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JANUARY 25TH, 2014

District southeast of Lake Merritt organizes to create neighborhood of their dreams (Community Voices)

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by Steven J. Kopff

My partner, Joshua Stenzel, and I transplanted ourselves to Oakland from San Francisco a year ago. After a careful search for the right location, we now call the neighborhood of Clinton home. It is a mostly undiscovered, rapidly-changing neighborhood to the southeast of Lake Merritt not far from Jack London Square. In Clinton, diversity is the name of the game: there are Victorian mansions next to bungalows, Julia Morgan Craftsman, and homes built in every decade. The makeup of residents is just as varied.

Back in the 1800s, Clinton and surrounding neighborhoods were all part of the "Brooklyn Township" and were later annexed by the city of Oakland. Brooklyn was a wealthy area with many Victorian mansions and well to-do residents, and had a vital Redwood timber shipping route originating in the Oakland hills that ended at the coast. Brooklyn included the current-day neighborhoods of Clinton, Bella Vista, Ivy Hill, Highland Park, Cleveland Heights, Highland Terrace, Merritt, Tuxedo, Lynn, San Antonio and parts of Trestle Glen.

The first thing we noticed is that the Clinton/Brooklyn area was lacking many restaurants as well as super markets, especially offering fresh, organic and healthier options. We were living in a virtual food desert, and had to travel to other neighborhoods to find restaurants, shops, ATMs and supermarkets that provided the services we were looking for. To shop for groceries, I found myself driving fifteen minutes or more to find a store that had enough variety in offerings and that didn't break the bank.

Within a month of moving in, we had plugged into several neighborhood groups, some made up of people who had worked hard for decades to preserve and improve the neighborhood, and some who were more recent additions to the neighborhood, working hard to build a community and make positive changes.

Energized by these meetings, my partner and I started a nonprofit, Oakland's Brooklyn Neighborhood Beautification Project, to raise funds to beautify the sidewalk landscape strips and public medians as a means to fight illegal dumping, graffiti and crime in the area. The funds raised go to neighbors who need financial assistance in planting their sidewalks, and who want to be part of the project. Where we have been short on donated funds, Josh and I have picked up the tab.

With the help of many neighbors, we have installed a library box in a public space and filled it with books of all languages for the neighborhood children to read. We landscaped three city medians, a private sidewalk where prostitution was occurring, and several other homes. The graffiti and illegal dumping stopped in the areas where we did our beautification, and now there is a much more steady flow of people taking leisurely walks, going for runs and bike rides, as the spaces feel more safe.

We also hope to plant fruit trees and a garden along with some neighbors at an apartment building near the library box we installed. The tenants used to look at us with suspicion when we walked by with our dogs. Now their kids play in the streets and they say hello and talk with us. It is so valuable to feel at home out on the streets.

I started my own neighborhood email newsletter initially to try to raise donations for our nonprofit, but it quickly turned into a neighborhood resource newsletter in which we cover such issues as historic homes, beautifying the neighborhood, calling to attention new businesses in the neighborhood worth trying out, neighborhood events and our effort to bring a good food market to the neighborhood.

I sent out a poll that reached more than 400 neighbors asking what they would like if they could choose a local grocer. The neighbors overwhelmingly were looking for a store like a BiRite, run by local owners, with reasonable prices, that offered lots of organic fruits and vegetables, locally-grown options included. Also on the wish list was an in-house bakery that offered fresh baked goods, an ATM in-store such as a Wells Fargo, and a coffee kiosk with patisserie bites.

An article in Oakland Local made us aware of the Portside Community Market, which plans to find a location in the Jack London Square area. We quickly got in touch with co-founder Tommaso Boggia, who told us, "It's heartening to see that your neighbors have similar visions for what a local grocery store should look like. We also view Bi-Rite as an example, though we want to be able to provide a bit more mid-price-range choices."

This was music to our ears, as their model matched the wish list of the residents of Brooklyn.

Tommaso has asked to meet with the neighbors in the coming month for feedback and more ideas on how they can provide the best of service when they open. The residents of all the



neighborhoods making up Brooklyn would jump at the chance to have Portside Market serve the community.

Editor's Note: This piece reflects an individual opinion and is not a reported story from Oakland Local. Oakland Local invites community residents to share their views about events and issues in Oakland. See our [guidelines](#).

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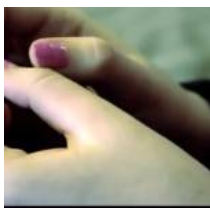
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52 thoughts on "District southeast of Lake Merritt organizes to create neighborhood of their dreams (Community Voices)"



1. **Oaklander** on January 25, 2014 at 10:36 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

"We were living in a virtual food desert" Are you afraid of all fo the scary people going to all of those scary markets with the funny letters on the signs that have gigantic displays of produce? A restaurant that serves pho doesn't count as a restaurant? "Patisserie bites" cant be found at all of the bakeries that line International and E 12th Street? Community Bank of the Bay isnt good enough to keep your money and serve this area?

It sounds as if you want to have a positive impact on the community but have no desire to actually appreciate many of the good things in the community you decided to live in.



2. Clinton resident on January 25, 2014 at 11:16 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I live in this neighborhood and appreciate the landscaped medians, so thank you for that!

But I don't agree with calling this area a food desert. There are quite a few restaurants, and shopping options include Lucky, Trader Joe's, and many locally owned ethnic markets around International. I'd have no problem with a more upscale store in the neighborhood but it's a little odd that you don't acknowledge what is already here.



3. Dee on January 25, 2014 at 8:08 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I really like that you've started a library box and plan to plant trees in the neighborhood. I'm definitely for "beautification" that is inclusive. I'm weary, however, of bringing in a lot of higher priced restaurants/grocery stores because it forces less privileged restaurants out (and eventually people). I'm all for healthy and yummy food, but please be mindful in who has access to these new places. Overall though, I really like these efforts!



4. RustBeltRefugee on January 25, 2014 at 10:15 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Food desert? Uh, what?



5. OaklandDerper on January 26, 2014 at 12:47 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Be weary of anyone who uses colonizing language. e.g. "It is a mostly undiscovered, rapidly-changing neighborhood "

JK

But not really.



6. Dannette on January 26, 2014 at 4:14 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I agree with the previous comments. I know that your idea was to replace the Lucky's with a Birite. That is creating a food desert, not eliminating one. Our neighborhood is a very mixed one and there are some very poor people who rely on the reasonable prices at Lucky's to survive. Just because you and your 400 friends have the ability to afford higher prices doesn't mean that you get to dictate how the rest of us live our lives. This is how you start pushing people out of the neighborhood. It is the definition of gentrification.

Also, did you put that survey out in multiple languages? At the very least you would need to do it in Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese in order to get representation in the neighborhood. And did you distribute the survey door to door, so that people in the neighborhood that don't have access to the Internet have their voices heard?

If they answer to these questions is no, and I suspect it is, then you have basically asked the wealthy, mostly white, mostly recently arrived neighbors of one of the most racially diverse neighborhoods in Oakland how they would like to change the neighborhood without consulting the lower income people of color who have been holding it down in our community for years with fewer resources.

There are so many minority owned businesses in our community that the fact that you think we live in a food desert only proves how the efforts and activities of people of color are completely invisible to you and your privileged network. I suggest you try the fresh vegetables at the Asian food markets on International and 12th St. There are about 4 or 5. I can't even

count the number of restaurants. There are two cafes on Park Blvd, numerous bars on Park and E18th, and a great business cluster that has formed around Foothill and 2nd Ave.

The beautification is great. And you and your group probably have more time and resources to make that happen. Congrats to you on having so much privilege in your life that you can afford to think deeply about issues of aesthetics. Those folks trying to make rent, dealing with the violence in our communities, trying to figure out a way to survive in a city where everything is getting more and more expensive, and struggling with the general trauma of being poor and POC in this country, have bigger priorities. Please stop trying to act like we should all bend to your will or pat you on the back and congratulate you because your life has given you the tools know how to work the system in your favor.

I love my neighborhood. I moved here because it was a diverse neighborhood with the services and facilities that I need. I would like to see some of the graffiti and dumping cleaned, but other than that, this is a perfect neighborhood for me and my lifestyle. Some changes are cool, those changes should be made with the input of the entire neighborhood.



7. OaklandNative on January 26, 2014 at 7:45 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Thanks Dannette.

I read this article and I thought the same things as you. I didn't comment because I don't live in the area.

This article reminded me of the Swans article. It opened with Swans being boarded up. However, the writer didn't look into why it was boarded up. It was boarded up as part of the "gentrification" of Oakland. I loved Swans. I shopped there. I was sorry to see it go. What is there now is nothing near as "vibrant" as what was there before.

Does this writer actually think the kids now play outside because of them? "Undiscovered"? Undiscovered by whom? What arrogance!

A neighborhood is measured by restaurants? Some communities prefer home cooked meals. Organic fruits and vegetables? C'mon now.

Ironically, Swans had fresh fruits and vegetables and it was closed down.

Any city official talking about the "New Oakland" should be impeached.



8. east oaklandite on January 26, 2014 at 9:14 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I've lived in Oakland for 17 years now, and owned a home in East Oakland for the last 4. I am white, well-educated, and privileged on many levels. In my neighborhood, that puts me in the minority. First, I think it's wonderful when people take time and energy to pour into this great city. Kudos for looking to bring more greenery to your sidewalks and public medians!

I would hardly call that neighborhood a food desert (if you think that's a food desert, head to deep East Oakland!), and I echo many of the valid and wise words of those who have also commented.

I too long for there to be trees on my street, and less concrete, and a better food option to walk to than the liquor store a block and a half away from me. But I also don't want to alienate the neighbors who have lived here for decades and decades, who mourn things like crime and theft and violence and illegal dumping, but don't necessarily want an organic grocery store or high end restaurant. There is an awesome strip of storefronts a block from my house. Most of them are empty. If I was deciding what would go in there without considering my neighbors and what would really be welcome to most people in the neighborhood then I would want a cool cafe, a nice restaurant, a grocery store, some cool little shops. But I don't know if that is actually what my neighborhood needs or wants in that block. So it takes time, relationship, showing up to the neighborhood meetings that have been going on for years, listening to stories from neighbors who have lived here for many years (yes, even the ones who cut down their trees and paved it over with concrete because they didn't like all the shed leaves), trying

to ask ALL the neighbors what they want (even if they speak another language or won't fill out a survey online or even on paper.)

I think it's great to hear how these neighbors are working towards good things, I just hope it includes a wide range of voices, even if those voices bring a different point of view.



9. Clinton resident on January 26, 2014 at 9:59 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Wait, is it true that the plan is to replace the Lucky? If so, then my original comment was much too restrained. Dannette, you are right on.

As a somewhat privileged new neighbor here myself, I'm chagrined by the attitude displayed by Mr. Kopff. I moved here for the same reasons as Dannette, I support the existing businesses, and I don't expect things to change to suit me. And as the excellent comments above make clear, it isn't about me anyway.



10. TheDude on January 27, 2014 at 2:11 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I moved to this neighborhood about a year ago too. I didn't come from SF though, I came from Miami. If you saw me on the street I'm sure you would consider me a gentrifier, but I'm deficient in one area, and that's having money. Honestly, I've never really had any money, and by money I really just mean wealth, material goods, etc, as well as actual currency. It's created a kind of independence from the whole "have more than you did last year" thing we do here in America, and I think it's allowed me to have this epiphany upon reading this article. "Gentrification" boils down to simple narcissism: because the neighborhood does not fit what Steven and Josh view as desirable or vibrant, then they must do something to change it! The newsletter and "poll" should be viewed with skepticism as well. I am a political consultant, and this just reminds me of the kind of overly meritorious tools that run the little homeowner's association fiefdoms back in Florida. Steven and Josh view these actions as constructive, but it's only constructive to their means (again, narcissism). However, they have shown their cards too early! I will be watching them now, and I suggest everyone else in the neighborhood does the same. I love getting cheap vegetables and snacks from the Sun Sang and all the others. Kevin's Noodle House is great for quick and easy pho, but when I want a little better quality I go to Pho Ao Sen. Rainbow Cafe is open late as hell, as well as the taco trucks. Oh, and while I think it's great that they were able to clean up some of the right-of-way and curb a little of the epic illegal dumping, I would much rather see the city handle this, since, you know, it's why we all pay taxes. If these guys want to battle it out for the character of the neighborhood, I will be happy to align myself on the side of history rather than of money.



11. Near Haddon Hill on January 27, 2014 at 8:01 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Steve, who exactly hasn't "discovered" the neighborhood yet? Surely you don't mean the brown people of many ethnicities that have lived here for generations and established small businesses, including restaurants, grocers, and specialty food shops? The Intertribal Friendship House that's been here for almost 60 years?

If you're afraid of trying the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai/Laotian, Korean, Indian, and other kinds of fruits, vegetables, grains that are available in abundance in our neighborhood, perhaps you'd be more comfortable somewhere else — rather than changing the neighborhood so much that you make the rest of us uncomfortable.

I moved to this neighborhood (I'm a relatively recent transplant too) in part because I could a) walk to any one of 3 full line grocery stores b) eat in or take away from any number of locally owned restaurants that prepare delicious, fresh foods c) enjoy a number of parks d) be around people of many different ages, ethnicities, and ability levels.

But I'm already on the verge of being priced out as gentrification continues. Planting the medians is a gift to us all; thank you for that. But your efforts to homogenize the community are not.



12. Doug MacLellan on January 27, 2014 at 11:44 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Rather than castigate Steve I think we should chip in and buy him a pith helmet and hire him a native guide so he can intrepidly explore the culinary wilds of East 12th and East 14th. What tales he could tell to the Bi-Rite 400 upon his safe return. Shades of Captain Spaulding. Stalking the wild nuoc mam, or the legendary nam prik mang da, or real Sri Racha sauce in a glass bottle that actually comes Chonburi Province, instead of Irwindale.

I don't live in the neighborhood but we're always in transit from Fruitvale to Chinatown, and shop regularly at Long Hing, Thien Loi Hoa, Sun Hop Fat 1, and Lucky Fish Market.

As a guide book I suggest

<http://thaifoodandtravel.com/blog/asian-markets-oakland-2/>

There's a whole world out there to explore. Right here in East Oakland. to paraphrase Ferris Bueller, If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it.

13. Pingback: Oakland Projects and Business Development - Page 134 - City-Data Forum



14. poonam on January 27, 2014 at 5:45 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I'm usually afraid of reading the comments sections on blogs and articles, but wow, kudos to all the commenters for their very articulate and appropriate response. I was going to comment, but you all have said it all.

My favorite: "If you're afraid of trying the Chinese, Vietnamese, Thai/Laotian, Korean, Indian, and other kinds of fruits, vegetables, grains that are available in abundance in our neighborhood, perhaps you'd be more comfortable somewhere else — rather than changing the neighborhood so much that you make the rest of us uncomfortable."

Thank you all.



15. This Is Not Brooklyn on January 27, 2014 at 8:34 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Steve,

there is an entire world of actual facts begging to make your acquaintance. Let's review:

1. You didn't discover anything. In characterizing our neighborhood as "mostly undiscovered", you disregard the lives and experiences of the working class people of color who have lived here, in many cases for generations, before you arrived. Your preoccupation with the history of 19th century wealthy white landowners obfuscates the present and historical realities of people of color in this neighborhood.

2. Our neighborhood is not a food desert. It might feel like that to you if you don't patronize the dozens of ethnic markets and eateries all over East Lake and the San Antonio. (Also, your discussion of food options makes no mention of cost, which is an actual consideration for the majority of residents in our neighborhood.)

3. You did not install the library box. This was not your idea and you did not help in either the construction or installation. This project was designed and implemented by a multiracial group of neighbors on 12th Ave. who lived in the neighborhood prior to your arrival. That it fits with your own vision of what the neighborhood should be does not give you ownership over it.

4. Safety is relative. What is safe for you is not necessarily safe for all of your neighbors. Oakland Police Department has a long and complicated history of racial profiling and abuse of power against people of color in this city. In failing to recognize this, and charging ahead with your own singular vision for what a safer Oakland looks like, you are making the neighborhood less safe for many residents. Also, children played in the streets long before you moved in.

5. The results of your English-only, web-based grocery store poll represent the desires of your 400 survey participants, not the will of the community.

6. This is not Brooklyn.

Also, Steve, a lie of omission is still a lie. In your rush to publicly congratulate yourself, here are a few points you failed to mention concerning your impact on the neighborhood:

1. Since moving in, you have reported your neighbors to city inspectors for minor housing code violations, forcing them to alter their homes or properties, resulting in stress and financial burden.

2. You have received critical feedback from neighborhood residents concerned that your efforts do not reflect the needs and desires of our diverse community.

3. You have encouraged neighbors to oppose a home that would serve individuals with disabilities and mental health needs from opening in our neighborhood on the basis that, "we don't need any more mental houses". Your reality, once again, fails to acknowledge the actual needs of this community.

Steve, you are no one's lord. Our neighborhood is not your fiefdom. Please take your white man's burden and go home.



16. Ecaterina Burton on January 28, 2014 at 8:41 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Steven, calling our neighborhood a food desert because it doesn't have organic produce is a gross misuse of this term. As someone who works on the issue of food deserts, I can tell you that our neighborhood is one of the best in Oakland precisely because it has a wide arrange of options for residents from the numerous Asian markets to Lucky's (which even has an organic produce section, albeit small). We are also within walking distance of great farmer's markets. And in terms of restaurants, there are many who have been local community establishments for decades like Pho Ao Sen or Champa Garden or Mi Rancho tacos.

Also I find it unsettling that you focus first on the diversity of architecture than on the diversity of the people in this neighborhood.

I appreciate your beautification efforts and as your neighbor, I'd be happy to show you around the local markets (which will not break your bank even when you buy in bulk) and my favorite restaurants and introduce you to the wonderful people working to provide these services to the community. I'd also be up for talking to you about what I love about our community and what I find problematic about your portrayal of it.



17. Bajo on January 28, 2014 at 9:11 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

"Also, did you put that survey out in multiple languages? At the very least you would need to do it in Chinese, Spanish, and Vietnamese in order to get representation in the neighborhood. And did you distribute the survey door to door, so that people in the neighborhood that don't have access to the Internet have their voices heard?" -Dannette

Well said!



18. NewResident on January 28, 2014 at 12:33 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Ecaterina Burton-

Great comment! This article was confusing to me because as I was reading it I thought, "wait a minute, this is my neighborhood!" I moved here less than a year ago and part of what made us decide on the area was how close it is to Lake Merritt, multiple public transportation options, and how friendly the neighbors seemed.

I wish there was some way to take you up on your offer to the author! I'd love to be shown your

favorite markets and restaurants!



19. williams on January 28, 2014 at 1:20 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

if it weren't for what appears to be first hand accounts that this guy is real, i'd say this piece was either the work of a skilled troll or entirely satirical. as it stands, its simply a modern 'white man's burden'.

these people are out there, and soon they'll be moving into your neighborhood.



20. JCP on January 28, 2014 at 2:24 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

EAT THE RICH



21. OaklandResident on January 28, 2014 at 3:21 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Wonderful comments! Very happy to see this response. Restores my faith in an Oakland that has been so rapidly changing lately.



22. scott rossi on January 28, 2014 at 4:04 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

this is what white settler mentality looks like.



23. Clinton Resident and love it as is! on January 28, 2014 at 4:32 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I am glad to see that many of my concerns were addressed in the comments. Why would you want to change the diversity you love and carbon copy the neighborhood you left?



24. Dissentist on January 28, 2014 at 4:55 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

"To shop for groceries, I found myself driving fifteen minutes or more to find a store that had enough variety in offerings and that didn't break the bank."

So you'd like to replace Lucky with another Whole Foods doppelganger. You DO realize there's a Whole Foods already, and that many of us were hoping that it would have been made ANYTHING BUT a Whole Foods, because now there's yet another grocer we can't afford to use.

Lake Shore Avenue is a few blocks from you, on the east side of 580 it runs parallel to Grand Avenue. Both of those streets are pretty close and offer TONS of the type of restaurants you're looking for. 16% of your neighbors are asian, 25% of them are black, what percentage of your "survey" responders were black or asian?



25. Christine on January 28, 2014 at 5:05 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I don't understand why people move from SF, and then complain that Oakland doesn't have Bi-Rites. Has it ever occurred to these transplants that many Oaklanders don't want/need shops that sell \$5.00 organic cauliflower? Gross.

Thank to everyone else in these comments who is representing Oakland.



26. my dictionary is broken on January 28, 2014 at 5:35 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

What the hell is “mostly undiscovered” supposed to mean when used in reference to an **inhabited area**?



27. EastBayB&R on January 28, 2014 at 5:56 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

As someone born and raised in the East Bay (Oakland, Berkeley, Richmond), I have found myself reading Steve’s e-mails and wondering what he’s doing in my neighborhood. I, too, want to see more storefronts occupied in Brooklyn, but I would like them to be run by local business owners who have a personal interest in helping the neighborhood continue to thrive. There are so many places I can walk to for groceries, food, etc. yes, it would be great to have more of the same, but I don’t want “high-end” expensive markets pushing out the people who have been serving the neighborhood for so long. Please don’t make Brooklyn go the way of other Oakland neighborhoods; let’s learn from past mistakes and keep our neighborhood beautiful while also keeping all our residents. I can’t afford to live most other places in Oakland, and I don’t want to have to move from my home.



28. Amilcar Cabral on January 28, 2014 at 6:09 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

It is somewhat ironic that the author with the colonialist language and thrust bought the old Victorian that used to house the center for third world organizing.



29. jme on January 28, 2014 at 6:25 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

so many difficulties with this article, but i’ll just focus on the most puzzling, like so many of you already have, the food desert issue. personally very hilarious to me, as my husband and I, when we lived in Fruitvale, rode our bikes to this neighborhood every Saturday because of all the great grocery options. this article is a trainwreck!



30. osa on January 28, 2014 at 6:54 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Not only is Oakland the place that I have called home for a little over 8 years but I will be moving to this neighborhood in the summer. Everything that I wanted to say has been expressed very eloquently many times over, so I just wanted to say thank you for all the comments that speak not only to this article but also this way of thinking.



31. Natalio on January 28, 2014 at 7:55 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

“This neighborhood is so diverse, look at all the different kinds of houses here!”

How out of touch can you be?



32. Mr. Mika on January 28, 2014 at 8:07 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

What was the organization that was there?



33. ACJ on January 28, 2014 at 8:17 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I lived on E16th and 7th for years, and, while reading the comments makes me proud of my people, reading the article and really confronting the mindset of the gentrifiers is bith deoressing and infuriating. I used to play tennis on the courts where it was all black and the newly arrived southeast asian folks playing each other peacefully, even when we didn't "get" each other culturally – there was respect and lots of laughter. I adopted my cat from the family-owned corner store, and they had a bunch of sons whom I feel like I watched grow up. I watched La Estrellita go from a little storefront to this huge successful restaurant. And to call that neighborhood a "food desert" is to abuse the meaning of the phrase. I discovered all kinds of crazy sights and smells in those markets that prompted me to ask questions and to cook! I started using coconut milk and improvising a curry chicken recipe because of those markets. Most importantly, my son started his life there. But these gentrifiers talk about the place like all that beauty was just wasted on us. Some things never change, and the colonial mindset seems to be one of them Like the Intertribal Friendship house, we were here before you. I hope the writers of this article listen to the words of their neighbors, and I hope the long-term neighbors follow up.



34. Travis on January 28, 2014 at 8:26 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Please go back to San Francisco and "discover" a neighborhood there.



35. Eric on January 28, 2014 at 9:18 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

How can this guy be from SF and not figure out all the fresh and cheap produce from all the minority owned markets?



36. Kate on January 28, 2014 at 9:22 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Wow. Internet comments are almost never constructive or thoughtful, but the thoughts shared above are incredibly respectful, righteous, and right-on. Rather than dismissing potentially alienating Steve with abusive language (which would, given the unbelievably tone-deaf and offensive content of his piece, be totally understandable) ya'll laid out the facts with much grace and clarity, but without sacrificing honesty. Hopefully Steve will be able to take these comments to heart and really truly think about what his words and actions are doing to his neighbors and 'community'—otherwise, those neighbors who wave to him are gonna be doing something else soon enough, and the walk from his meticulously restored Victorian to the fancy artisan vegan dog treat food truck is gonna be a long and lonely one.



37. Blackie on January 28, 2014 at 10:04 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I am "weary" of people who use language like "colonize" in regards to others, as though wanting a better neighborhood is the same as being a slave trader.



38. Ben Here on January 28, 2014 at 10:05 pm said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Looks like macklemore's dad is lookin for a place to buy his groceries!



39. Bblackie on January 28, 2014 at 10:20 pm said:

Reply ↓

I miss the four murders a year we were averaging on our block. Too bad Jax burned. Now there are even LESS addicts & MORE dealers may have to move!



40. White Savior on January 29, 2014 at 12:00 am said:

Reply ↓

Dear, Steve, you might consider moving to walnut creek where you won't have to live in a grocery store desert and we won't have to read any more condescending, white savior complex letters from you.



41. susan mernit on January 29, 2014 at 12:05 am said:

Reply ↓

I've been out of town on a mini-sabbatical, but want to share how great the discussion and dialogue is around this opinion piece. Please fo remember Oakland local welcomes community voices pieces on individual views...and great discussion of those views!



42. John on January 29, 2014 at 1:17 am said:

Reply ↓

"After a careful search for the right location, we now call the neighborhood of Clinton home. It is a mostly undiscovered, rapidly-changing neighborhood to the southeast of Lake Merritt not far from Jack London Square." LOL WHAT? The neighborhood was "undiscovered? Before when? Before white people "found it"?"



43. John N. on January 29, 2014 at 4:33 am said:

Reply ↓

"we were here before you." – Wrong, Some of the people moving back were descendants of the original Oaklanders. There were here before the "White Flight". Oakland was predominantly white half a century ago. If the majority of the current residents were really here before "us", there would've been a lot more Chinese supermarkets instead of the man-made Lake Merritt that is the beauty of Oakland today.



44. Another Gay White Dude with a Downpayment on January 29, 2014 at 8:24 am said:

Reply ↓

Steve-

We have to be better than this. Seriously.

You and I know about a certain kind of struggle. The one that says people with more access to the tools of power and policy, more financial tools to market their world view, and more freedom of movement through job security, housing practices that favor them, and even access to their limited notions of marriage can tell us how to live our lives based on their interests and values.

They've done that with very little thought that we live in their world. They've done that without knowing us well enough to start to care about us. They've done that while reaping massive benefits because of their position.

Don't be that guy. Build relationships. Learn about the community. Don't just try to change it.

Release yourself from the idea that you are a pioneer. Do we really need to go over this again and again? Come to think of it we do. It's going to take some work on your part, but I promise, as someone who is in the practice of doing this, that transforming your thinking here is going to serve you much better than not doing so. You have discovered nothing. Nothing. It's the height of ignorance to speak as if you have. Don't be Columbus. We already had one of him.

No. Try to be that guy who shows up and listens deeply. Who notices what is around him. Who sees the incredible entrepreneurship and ability it takes to run all the food markets and restaurants you don't see but your neighbors are offering to show you. Be that guy who takes a beautiful building like the Center for Third World Organizing and shares the history of it with the people you welcome into your home. Be that guy who learns Oakland in some of the layers underneath your own desire to shift it into something beautiful.

We gay white guys have an opportunity here. Think of how it feels to be told how you live must change. How some lives are erasable.

You can do this. You seem really invested. Invest in the the reality that is around you before you build a change narrative. Remember how it feels to be left out and for people to make assumptions about your entire life based on knowing very little about you.

Oakland, and the community you live in, is PACKED with awesome people who have made this town important. Who have literally changes the face of food politics in the nation. Who have lifted up voices often unheard using art, words, community building and policy. You have moved to a place where people from around the world are rooted and thriving in a world that finds many ways to tell them not to. They've fought job killing policies, xenophobia, redlining, police brutality, and more. Many have traveled far.

Oakland is full of teachers. I highly recommend becoming a student and embracing the opportunity to see your community differently.



45. Jeff Pollet on January 29, 2014 at 8:50 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

I would like to nominate you to write a "community piece" for this site as a response to this article! I'm gonna write the editors and suggest it. Hopefully you're interested!



46. Kate on January 29, 2014 at 8:53 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Another question to ask of Steve: Whose dreams are being fulfilled here? Neighborhood of "their" dreams or neighborhood of YOUR dreams? Big difference there. Because it's totally legit that the neighborhood of YOUR dreams include a BiRite and lush medians and zero individuals suffering from mental illnesses—but is that the dream for everyone?



47. Born in Oakland on January 29, 2014 at 9:03 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

When we purchased our home in the 70's on the Park Blvd/E. 18th major shopping area there was: a movie theatre, butcher, produce store, multiple restaurants, a book store, laundry/dry cleaners, dentists, optometrists, doctors, at least one drug store, a large Wells Fargo plus smaller banks and THREE LARGE GROCERY STORES. We had a Safeway, a Lucky and a branch of the Berkeley Coop which has bins of grains, beans, etc. Seniors Housing had been built in the neighborhood because the neighborhood was "full service and within walking distance" of residents and was pedestrian friendly. We had auto mechanics, a vibrant recreational center complete with preschool at the Borax Smith center. I recall that the only thing we were missing was a gas station. The buses ran often and public transportation in and out of the neighborhood was convenient. The E.12th and E. 14th (International Blvd) had been all but abandoned at that time and the Grand/Lakeshore shopping areas were really a shadow of what they once were and what they are again becoming.

The Lake Merritt Business Association along with multiple City agencies and officials has fought long and hard to attract services back to the area and to reduce the crime and grime that accumulated in the area over the years. Somehow I don't believe these activities should be characterized as "colonizing" or "gentrifying." Hats off to new residents who have the energy to participate and create a liveable service area which serves all the residents.

By the way, as a piece of history of the neighborhood. In the 1980's lots of the real estate in Brooklyn (yes, Brooklyn) was purchased with Hong Kong money and by the first wave of

Vietnam immigrants and the groups being “colonized” were then all the Laotian, Thai, Cambodian peoples who were moving into the neighborhood and being sponsored by churches here. It is this piece of immigrant history that drove the development of the Eastlake District and needed services.



48. Jeff Pollet on January 29, 2014 at 9:06 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

To be clear, I am nominating ACJ, above, to write another article with a somewhat different take on the neighborhood—if different community voices are welcome here, surely that would benefit the site...



49. Carlos on January 29, 2014 at 10:05 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

Wow, I won't use the G-word but...

You seem to have good intentions. Unfortunately, you are being very cavalier about the fact that this IS and WAS a lovely neighborhood LONG before you got there. How about showing respect for the diversity that exists, and the small businesses that are attempting to make a living while dealing with the mentality that you have that ignores their existence. This has NEVER been a “food desert.” My goodness, how precious of you to move into a neighborhood and decide that it doesn't have what YOU want (expensive food) so you are intent on razing what people long before you have worked hard to build, despite the fact that what you are changing will greatly affect the working class citizens who have lived in this neighborhood years before you and years after you decide it's not “Brooklyn” enough for you.

I am sure you are a good person. Think twice about what you wrote because it is greatly steeped in a mentality that is detrimental to the diversity of class and race that makes Oakland great.



50. Bi Rite Worker on January 29, 2014 at 10:06 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

As a Bi Rite worker and Oakland resident, I'm appalled that Bi Rite is the kind of store this gentrifier wants to have come here. A warning to everyone else on this forum: DO NOT LET THIS HAPPEN! Having a Bi Rite open around International would be a terrible thing to happen and would rapidly transform this neighborhood into a place safe for white yuppies like the author.



51. Matt on January 29, 2014 at 11:42 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

So, you crowdsource the community into realizing your dream neighborhood... bring in a bi rite, fix up the medians, spruce up the corners... only to turn around and repay the community with a likely rise in their rents due to your “improvements.” Your dream neighborhood is the nightmare that has caused Brooklyn to surpass San Francisco in rent prices...



52. Krista on January 29, 2014 at 11:48 am said:

[Reply ↓](#)

So many others have posted responses way better than I could stating why pretty much everything that Steve wrote in this article is crap. I am only adding my voice so that if anybody actually counts how many people are saying NO to Steve and his privileged white agenda, I am counted.

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