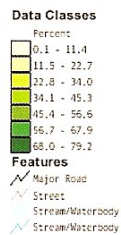




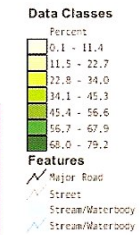
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above: percentage of the population that is African-American  
top: 1990  
below: 2000

In 1960 African-Americans were 22.8% of Oakland's population (83,618 people). By 1970 that number had grown to 34.5% (124,710). Today it is declining.



above: percentage of the population below the poverty line  
top: 1989  
below: 1999



the absoluteness of the line: the 1999 poverty map at the underpass

But if the policies have gone, some informal red lines do remain; most of them follow the route of post-war transportation projects. The Grove Shafter Freeway is one such red line. Above it, stretching into the hills, the houses remain mainly white-owned. Below, as if in a photographic negative, they are black. In between, at the border, another world occurs.

To get to my house just off Martin Luther King Junior Way, you have to pass from the hipster restaurants of Telegraph under the Grove Shafter at 45th. The traffic roars past as you pass the steep banks that lead from the pavement to narrow ledges just underneath the freeway. One night I found John, a frequent resident of the underpass, pushing a trolley up that impossibly sheer slope to where so many make their homes. These are shallow settlements, unobtrusive agglomerations of mattresses and the occasional stove.

Some of the faces I have known for two years now, others pass through quickly; like most homelessness in the USA, the residents are temporary. Yet, as quickly as people pass through

the space, certain constancies remain. This space between the red lines is not a harmonious neutrality. Shelter, ad-hoc accumulations of cardboard and canvas, is racially divided. Rather than these divisions marking out the limits of urban space, here the divisions run through the space, dividing up people who live almost on top of each other. Too close to keep apart, fights break out, and everyone is aware of the lack of distance that separates oneself from one's neighbour; there are many types of internal colonisation and often they are felt most strongly when one is weakest.

There are reasons to keep these settlements unobtrusive. The council frequently puts up notices banning illegal camping, and the police erratically come by to move people on. Recently, the area was designated an area of urban blight and the council began cleaning and re-designing the underpass. Mary Douglas famously called dirt 'matter out of place'. In this case, blight serves the same function. Life on the red line is life lived through the red line, and an uncomfortable reminder of how close we are to things we wish were kept far apart, in time and in space.