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Building on Grace Lee Boggs: Place-based organizing against the A's stadium

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ABSTRACT
Stadiums have been criticized as large developments with few returns to residents. Yet, most stadiums built since 2000 have garnered little community resistance. Here, we examine the unique case of Oakland, California, in which the Athletics' baseball stadium siting process was met with significant community resistance. Our study draws on Grace Lee Boggs's place-based organizing concepts to understand the impact of hyper-local framing on the campaigns. We use multiple data sources, including interviews, newspaper articles, and other primary documents to assess the circumstances under which communities oppose stadium development, and how place is conceptualized in effective mobilization efforts. We found that organizers drew on historical precedent and experiences to build networks and spur action. They also asserted multiple identities, roles, and experiences, which reflected their communities' racial/ethnic legacies. Central to their efforts was a critique of market logic's ability to care for the natural and built environment, as well as residents. The results provide implications for how community-led groups can build on Boggs's ideas to coalesce and fight for community priorities tied to large-scale developments.

KEYWORDS
Community organizing; stadiums; race/ethnicity; immigration

Introduction

Community organizing is widely recognized in urban studies as a means by which historically marginalized communities employ concerted strategies to advance social justice. In the United States, organizing frameworks are numerous and diverse. Amongst the most renowned are those put forth by Saul Alinksky, the United Farm Workers, and the National Domestic Workers Alliance (Schutz & Miller, 2015). As a field of practice, community organizing requires a repertoire of skills and knowledge predicated on relationships and political astuteness. It also involves collaborating with people embedded within community-based organizations and other community leaders to conceptualize and implement strategies to advance shared priorities.

Cities are not just backdrops to organizing efforts; they have distinct qualities that spur politicization (Nicholls & Uitemark, 2016). And increasingly, community organizing efforts operate across cities and scales (Doussard & Schrock, 2022). This article seeks to build on existing literature about community organizing by specifically examining *place-based organizing* to highlight how communities advance their priorities in an urban context. In so doing, we seek to make a clear case for place-based stakeholder status and community belonging. Accordingly, we elevate the work of Grace Lee Boggs, a philosopher, theorist, community organizer, and participant in socialist, Black, and Asian liberation movements, who wrote specifically about place-based community organizing efforts. For more than 60 years, she fought for workers' rights in the highly industrialized city of Detroit, and then she worked to rebuild it after its manufacturing base was decimated.

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Like Detroit's remaking, many urban communities today are trying to maintain place—this time, by responding to speculative, large development projects that spur gentrification and displacement. We build on Boggs's writings through an examination of a stadium proposal in Oakland, California, a unique case in which a proposed stadium was highly contested, and the stadium was successfully opposed to fill two empirical gaps. The first gap is to highlight a case study in which historically marginalized communities contested the siting of a professional sports stadium. To date, most stadiums continue to be publicly subsidized and face little community opposition (Solis & Lee, 2025). Second, the study examines the role of place in community organizing efforts. We illustrate how context and scale can be contingent on each other to advance place-based visions *and* multi-scalar visions for social, spatial, and economic justice.

Literature review

Stadiums and community impacts

Stadium developments are large infrastructure projects that typically involve public subsidies but yield few economic returns for localities. Studies over the past 30 years have shown that stadiums generate negligible public revenue, fail to create jobs or catalyze commercial development, and are not associated with increases in residents' income, educational attainment, or employment (Agha & Rascher, 2021; Austrian & Rosentraub, 2002; Baade, 1996; Hudson, 1999). Econometric analyses have further determined that the public costs of subsidizing stadiums have far outweighed public benefits (Bradbury, 2022; Bradbury et al., 2023).

While demonstrably failing to benefit cities, stadiums have also had a range of negative impacts on surrounding neighborhoods. In addition to raising concerns about new taxes and political transparency, residents have highlighted local consequences of stadium projects, including traffic congestion and loss of existing community amenities such as greenspace (Kellison, 2023). Stadiums contribute to air pollution, use vast amounts of water resources, and generate large amounts of solid waste (Grant, 2014). Residents may also experience intensified residential and commercial gentrification in surrounding neighborhoods. For instance, spaces closest to Brooklyn's Barclays Center were found to have disproportionately high rents, possibly because of speculation (Propheter, 2019). Also, proximity to 1 Center in Sacramento, California, decreased existing businesses' longevity by 53%, ostensibly due to commercial gentrification (Propheter, 2020). Several scholars have elaborated on how gentrification fueled by stadium projects has accelerated the displacement of communities of color (Spirou, 2024; Wilkins, 2016).

Yet, developers and city officials continue to regard stadiums with optimism (Graham et al., 2023). On average, cities subsidize stadiums at around $50 million per facility (Long, 2005). Furthermore, stadiums rarely face organized resistance. Only 14 of 89 sports stadiums built between 2000 and 2022 were contested by community organizations, and in only five cases did a stadium developer enter a formal, community-governed community benefits agreement (CBA), or contractual agreements between communities and developers (Solis & Lee, 2025). Community opposition to stadiums is infrequent in part because developers and city officials often select sites where they expect less resident opposition, such as industrial areas (Melaniphy, 1996) or sites where they deem resident opposition politically "acceptable" to ignore, such as low-income and nonwhite neighborhoods (Melaniphy, 1996).

While few in number, CBAs have been instrumental in combating the effects of gentrification and generating some benefits for local residents and businesses. As coalition-led efforts, they have also harnessed community power. For example, key organizations such as Strategic Action for a Just Economy and the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy helped to form the Figueroa Corridor Coalition for Economic Justice, which included more than thirty community organizations, and negotiated one of the first CBAs around the development of L.A. Live and the Staples Center in Los Angeles (Saito, 2012). The CBA included requiring living wages for 70% of jobs created, ongoing job

training programs, and 20% of new housing to be affordable (ICIC, 2025). These coalitions are key because they continue to shape negotiations with developers over major infrastructure projects, including the Los Angeles International Airport and the current NOlympics LA coalition organizing against the 2028 Summer Olympic Games over concerns of development and displacement (NOlympicsLA, 2025; Saito, 2012). Examinations of other large developments in Atlanta (Georgia), Brooklyn and Queens (New York), and Philadelphia's Chinatown (Pennsylvania) provide additional insights into the possibilities and challenges of community-sharing approaches to equitable economic development (A. X. Chen & Tobier, 2024; Propheter, 2019; Rosen, 2023; Vasilev, 2025). All of these are examples of community-led efforts to create places that are responsive to local priorities.

Place-based organizing

"Place," as opposed to physical space, is a geographically amorphous social imaginary and is co-constructed by spatialized institutions, political and economic superstructures, and various people and groups who occupy and interact within it (Martin, 2003). Urban studies scholars have explored how individuals and groups socially construct "place" in ways that solidify place-based identities and inspire collective action. For example, "place" is often a salient framework in which organizers can powerfully articulate community identities and issue narratives (Martin, 2003). Miller and Nicholls (2013) further observed that urban "places" elevate social movements: by asserting their power to create and transform places, place-based organizers can both materially and symbolically challenge existing power structures.

Scholars have investigated how community organizations employ place-based organizing to mobilize collective action and to argue their legitimacy as stakeholders in development. Martin (2003) and Nicholls (2009) notably highlighted the value of centering place-based community identity in organizing, arguing that shared place-based meanings form a basis for solidarities that can inspire collective action. Harvey (2002) further argued that place-based solidarities are the foundation for coherent structures that can be reactivated for future, ongoing, and/or larger-scale campaigns and actions. In addition, Martin (2003) described specific place-based organizing strategies in breadth and depth, highlighting how centering place helps organizers not only inspire collective action but also develop issue narratives that are legible to decision-makers. For instance, to organize diverse residents around common interests, place-based organizers focus on physical conditions and other shared everyday living experiences (Martin, 2003). In so doing, these organizations define geographic places as natural units of organizing.

We build on this body of work by using Grace Lee Boggs's theoretical framework of place-based organizing around stadium developments. Grace Lee Boggs (1915–2015) was a scholar and community organizer in the Black Power, Asian American, and labor movements. Her writings include "A Question of Place" (2000), which introduces the term *place-based civic activism* to describe an intersectional practice that empowers communities to "come together around common, local experiences." As a place-based organizer based in Detroit, Boggs (2009) rejected deficit-based thinking about communities and instead viewed cities as spaces of shared meaning and laboratories for social transformation. Using Detroit as emblematic of an unjust U.S. economic system, Boggs (2009) believed place-based organizing, practiced by independent community organizations working in solidarity across social movement space, could achieve justice for local communities as well as larger-scale systemic change.

This study builds on parallels between Boggs's work and urban studies literature. We also use Capizzo and Madden's (2022) synthesis of Boggs's writings and Boggs's (2000) essay to identify the following concepts of place-based organizing:

(1) *Place-framing: Centering place in activist narratives and community identity to ensure issue clarity for local residents and other stakeholders*. While community is a notion that does not always align onto geographic spaces (Amin, 2004), Boggs (2004) demonstrated the power of

centering *community as identity* in place-based organizing, as previously highlighted by Harvey (2002), Martin (2003), and Nicholls (2009). Capizzo and Madden (2022) view Martin's (2003) "place-framing" play out in Boggs's activism: this public relations strategy involves generating issue clarity around a problem and its potential solutions to spur collective action.

(2) *Organizing strategies: Ensuring concrete outcomes and building community power through network building*. Boggs (1988, 2004, 2011) joins Harvey (2002) in insisting that hyper-local *network building* is not at odds with the goal of building solidarity networks across geographies but rather is a precondition for doing so. As hyper-local networks build power and become more cohesive, they in turn aggregate their demands with other hyper-local networks contesting similar geographically located wrongs across the "social movement space" (Nicholls, 2009). By emphasizing *concrete outcomes*, organizers have inspired place-based collective action without attempting to resolve the contradictions of place-based identity.

(3) *Care: Suspended belief in market logics, prioritizing the health and safety of people and place*. While the first two are known elements in place-based organizing research, our findings and Bogg's writing identify this third element of care. Boggs's (2000) describes how place-consciousness combats global capitalism, which "relentlessly displaces people and abandons place because it views local communities, cities, and nations as inconveniences in the path of progress." This concept also helps organizers to envision and promote "health and safety of people and places."

Care and place-making

We situate Boggs's emphasis on care among several scholarly traditions that have advanced a care ethic. Traditionally, care work has been conceptualized as needed by children and the elderly, and its formal and informal everyday roles are typically held by women and are undervalued and under-compensated (Glenn, 2000). In these understandings, the recipients of care and the caregivers are not considered productive members of society. However, care is a needed response to the individualism of market logic and associated discourses of personal responsibility (Lawson, 2009). It involves the pursuit of individual and collective liberation from the interlinked nature of colonialism, capitalism, and racism (Finch, 2022; Hayes & Kaba, 2023).

Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (1999) seminal work on Mothers Reclaiming Our Children (Mothers ROC) organizing efforts against carcerality further develop an understanding of care by conceptualizing "political care" (p. 28) as a basis for, and a tenet of, political organizing. Their caregiving roles as mothers were the foundation for Mothers ROC political organizing and abolitionist practices. Gilmore's (1999) understanding of care:

> ... [extends] past the limits of household, kinship, and neighborhood, past the limits of gender and racial divisions of social space, to embrace the political project to reclaim children of all ages whose mothers are losing them, at a net of fifty-five Statewide per business day, into the prison system. (p. 28)

Mother's ROC reflects Wekerle and Peake's (1996) thesis that women's urban protest movements advocate on behalf of their children and families to spur broader social and spatial change.

Here, we focus on care as a characteristic of organizing efforts. Indeed, community care already exists and has been done by informal and formal community organizations to shape urban development (Moore Milroy, 1996). Community-based organizations are central to shaping "caring cities," because they have the flexibility to respond to the needs of people left out of state-based health and social services, such as unauthorized immigrants and communities (Kim & Chun, 2025). Yet, the field of planning needs to come to terms with how it only recognizes work that is tied to material production and distribution (Moore Milroy, 1996). Though care work is not new, urban studies scholars have recently strengthened their call for an ethics of care in place-making, including the need to better understand how urban governance and planning can better shape practices of care (Power & Williams, 2020). Care ought to more strongly feature in participatory processes, the natural and built

environment, and programming efforts that support intergenerational public space (Nelischer et al., 2025). In the context of these studies on care, this study highlights how community organizations continue care work features in place-based organizing against large infrastructure projects.

Data and methods

Research questions

Our study examined the following three questions. First, how was place-framing centered in Oakland community mobilization efforts? Second, how was the concept of care used by community organizers? Third, what specific community organizing strategies were used to ensure concrete outcomes and build community power in Oakland? To answer these questions, we focused on the Oakland Athletics (A's), a Major League Baseball team that began the process of looking for a new stadium site in the 2010s. This siting process lasted through 2023 and involved multiple locations throughout Oakland until the team decided to relocate to Las Vegas. This study employs a case study approach because this framework helps to assess a real-world phenomenon and context from multiple data sources that are then triangulated (Yin, 2018). More broadly, our case responds to the need for exemplars that serve as a "force of example" for human learning (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 126).

Data sources

We triangulate several primary data sources. First, we draw from newspaper articles about the A's stadium siting process and community reactions between 2012 and 2023 published by local newspapers (e.g., *East Bay Times, East Bay Express, San Francisco Chronicle, SF Gate, Mercury News)* and national newspapers. Other sources included flyers, meeting materials, letters, city council reports, economic impact reports, legislation or ordinances, documents related to draft community benefits agreements, and Laney College (Laney) newspaper articles. These documents were gathered through online searches or provided to us by interviewees.

Our semi-structured interviews were conducted with 23 participants who were involved in one of the stakeholder groups in the Oakland stadium community engagement process, including: public officials, community organizations, and businesses (see Table 1). Potential interviewees were identified as individuals named by newspaper articles, and we searched online for the contact information. We simultaneously used convenience and snowball sampling.

Community organization interviewees (11) included current and former members from Chinatown, West Oakland, labor organizations, Laney, and advocates for community organizations. Public official participants (6) were current and former members of the city council, city administrators, and port authority. Finally, business stakeholders (6) entailed consultants involved with the siting process, developers, and representatives of the A's franchise. Two business stakeholders also served on the Oakland Planning Commission.[1]

Interviews were conducted between April and August 2024 by Zoom. Interviews were about 45–60 minutes and were audio recorded. Participants were asked about their involvement in the A's stadium planning or community organizing efforts, their perspective on the three considered sites, how the A's team engaged stakeholders or the participant, organizing tactics, how site factors shaped discussions (e.g., environmental, economic, land use), and their perspective about sports teams and impacts on neighborhoods. Questions were tailored to the participant based on

Table 1. Summary of interviewee stakeholder groups.

Interview Type	Number	%
Community Organizations	11	48%
Public Officials	6	26%
Business Stakeholders	6	26%

their involvement with the siting process. The research team determined the final number of interviewees when no additional themes arose and reached a saturation point (Saunders et al., 2018).

Analytical method

Primary documents were analyzed using deductive and inductive coding in Dedoose, a qualitative coding software. The research team developed a coding dictionary through an iterative process: interviews were reviewed to develop proposed themes, and parent and child codes were then edited if needed after analyzing additional transcripts using deductive coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2014). Two coders validated the codebook for intercoder reliability. As with all research, the study's sample may reflect certain partialities; interviewees who volunteered to participate may have differing opinions than those who were not available or willing to speak about their experiences. For instance, participants who are still working for the City of Oakland may not feel comfortable participating in the study. Nonetheless, these perspectives, alongside primary and secondary materials, provide needed descriptions and interpretations that contribute to knowledge-based expansion (Flyvbjerg, 2006) on place-based organizing.

City of Oakland history and context

The stadium proposal in the City of Oakland is a useful case study because the city has a history of contestation and community organizing for racial justice, economic struggles, and equitable development. In the 19th century, Oakland became a railroad hub and attracted workers from China (Chang, 2004). It also had exclusionary housing laws that enforced racial segregation and was the first testing ground for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 because it passed laws barring people of Chinese descent from employment and housing (Chang, 2004; Zhang, 2007). The city later developed freeways and urban renewal projects, which reinforced racial segregation and disinvestment in the city core. For instance, the majority Black West Oakland neighborhood was fully walled in by multiple freeways, cutting the community off from other neighborhoods and resources, and 5,000 homes were demolished for freeway construction (Susaneck, 2024).

In response to these injustices, Oakland has been a hub of organizing and resistance. Of note, the Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 in Oakland and organized mutual aid programs (City of Oakland, n.d.). Chinese community organizing also began in 1912 with the Chinese American Citizens Alliance Oakland Lodge, which advocated for civil rights and economic opportunities, organizing social programs ever since (Yu, 2022).[2] Oakland also has a long history of union organizing. For example, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) Local 10 represent workers at the Port of Oakland, and the union played a central role in the 1934 San Francisco general strike, the 1960s boycott against South African apartheid, and the 2010 and 2017 protest of police violence and workplace racism (Pratt, 2017). This organizing history provides context for current development efforts and resistance in Oakland.

Oakland continues to experience challenges around affordability and gentrification. The city is an economic and cultural hub in the Bay Area, with a population of more than 440,000 (2020 Decennial Census). Yet, Oakland had the highest "intensity of gentrification" of any U.S. city between 2013 and 2017, in part due to its proximity to San Francisco and Silicon Valley which have high-paying professionals looking for cheaper places to live (Montojo, 2017; Richardson et al., 2020). Rising housing prices further intensified the displacement and disruption of Black residents, of which the Black population decreased from 47% in 1980 to 22% in 2022 (1980 Decennial Census; Levin, 2018). There were previous attempts to intensify development on the proposed stadium sites discussed below. In 2015, the developer UrbanCore attempted to build a 300-unit apartment tower near Lake Merritt, which was found to be illegal under state law, faced significant community backlash, and was stopped (BondGraham, 2015).

Laney is a public community college founded in 1953 and is the largest of the four Peralta Community College District schools, serving about 15,000 students, most of whom are nonwhite (Institute of Education Science, 2022; *Laney Tower* staff, 2017). Laney has also had to previously ward off intensifying development pressures: Kaiser Permanente, Children's Hospital Oakland, and the Golden State Warriors are among the entities that proposed plans to redevelop the land that houses the school's athletic complex (Howey, 2017c; Zamora, 2004). The developer Alan Dones tried to build apartments and a medical center on Laney land in 2004 to 2005 but withdrew his proposal after much community opposition (Allen-Taylor, 2005). Initially, the Peralta district chancellor saw the A's relocation to Laney as an opportunity for student internships, as well as funding for campus building repairs and to address budget shortfalls associated with declining enrollment (Howey, 2017b; Matier & Ross, 2017).[3] However, students, faculty, staff, and other members of the public voiced nearly unanimous opposition to the A's plan and subsequently formed the coalition, StAy the Right Way (BondGraham, 2017; *Laney Tower* staff, 2017).

Background of the Oakland A's and three site locations

The following provides a summary of the case study. It is important to note that it is beyond the scope of the study to provide a full detailed account of the A's stadium planning process, which included complicated negotiations at multiple sites. Here, we focus on three Oakland sites that were predominantly considered for the stadium starting from the 2010s: a site next to Laney on the eastern edge of Chinatown, Howard Terminal, and redeveloping the original Coliseum site (see Figure 1, the sites are marked with an "A"). The Athletics (A's) moved to the Coliseum stadium in Oakland in 1968 and was financed and developed by a nonprofit corporation (*San Francisco Chronicle* staff, 2021). However, the

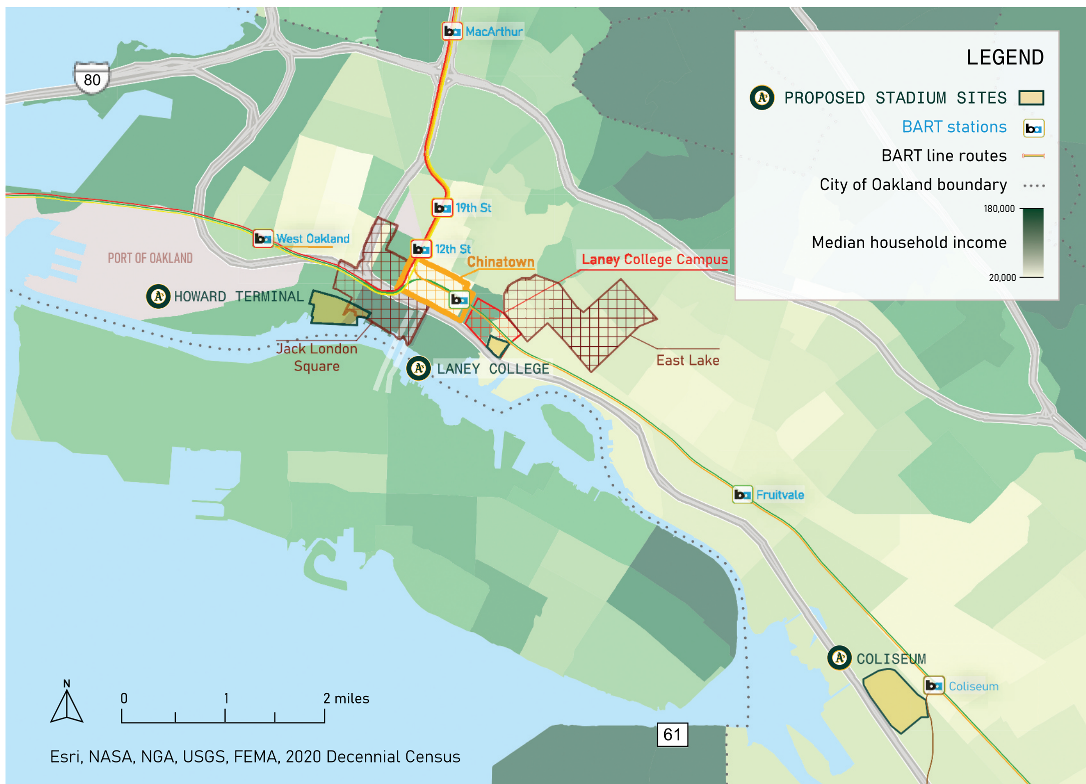

Figure 1. Map of Oakland, proposed sites, and median household income by census tract.

Coliseum began experiencing infrastructure issues from the early 2000s. There were multiple instances of sewage backups and leaks into the team's training and storage rooms in 2013 (*San Francisco Chronicle* staff, 2021). A *New York Time*s article referred to the Coliseum as "a bland, charmless concrete monstrosity" (Draper, 2017). As early as 2001, the A's were investigating other sites for the team—a private firm recommended seven sites to the Oakland Alameda County Coliseum Authority, including four urban sites and three suburban sites (HOK, 2001). By the late 2010s, the team was seeking to relocate to another site.

In August 2012, discussions began about developing Howard Terminal. However, the idea faced opposition from SSA Terminals, the on-site operator, as well as the longshoremen and maintenance worker unions, who sued the port in 2013 because more favorable terms were being offered to the baseball stadium and they would lose jobs, respectively (Bay Area News Group, 2012, 2013a).

In 2013, the owner of the A's conceded that the Coliseum will likely remain the future of the team (Bay Area News Group, 2013b). The A's lease with the Coliseum was extended for another 10 years in 2014 (Associated Press, 2014). Team ownership changed in 2016 and reports started circulating that a portion of Laney could be the A's next destination (Hickey, 2016). This was confirmed on September 12, 2017, when the team announced it had chosen the Laney site (Debolt, 2017a).

Additionally, activists from Oakland's Chinatown argued the ballpark would displace low-income renters and small businesses (BondGraham, 2017). Oakland's Chinatown sits directly west of the proposed Laney site and is among the oldest Chinatowns in the country (J. Chen, 2019).[4] Other local politicians raised concerns about traffic, real estate speculation, and displacement (Matier & Ross, 2017). Ultimately, the Peralta Board of Trustees held an emergency, closed-session meeting on December 5, 2017, and issued a statement on December 6th that the college was discontinuing its process on the Laney plan, ending the A's potential relocation to the campus (BondGraham, 2017; Howey, 2017a).

On November 30, 2018, the A's announced that they planned to develop a stadium at Howard Terminal, which sits on Oakland's downtown waterfront and the Port of Oakland—one of the busiest container ports in the U.S (Peterson et al., 2018; Port of Oakland, 2025).[5] In 2019, several concerns around contaminated soil and groundwater were raised (Matier, 2019; Veklerov, 2019). In the following year, the proposed stadium faced opposition from port operator unions and the existing port tenant, Schnitzer Steel (Debolt, 2020). The city council also struggled to negotiate with the A's for several years, particularly around affordable housing and community benefits (Sciacca & Rubin, 2021). In April 2023, the A's, having been unable to find a new home in the city, announced they would be relocating to Las Vegas (Keown, 2023).

Findings

Our findings corroborate and build upon Boggs's place-based organizing framework. Table 2 defines the three concepts and how case study findings clarify the concepts. We found that organizers asserted multiple identities, roles, and experiences, which builds on existing scholarship. For instance, neighborhoods with distinct identities such as Chinatown emphasized diverse and expansive implications for its residents, rather than focusing on one homogenous identity. Second, the case highlights concrete organizing skills by drawing on historical precedent and experiences to build networks and spur action, which echoes previous urban studies literature. Finally, the case presented how the concept of *care* was central to Oakland organizers' placed-based organizing frameworks. Care played out as a critique of the market logic of economic development, and the insistence to care for residents and the natural and built environment.

Place-framing

Interviewees and secondary data highlight how activists centered place and drew on cultural identities to ensure that their campaigns had clear goals. One aspect of this strategy was to use the hyperlocal

Table 2. Place-based organizing framework concepts and evidence in Oakland stadium case.

Concept	Definition	How Oakland organizing efforts extend or clarify concept
1. Place-framing	"Centering place in activist narratives and cultural activism to ensure issue clarity for local residents and other stakeholders" (Capizzo & Madden, 2022, p. 9; see also Boggs, 2000; Martin, 2003; Nicholls, 2009)	a. Using the hyperlocal history of community organizing to clarify campaigns b. Focusing on place and strong coalesced neighborhoods allows for working across multiple identities
2. Organizing strategies	Ensuring concrete outcomes and building community power through network building (Boggs, 1988, 2004; Boggs & Kurashige, 2011; Capizzo & Madden, 2022; Harvey, 2002)	Concrete Actions a. Enacting concrete actions helps to engage broader range of stakeholders and teaches how to do long-term organizing b. Coupling concrete actions with long-term vision and wins Network building a. Building on previous campaigns to strengthen networks b. Linking strong and weak ties through skill building c. Building networks within and across cities strengthen organizing capacity
3. Care	Suspended belief in market logics, prioritizing the health and safety of people and place (Boggs, 2000; Finch, 2022; Hayes & Kaba, 2023).	a. Having a stated opposition to the market logic of economic development b. Caring for and the maintenance of the built and natural environment c. Insisting on organizing around residents' future d. Prioritizing community elders and long-time residents and including intergenerational organizing

history of community activism. For example, interviewees frequently mentioned the importance of the Black Panthers having formed in the city—which was a source of pride and tradition for activism. One West Oakland organizer described:

> What's unique about Oakland is the history of resistance and resilience . . . people are ready to mobilize when something is happening in their neighborhood. I mean, this is the birthplace of the Black Panther Party, the Black Lives Matter movement. There's so many organizers and activists in the area.

A Chinatown organizer similarly noted that "the Black Panthers, as part of the civil rights movement . . . is, I'd say, [the] DNA of the city." As a result of this legacy, the interviewee continued that if there are stakeholders "running counter to the interest of vulnerable populations, there are leaders in the community who will object, and depending on how serious the impact is, [they'll] inform the level of activism that has to take place." An interviewee associated with Laney succinctly summarized, "It's Oakland. We're the home of the Black Panthers. The community is very engaged." This pride creates a strong, coalesced identity for organizers.

In addition to the centrality of the Black Power movement, Oakland organizations emphasized multiple identities and neighborhoods to explain how the stadium would impact residents. This place-framing approach reflects Boggs's (2000) assertion that place-based civic activism can "recognize the multiple ways that we relate to one another in our communities," unlike narratives based on one identity, such as race or gender. She listed "neighbors, housewives, working parents, parents of schoolchildren, elders, children, sufferers from asthma and other disabilities, consumers, pedestrians, commuters, bus riders, citizens" as all central to a place's relational composition (Boggs, 2000). Place-based organizers achieve issue clarity and specificity by focusing on everyday lived experiences in the physical environment that are "inherently spatial and geographically located" (Martin, 2003, p. 747). Accordingly, organizers heavily emphasized practical, "geographically located" disruptions to the everyday lives of Laney students and Chinatown residents, such as parking, traffic, pedestrian fatalities, noise, light pollution, trash and pollution in Lake Merritt, and the ability to afford housing in the

neighborhood. Similarly, organizers at the Howard Terminal site highlighted the risk of housing unaffordability and displacement of existing residents.

The community organizers' emphasis on the implications of stadium-induced change for different residents' identities, roles, and experiences counters the idea that racial/ethnic identity was a unifying conduit. That this multiplicity of experiences exist in place is not new; Massey (1991), for example, argued that "place" is typically home to many communities and to interactions between people with varying relationships with the place. Oakland organizers illustrate how this can also be the basis for effective mobilization.

The concept of centering community identities in messaging and engagement was corroborated by multiple data sources. First, in their external messaging, community organizers presented coalesced community identities around Chinatown, Laney, West Oakland, East Oakland, and what it means to be an organizer in Oakland. In notes written down about what to include in press releases, several points mention "raise visibility of cultural neighborhoods, raise visibility of Laney Community as historic and cultural landmark and educational landmark," and "raise visibility of Lake Merritt advocacy groups and artists" (StAy the Right Way Coalition, personal communication, May 7, 2024). Organizers consistently used these messages. For instance, a Chinatown organizer was quoted in an *East Bay Times* article as describing Chinatown as a place where "immigrants and refugees have spent generations building communities where people can thrive . . . . Our friends, churches, doctors, and stores are here. We will not allow the A's owners to destroy the sanctuaries we've built" (Debolt, 2017b).

Similar messages were distributed in protests against the Laney site. For example, Figure 2 displays a flyer that was used to galvanize Laney campus stakeholders against the stadium and Board of Trustees. The flyer lists five reasons to oppose the stadium, including language on preserving the culture and small businesses of Chinatown, the Eastlake neighborhood, and the 5th Avenue artist colony; protecting Lake Merritt; and centering student access to campus (StAy the Right Way Coalition, personal communication, April 4, 2024). Of note, the flyer also lists out the coalition members at the bottom of the flyer to highlight how many groups are against the stadium, including 15 named nonprofits. Organizers also gathered input to acknowledge the diversity of residents. For instance, the organizers used petitions in multiple languages to mobilize English-, Chinese-, and Vietnamese-speaking stakeholders. They were one of many vehicles used to spur action amongst Laney staff or students, tenants, small business owners, A's fans, and others in the community.

Organizing strategies

The third concept was organizing strategies that included concrete actions and network building to ensure that activists had tangible community input and outcomes while also strengthening their campaigns. Organizers exemplified Boggs's (1988) idea of "concrete next steps" in which community members and allies could participate in stadium opposition. For instance, a mobilization plan was developed for Laney and Chinatown constituents that lists specific steps to "celebrate community, build power" and prepare for the Board of Trustees meeting (StAy the Right Way Coalition, personal communication, April 4, 2024). Similarly, interviewees discussed a range of participatory actions, including carrying signs and speaking at public meetings (see Figure 3), signing petitions, sending letters and e-mails to decision-makers, and marching on the Peralta Community College administration building. Organizers also assigned some tasks to specific stakeholders to keep them engaged. For instance, a Laney organizer who explained that "we all have our individual strategy. For instance, the Chinatown [coalition] was big on press releases and public relations, protesting. Mine was going after the trustees, giving them data points to stand up in court." Other examples included tasking youth organizers with leading canvasses and tabling, and neighborhood councils and associations were asked to administer community surveys.

Several interviewees elaborated on the importance of concrete actions and clearly defined next steps. A Laney organizer shared that a focus on concrete actions empowered "people [who] did not

5 Reasons A's Stadium Next to Laney Doesn't Make Sense

1◆ PRESERVE LANEY COLLEGE. Student access to Laney severely impacted on game days (traffic, loss of parking, overcrowded BART and bus). Student access to College of Alameda also disrupted by game day gridlock. Laney and Peralta enrollment declines. Also disruption to educational environment from thousands of fans walking through/next to Laney, negative impact alcohol consumption by fans, noise from games and fireworks. 81 home games, with start-times between 12:35 pm and 7:05 pm. Concerts and other stadium events.

2◆ SAVE OUR COMMUNITIES. Surrounding neighborhoods and their culture would disappear. Oakland's historic Chinatown, Eastlake neighborhood, 5th Avenue artist colony. Already soaring rents worsened as stadium-related development continue to threaten and displace existing housing, retail, small businesses and artists. Research on downtown stadium developments shows little economic benefit but large negative impacts.

3◆ PROTECT LAKE MERRITT. Beautiful Lake Merritt and Channel Park overwhelmed by stadium. Oakland taxpayers have spent millions to restore this parkland. Birds and other wildlife have returned. Restored habitat near one of the densest parts of Oakland is now enjoyed by students, community members, visitors and tourists. Stadium events and traffic will overwhelm Channel Park as it flows through Laney. Golden Gate Audubon Society opposes a stadium at Laney.

4◆ PREVENT 880 GRIDLOCK. Traffic nightmare for Oakland and Alameda. Game day traffic will back up 880 and 980 freeways, block Oakland street traffic and access to Alameda bridges and tunnel. Predictions for high public transportation use to Laney stadium are exaggerated.

5◆ MILLIONS IN PUBLIC MONEY DEMANDED BY A's. While the A's have committed to privately financing the stadium's construction, the A's expect public money to be spent on "utility and transportation infrastructure" for the stadium and its related development project (see A's September 12 letter to Peralta chancellor, www.oaklandballpark.com). Oakland and Alameda County taxpayers still owe more than a hundred million dollars from existing stadium and arena deals.

How many millions will each infrastructure project cost?
- Water and sewer upgrades to handle 35,000 stadium-goers
- Electricity upgrades to power the stadium
- Road and freeway upgrades
- Enlarge nearby BART stations (both Lake Merritt and 12th Street)

Stay The Right Way

Stay the Right Way Coalition is a growing coalition of small businesses, students, faculty, workers, tenants, seniors, artists and nonprofits, including the Oakland Chinatown Coalition, Save Laney Land for Students Coalition, Coalition of Advocates for Lake Merritt (CALM), 5th Avenue Community Waterfront Alliance, Vietnamese American Community Center of the East Bay (VACCEB), Causa Justa: Just Cause, Eastlake United for Justice, and Oakland Tenants Union. The Chinatown Coalition includes Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN), East Bay Asian Leadership Development Corporation, Asian Pacific Islander Legal Outreach, AYPAL: Building API Community Power, Chinese Community United Methodist Church, Family Bridges, Inc., Filipino Advocates for Justice, Oakland Asian Cultural Center and Oakland Chinatown Lions Foundation. You can reach us at Staytherightway@gmail.com. 10/31/17

Figure 2. Flyer against the A's moving to the Laney site.

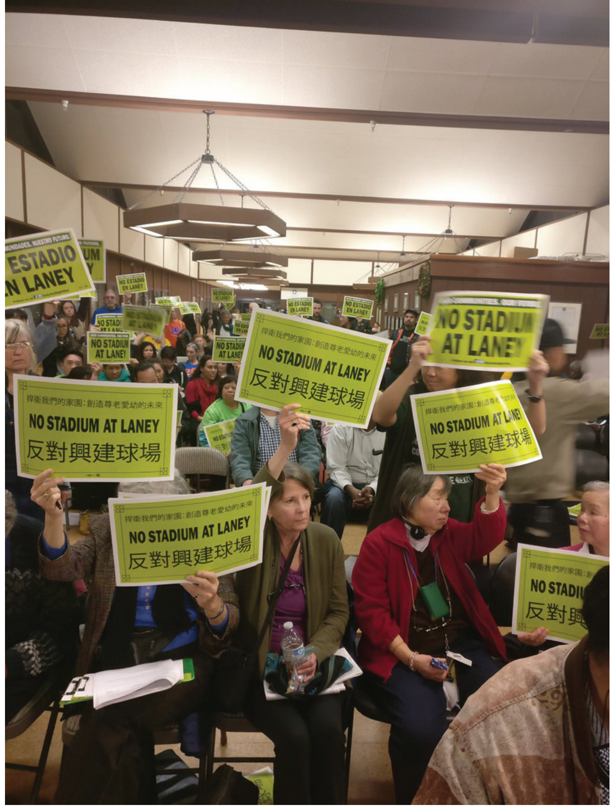

Figure 3. Community protest at the Peralta Board of Trustees meeting.

always have all of their politics parsed out . . . to continue supporting in some ways." Because actions and desired outcomes were clear, specific, and tangible, people needed only to support the current concrete action to be willing and able to participate. In addition, mobilizing around concrete steps was used to help teach how to do long-term organizing. As a Laney student organizer explained, "Some of it was the structures of how to organize: weekly meetings, who's doing what, delegation. There's that phrase that people will say—no fakes and no flakes—so [teaching] that follow-through [is] needed."

Several interviewees highlighted the power of concrete actions in conjunction with long-range organizing activities, such as future site visioning and learning organizing skills. As one Chinatown organizer explained, "it is really hard to organize as an 'anti' position . . . people want to fight for the things they want to see instead." As such, bringing residents together to talk about a future vision for the space was crucial in motivating the community to commit to "taking a hard stance on [saying] no [to the stadium]," even when developers offered concessions. The interviewee further explained:

> The no isn't just cause I wanna stop something from happening. The no is really because our community members want to live in a different community. They have a vision of . . . having more community-shared spaces, community-governed spaces . . . . And that's what we're saying yes to. So saying no to this stadium megadevelopment is a way for us to stay on path for the vision that we do have.

Coalition organizers similarly discussed the power of future site visioning as a concrete action in which to engage participants to maintain momentum and as the focus shifted across sites. After the A's abandoned the Laney proposal, organizers recognized the need for concrete actions to push for community-led development at the Coliseum and "reinvigorate the coalition." As such, organizers used surveys to engage residents in articulating how they wanted to see the Coliseum site used, while also offering other participatory "next steps" such as distributing petitions and gathering signatures.

Similarly, a labor organizer mentioned the importance of coupling long-term visioning to dissuade similar proposals in the future after the Laney proposal ended: "We still had an action on the chancellor and asked, 'Can you promise that you're not gonna consider this again? And, if something like this comes up, [would] you actually talk to us as a community?'" While they wanted to celebrate the immediate win of blocking the stadium at Laney, this participant also thought it was important to have a "long-time win of what the standards and commitments are that [Laney] have to uphold for us."

Finally, interviewees echoed Boggs (1988, 2004, 2011) and Harvey (2002) in emphasizing the importance of hyperlocal networks in making organizing possible while also adding that organizing is in turn an important catalyst for network building. Both dynamics were highlighted in that many of the networks that facilitated stadium organizing in Oakland were built during prior organizing actions. For instance, organizing around Laney and Chinatown was preceded by a campaign against an earlier contentious development in the area called East 12th Street, which had brought the community together and prepared participants to mobilize against development projects. Other organizers highlighted how local network-building had occurred during larger-scale, citywide and even nationwide campaigns, such as Occupy Oakland and Green New Deal organizing.

Participants highlighted how network building allows people who have participated in past actions, in which they gained organizing skills and experiences, to then teach those skills and share those experiences with others in their hyperlocal networks. One Laney organizer explained how participants who had acquired "bedrock organizing skills" during Occupy and other actions were able to build leadership capacity in the stadium opposition coalition by "[teaching organizing] structures" while also sharing leadership roles in meetings. Another Laney interviewee shared how coming together with younger organizers introduced them to inclusive organizing praxes, such as everyone saying their pronouns at the beginning of meetings.

A strong ecosystem of community leaders and diverse organizations was central to network building within neighborhoods and across Oakland. For example, Chinatown was in part able to organize effectively because of the density of community organizations to join the coalitions. A public official interview explained:

> It is not like other Chinatowns where people were originally immigrants, and once they become acculturated they move to the suburbs. [Oakland] Chinatown has remained a vibrant community because of the different waves of immigration . . . . It's one of the few Chinatowns where there are a lot of nonprofits. It is very, very well organized to that extent—it's got a lot of community.

These place-based networks were not just informal relationships; in all three neighborhoods, entities came together under the banner of a named coalition: United Oakland Coalition in the Coliseum; StAy the Right Way in Laney/Chinatown, and East Oakland Stadium Alliance in Howard Terminal. Among other things, this advanced multiple community priorities. A West Oakland organizer pointed out how the bringing together of different entities and priorities was reflected in meeting attendance:

> [There were] meetings where we've had developers and community at the table, an affordable housing developer, elected officials were there from the city, county and state level, in addition to as many community people as we could have, and it was done on a church property, so we had a faith component as well. So we really tried to combine multiple forms of organizing at one time.

Place-based networks advanced the coalitions' stadium campaigns, as well as other community efforts and priorities, including those pertaining to housing, environmental justice, and labor.

Organizers' network building happened between neighborhoods too. Interviewees followed the siting decision-making process in different neighborhoods and conceptualized the importance of this work in working to advance other neighborhoods' goals. For instance, a Chinatown organizer explained:

> We were trying to be principled in the way that we moved through our work where at the end of the day, Howard Terminal is about West Oakland, Coliseum is about East Oakland. Whatever [the communities] decide is what we'll support. In Howard Terminal, there was a lot of stuff around CBAs . . . we're gonna be a part of that conversation and, from our positioning, be clear about these are the things that need to be addressed that are

> Chinatown-specific. But at the end of the day, West Oakland matters more [and] will be impacted more [at Howard], and we want to make sure those goals are [advanced] first, in addition to what we can win.

Interviewees clarified their parallel experiences with disinvestment and shared struggles, as well as their susceptibility to further marginalization through a planned stadium. In addition, this quotation highlights how organizers supported each other to adhere to principles of community autonomy for each site-specific effort. When negotiations took place for Howard Terminal, Chinatown organizers wrote comments in response to the Draft Environmental Impact Review advocate for West Oakland-specific issues, including wind impact and dust that could lower property values while also advocating for traffic mitigation that would impact Chinatown, West Oakland, and Downtown Oakland more broadly (Oakland Chinatown Coalition, 2021). Through relationships within and across place, organizers were more effectively able to undertake the concrete strategies that ultimately shaped the planning process.

Care

Care, as conceptualized by Gilmore (1999), Moore Milroy (1996), and others, is a central feature of efforts to challenge capitalism's exploitation of people and communities. Similarly, in her theorization of place-based consciousness, Boggs (2000) noted:

> While global capitalism doesn't give a damn about the people or the natural environment of any particular place because it can always move on to other people and other places, place-based civic activism is concerned about the health and safety of people and places.

A suspended belief in the market logic of economic development was echoed by Oakland organizers in multiple ways, including one Chinatown organizer's perspective that the A's should have stayed at the Coliseum stadium:

> They should just stay where they are and invest in the Coliseum. They should make it better for what they need it to be. Also, East Oakland is a predominantly Black and Latino neighborhood in Oakland, highly disinvested in and has some of the highest rates of crime, poverty, etc . . . . The way we saw it was like, oh, the promise of a Coliseum back in, I think the '50s or '60s when it was developed, was to really reinvigorate that area and neighborhood. And it never did.

Instead of trying to maximize profits for developers, organizers explained that the stadium could be used to still revitalize East Oakland.

In addition, organizers highlighted the potential consequences of new stadium development. For example, Laney students held as one of their slogans, "Laney for Education *Not* Gentrification," (Figure 4). In a letter of opposition from the Oakland Chinatown Coalition, they noted:

> More and more large-scale market rate development is being approved while private developers are buying up previously affordable property at accelerating rates. We know that the stadium will only exacerbate these current challenges, boost displacement, reduce currently affordable housing and leasing opportunities for merchants, further overburden publicly accessible open space, worsen traffic congestion, eliminate parking vacancies for residents and customers, worsen air quality, increase garbage and litter, and threaten both our safety and health. (StAy the Right Way Coalition, personal communication, April 4, 2024)

They are also skeptical of the economic opportunities the stadium might generate for residents. A Laney student critiqued the marketed job opportunities that the stadium would generate, noting, "We need to see these jobs for what they really are: opportunities for cheap labor" (*Laney Tower* staff, 2017).

Second, Boggs's place-based organizing included caring for each other and the environment, and Oakland organizers reflected this concept in multiple ways. First, interviewees emphasized that caring for the existing natural environment and public infrastructure should take precedence over new, large-scale development. Organizers expressed concerns for air and water quality, pollution, climate-changed induced hazards including sea-level rise, and migratory bird routes

LANEY FOR EDUCATION *NOT* GENTRIFICATION

***NO* BALLPARK NEXT TO LANEY COLLEGE**

Please attend
The Peralta Board of Trustees Meeting
Tuesday 9/12/17 at 6:30 P.M.
Peralta District Offices, 333 East 8th Street
(across the street from the Laney Athletic Fields)

If the A's build a ballpark next to Laney, students will face:

- **Construction Noise and Air Pollution**
- **Ballgame and Traffic Noise**
- **Decreased Access to Parking**
- **Skyrocketing Rents in Surrounding Communities**
- **Displacement of Local Community Residents**
- **As upscale restaurants, shops and apartments expand,**
  → WILL A BALLPARK REPLACE LANEY COLLEGE?

PERALTA BOARD OF TRUSTEES:
TELL THE A's TO REMAIN ROOTED IN THEIR HOME
AT THE COLISEUM.

SAVE LANEY FOR STUDENTS!

For more information, email laney4students@gmail.com

Figure 4. "Laney for education, not gentrification" flyer.

along the Oakland seashore. For example, the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Howard Terminal documented that the Chinatown Coalition was concerned about "net zero GHG and reduction of other pollution." Organizers also critiqued the local history of environmental degradation by pointing out that the Peralta Community College District had failed to address toxic plumes in the soil since 2013. Organizers also called for proactively organizing around economic opportunities for current residents and young people's future. For instance, one Chinatown organizer explained:

> There's this idea that there's only one way to get out of poverty or move out of these working-class conditions, when, in fact, there's a lot that can be built in our communities to help us survive and grow together . . . . [We can't] get so caught up on the new shiny things as the opportunity to, like, fix our economy, or like, bring in more economy . . . . How can we actually invest in our current assets or infrastructure and use that as a way to boost our economy and opportunities?

Community organizers called for union jobs, employment and career-development opportunities for young people, investment in existing infrastructure, including transportation and green spaces, and environmental protections. Most were skeptical that the A's would deliver these priorities and were ultimately proven right, providing another case in point of traditional economic development's lack of care for a place and its people.

Third, care was extended to prioritizing elders and long-time residents and how organizers worked across multiple generations. For instance, a Laney organizer described how Chinatown organizers "[saved] seats for some of the elders from Chinatown because they came [to meetings], because they care so much." Throughout organizing efforts, community elders were referenced as authorities on the impact of development. Black elders in West Oakland who had lived through urban renewal were able to speak authoritatively on how a stadium could impact affordability and displace existing renters. Organizers highlighted how these longtime residents had lived through past geographically located events, injustices, and developments that had transformed the neighborhood, and that their wisdom as to how a stadium would impact the community should therefore be respected.

Community organizers also engaged younger residents as part of keeping the campaign intergenerational, which in turn also informed organizers. As this interviewee continued to describe, having meetings with younger people around the Laney site was "the first time I was exposed to the practice of saying your pronouns at the beginning of a meeting, so that changed my perspective on that. It's energizing for me ... I remember being younger and being very politically energetic." These multigenerational engagements formed part of a broader relational strategy that aimed to have a material impact on stadium planning efforts.

Conclusion

This case study on community opposition to the A's stadium in Oakland has implications for urban planning scholarship and practice. Most significantly, it adds to literature on how place-based organizing efforts physically shape the natural and built environment. The siting of the stadium would have dramatically shaped Oakland. Warding off the stadium was a refusal of extractive globalization and the financialization of housing and land, which have created immense gentrification pressures in Oakland. The win against the A's stadium was also an affirmation of residents' desire to stay in and advance their vision for their neighborhoods. As previously described, these coalitions last beyond the momentary development, supporting further coalition and capacity building of community organizations—whether in the case study presented here in Oakland or in other cities (NOlympics, 2025; Saito, 2012). These organizing strategies are integral to how communities assert their priorities in the long-term and in the same neighborhood. At the same time, residents and community organizations lost out in severed relationships and the breaking of community trust with developers and city officials. While community organizers work relationally, these experiences of combating infrastructure do not help planners gain their trust.

The case also provides insights on how community organizing is sharpened and reified by place-framing and care. We highlight Grace Lee Boggs's place-based organizing concepts, which are aligned with other urban studies literature on lessons for how community organizing can be strengthened (Capizzo & Madden, 2022; Martin, 2003). Applying her concepts to the case study demonstrates the importance of neighborhood-level identities that recognize hyper-local power and issues that affect multiple communities. Having a coalesced identity that was tied to the history of Oakland and its diverse neighborhoods solidified community organizers' messages and how they engaged residents—including engagement of vulnerable and intergenerational populations. In other words, this case shows how a strong Oakland identity embraces relational and diverse identities that capture the intersectionality of residents. Oakland organizations would not be as successful if they focused on one identity because it would have undermined the coalitions. Similar principles may be applicable in other cities, particularly "super-diverse" cities, in which multi-ethnic populations may work together

(as in Oakland) or against each other while organizing around urban inequities (see the example of Queens, New York Allison, 2025).

Furthermore, while care ought to be an aim in planning practice (Nelischer et al., 2025; Power & Williams, 2020), the case illustrates how placed-based organizing efforts already practice care. Boggs and the Oakland organizers' emphasis on care reflects Mattern's (2018) interpretation of care scholarship: "We care for things not because they produce value, but because they already have value." Care included a trenchant commitment to protect existing community members, future generations, and the natural environment. This was pursued through a relational approach *and* an insistence on tangible planning priorities.

Lastly, the study provides a framework for future studies to understand how organizers worked and networked across cities. While it is beyond this study to understand how Oakland organizations connected with other places such as Philadelphia, future studies can examine how organizers fought for community benefits tied to stadium proposals. As Nicholls (2009) describes, a "social movement space" includes multiple places with place-based organizing. Future studies can continue to provide insights on how place-based organizing efforts are countering extractive globalization of the financialization of housing and land with visions for community health and well-being.

Notes

1. A total of 68 individuals were contacted for the study. Twelve individuals declined to be interviewed. The remaining 33 potential interviewees did not respond to requests for interviews.
2. Other notable community organizers from Oakland include Hernan Gallegos, Alex Zermeno, and Arabella Martinez and Latinx community organizations including The Unity Council and UnidosUS (East Bay Community Foundation, 2022). Indigenous resistance began against early settlers and continues with current organizing to increase access to ancestral lands and manage habitats (Gomez–Van Cortright, 2022).
3. The Peralta Community College District has undergone several investigations by the *San Francisco Chronicle* and an Alameda County grand jury because it was suspected of fund mismanagement, such as concerns that the district used public funds for "travel expenses and questionable contracts" (*Laney Tower* staff, 2017, p. 4).
4. In the 1960s, Bay Area Rapid Transit built the Lake Merritt light rail station and parking lots by demolishing three blocks in Chinatown, which included roughly 75 houses, a church, and an orphanage (Huang, 2011).
5. Howard Terminal is owned by the Port of Oakland but has not been used for port operations since 2013; the site is currently used for storage and to stage trucks (Port of Oakland, 2024).

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