

Taming the Wild West in the Late 1940s

Suburban Progressives in the San Francisco Bay Area

ABSTRACT In late 1945, a group of outraged citizens in the small city of El Cerrito formed a “Good Government League” to challenge the gambling and liquor interests who controlled City Hall. In the next few years the League achieved all of its agenda: a city manager plan, civil service reform, and the end of wide-open gambling. A movement like this was fairly typical of the Progressive Era. But the city in question was not a turn-of-the-century metropolis like New York or Chicago. These events happened in the late 1940s in a small bedroom community located just to the north of Berkeley. Within a few years, El Cerrito transformed its reputation from “Little Reno” to the squeaky-clean “City of Homes.” As a case study, the El Cerrito story is interesting for a number of reasons. Most importantly, it highlights how development in the San Francisco Bay Area has involved a regional periodization that differs from what we might traditionally associate with suburban growth. The city’s Old West heritage was a major source of political conflict, while the activism of the city’s new middle class contrasts with what sociologists called the politically quiescent “Organization Men” of the era’s “Lonely Crowd.” The El Cerrito experience also lends insight into why the Bay Area has remained politically liberal since 1945. The city’s reformers embraced much of the language and platform of the turn-of-the-century progressives. But they also lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War, and desired most of all to make public policy that would ensure economic security and equal opportunity. Their emphasis on an active public sector left a legacy that can still be felt today. **KEYWORDS** California History, American West, American Studies, California Studies, San Francisco History

THE BASIC facts of the story would have excited any muckraker of the Progressive Era. A group of outraged citizens forms a “Good Government League” to challenge the gambling and liquor interests who control City Hall. The reformers demand a recall election, and their “men of character”—a slate of managers and professionals—oust not only the mayor but the entire city council. In the next few years, the League achieves nearly all of its agenda, including civil service reform, a city manager plan, and the end of wide-open gambling.

This storyline was typical of the early 1900s. But the city in question was not a turn-of-the-century metropolis like New York or Chicago. These events happened in the late 1940s in the small bedroom community of El Cerrito, California, located just to the north of Berkeley. Within a few years, El Cerrito transformed its reputation from a “Little Reno,” notorious for its vices, to the squeaky-clean “City of Homes.”

As a case study, El Cerrito highlights how development in the San Francisco Bay Area has involved historical timelines that differ from what we might traditionally associate with suburban growth. As will be seen, the city’s Old West heritage was a major source of political conflict, while the activism of the city’s new middle class contrasts with what contemporary sociologists called the politically quiescent “Organization Men” of the era’s “Lonely Crowd.”¹ The El Cerrito experience also lends insight into why the Bay Area has remained politically liberal since the end of World War II. The city’s reformers embraced much of the language and platform of the turn-of-the-century Progressives. But they also lived through the Great Depression and the Second World War, and desired most of all to make public policy that would ensure economic security and equal opportunity. Their emphasis on an active public sector and civic participation left a legacy that can still be seen and felt today.

Although interpretations of postwar suburbia have evolved considerably over the years, most have been unfavorable. For too long, the late 1940s and 1950s have served as the dull, conservative, and mass-consumerist foil for discussions of the more exciting and activist 1960s. More recently, historians have linked the decades of the late twentieth century to a more cohesive narrative, examining the era for insight into the state of race relations and civic culture in the United States at the turn of the twenty-first century.² This work, based mainly on evidence from East Coast and midwestern cities, provides a bleak assessment of the postwar suburbs, identifying their development as a critical factor in the disintegration of the country’s urban downtowns, the unraveling of its welfare state, and the re-segregation of its communities.³

The history of El Cerrito runs counter to much of this narrative. Since 1945, the city has remained politically liberal, become more racially diverse, and enjoyed high levels of civic engagement, while the city’s retail center and public services, which originated in the 1950s, are still vital today. Being located in one of the most economically robust regions in the country certainly has helped. But prosperity alone does not explain El Cerrito and the region’s political progressivism, and only underscores the need for further study of the Bay Area’s distinctiveness.

Three important moments in El Cerrito’s political life during the years 1945 to 1960 highlight the city’s development. First and foremost is the formation of a powerful consensus among the city’s newest residents. To transform El Cerrito into the “City of Homes,” a variety of constituencies, including homeowners, veterans, merchants, and even members of the Communist Party, had to do battle with an “Old Guard” that ran the city much like a Wild West boomtown. This consensus generated an assertive approach to public investment, one that built schools, streets, parks, and many other important community resources that still serve city residents today.

A second important event was the creation of a cooperative preschool by a group of young mothers. At the height of the baby boom, these women pursued their own

progressive agenda, providing affordable care to hundreds of local families. Belying the June Cleaver stereotype of the 1950s housewife, their approach to early childhood education anticipated the core values of the social and cultural movements in the decade that followed.

The third and perhaps most eye-opening of these events is the development of El Cerrito Plaza, one of the first modern shopping malls in the East Bay. The city's reformers encouraged developers to build the mall in order to broaden the city's tax base and fund important programs and services for the community. The Plaza's new businesses, in turn, were locally based and took their relationship to the city very seriously.

Together, these events represent only a small portion of the city's many efforts in the postwar era. The new residents faced formidable challenges. Between 1940 and 1960, several of the Bay Area's suburban counties quadrupled in population. In El Cerrito, the number of residents jumped from 6,100 to 25,500.⁴ The vast majority of these newcomers were not from San Francisco or other major cities, but from less-urbanized areas of California and the northern United States. In El Cerrito, they faced not only a complete lack of infrastructure but also an entrenched set of interests that opposed anything resembling a community for young families.

In important ways, the El Cerrito example prefigures our own times. Through grass-roots organizing and a strong commitment to the public sector, the city's reformers were able to accomplish what many local officials across the country are attempting in the present-day—to pursue an active public policy agenda in the void left by a polarized Washington. In 1954, the city manager of El Cerrito was able to express a satisfaction with local government that seems almost unthinkable today. “El Cerrito is a community that not only dreams big dreams, but it is also one that seems to have the knack of making them come true.”⁵ In today's political environment, where gridlock has prevented creative policy approaches at the federal level, it seems worthwhile to find out why a small city manager could feel so good.

To understand the development of San Francisco's suburbs, it is important to place them in the context of the region's western past. Up until the 1920s and Prohibition, El Cerrito reflected the history and changing demography of much of the Bay Area. For centuries populated by the Ohlone Indians, the area comprising the present-day city did not come under the control of the Spanish mission system until the late eighteenth century. With Mexican independence in 1821, the missions were abolished and a large land grant was awarded to a soldier of the exploration period, Don Francisco Castro. Castro and his children built an adobe mansion at what today is the city's center, where they lived in the much-mythologized Californio style. This genteel comfort lasted only a generation, however, for the Gold Rush and its hordes of newcomers began to challenge and defraud the family of its property.⁶

The new American community that emerged was finally incorporated in 1917 as the City of El Cerrito (“little hill” in Spanish) with a population of fourteen hundred. It was not until 1921 that the city had its first paved road, and up until the 1920s ranchers still guided their cattle herds down the city's main street.⁷

During Prohibition, however, the community shed its sleepy reputation and carved out a niche for itself as a center for bootlegging and legalized gambling. As one resident recalled,

“you could tell cars driving up and down San Pablo Avenue with the rear end dragging on the ground . . . you knew the trunk was full of booze.” Cafes and clubs that served as fronts for casino games and slot machine parlors sprouted up almost immediately. By the mid-1920s, El Cerrito was known as “Little Reno” or “Little Monte Carlo,” and was home to such colorful establishments as the It Club, The Cave, the Club Kona, the El Rio Club, and the Six Bells.⁸

Though ramshackle at first, these operations soon reflected the reach and influence of professional gambling interests. Reno-connected “Big Bill” Pechart, for example, ran three full-service casinos and several thousand slot machines in the area. Most imposing was his headquarters, a “Citadel” equipped with bulletproof doors, guard dogs, and a safe reportedly containing a million dollars in cash. Big Bill also converted the Castro family’s adobe hacienda into a high-class casino. In the mansion’s ballroom, now illuminated by soft blue lights, “a tuxedoed and evening-gowned clientele played for high stakes to the murmur of the soft-voiced croupiers.”⁹

Fittingly, the city’s most prominent structure in the 1930s was the demurely named El Cerrito Kennel Club, a dog-racing stadium that could seat three thousand people.

The track, where “thousands of people . . . left millions of dollars with the puppies,” was managed by John J. “Blackjack” Jerome, a former strikebreaker for hire. Ten races were held each night, drawing capacity crowds from all over the state. Bookmaking operations grew up



El Cerrito had a well-deserved reputation as a wide-open town, starting with Prohibition and lasting through the Second World War. Called “Little Reno” and “Little Monaco,” the city was home to a racy nightlife that included bootlegging, casinos, cocktail lounges, and the El Cerrito Kennel Club, a dog racing stadium that seated three thousand.

Program Courtesy of El Cerrito Historical Society; and *El Cerrito Journal*, April 5, 1945.

along with the club. One outfit used a hamburger stand as a front, but felt no need to hide the several phone lines that ran out from the kitchen, connecting the bookmakers to racetracks across the country.¹⁰

The city's effort to police all this activity was minimal. For most of Prohibition, El Cerrito had no police force at all, and when a department was formed in 1927, it consisted of a police chief and three patrolmen, hardly sufficient to monitor the many illegal activities in town. Most glaring was the city's close relationship to the Kennel Club. The mayor himself held a salaried position at the track, while the chief of police and patrolmen "moonlighted" as security guards. Only through the action of state authorities did the city's gambling industry go into brief decline. Earl Warren, California's attorney general at the time, forced the Kennel Club to shut down in 1938 and the area's casinos to close soon afterward.¹¹

With the U.S. entry into World War II, however, prosperity quickly returned to the wide-open town, as hundreds of thousands of defense industry workers and servicemen and women poured into the Bay Area overnight. El Cerrito enjoyed a perfect location during the region's "second gold rush."¹² It was an easy commute from the many military bases, factories, and shipyards churning out war materiel. Business was never better, and nightclubs and cocktail lounges were now the most popular hotspots. One stretch of city blocks became known as the "Little White Way," offering dazzling floorshows and such future stars as Nat King Cole, while dance halls like Sally Rand's, featuring the famous stripper, offered a mix of country and western, big band swing, and rhythm and blues performers. In 1945, the El Cerrito directory listed twenty-two liquor taverns, seven poker clubs, and only four churches.¹³

But the city's greatest value to the war effort was its undeveloped land, which was so desperately needed for defense-worker housing. Between 1940 and 1945, the city's population nearly tripled to sixteen thousand, and more than half of these new residents lived in temporary housing. On the site of the former Kennel Club, for example, the federal government managed a trailer park with six hundred mobile homes.¹⁴ Most of the newcomers were not gamblers, but hard-working migrants from across the northern United States. Though many were industrial workers, at least half enjoyed middle-class incomes as tradesmen and professionals and were able to purchase their own modest, single-family homes. All had experienced the deprivation and turmoil of the Depression and World War II. By war's end, it was clear that most would want to settle permanently in the Bay Area.

In late March 1945, as the Allies were pressing toward Berlin, *Life* magazine published an amusing story from El Cerrito.¹⁵ A housing contractor with a flair for showmanship built an entire home in less than thirty-five minutes. The attractive 700-square-foot house was prefabricated, and the event publicized a new type of concrete that could be used for walls and even a roof. *Life* featured a spread on the construction, with photos documenting each step of the assembly. Not only were the doors and windows already in place, but also the flower bushes were in full bloom, and an open cigarette box sat invitingly on the living room coffee table. A final touch was to have the milk delivered just as a young family moved in.

Though a publicity stunt, the thirty-four-minute house and its new occupants represented the future of El Cerrito. Almost effortlessly, a young couple and their infant child, far from

the war's pain and suffering, were able to move into a modest, suburban home. As important, the event reflected nothing of El Cerrito's past, nor of its racy present.

The growing divide in the city, between hundreds of young families and a small group of tavern and poker club owners, inevitably led to conflict. By late 1945, the new residents had formed five different neighborhood improvement clubs and were demanding new schools and community necessities such as fire stations, sewers, public parks, and streetlights. In stark contrast, the city's mayor at the time, Louis E. Davis, was a saloon owner and a descendant of one of the first American families in the area. Under his leadership, City Hall had little interest in the newcomers' requests for the kind of public infrastructure needed for residential development, let alone the tax and bond measures needed to build it. Davis was also wary of seeking state or federal funding, which might involve greater scrutiny of the city's nightlife. To make matters worse, years of cronyism and the lack of any need for transparency made Davis and the "Old Guard" unresponsive at best and hostile at worst when the improvement clubs attempted to engage in civic affairs. The last straw for the challengers came in late 1945, when Davis forced through the appointment of two of his allies to a judgeship and a seat on the city council.¹⁶

In response, the five neighborhood improvement clubs created their own political organization, the Good Government League of El Cerrito. The League immediately drew up a petition for a recall election, targeting the mayor and other members of the City Council for removal from office. "We have tolerated inefficiency, extravagant expenditures, and disregard of the citizens' rights as long as we can," the group proclaimed. The petition required five hundred signatures, but the League collected over four thousand, more than four out of every five registered voters in the city. In a clever bit of political theater, the League delivered the petitions to City Hall in a wheelbarrow, an image that was printed in several newspapers.¹⁷

The political campaigns that followed in 1946 were remarkably bitter and even invoked the specter of communism. The League's "statement of reasons" accused Mayor Davis of appointing "political henchmen," "squandering" public funds, and approving "unnecessary and extravagant expenditures of the people's money."¹⁸ In response, Davis and his allies claimed that the League was a Communist front. "VOTERS: Do Not Be Fooled By The Hidden Group Behind the New Comers Movement," they warned in a full-page ad. The day before the election a leaflet of mysterious origin appeared proclaiming: "Communists Seek to Control El Cerrito."¹⁹

In the end, the Old Guard's allegations only served to infuriate most of the city's residents, and the recall passed by a 2.5 to 1 margin.²⁰ Mayor Davis and the two councilmen were removed from office, and a special election was declared to fill their seats. Seven weeks later, the Good Government League's candidates again won overwhelmingly. By late May 1946, the League controlled the mayor's office and all five of the city council seats. The charges of communism, meanwhile, were never again raised in city politics, even at the height of the McCarthy period.²¹

As suggested earlier, these reformers resembled the Progressives of the early 1900s, pursuing such goals as the end of gambling, revision of the city charter, and adoption of a city manager government. The recall, and the name they chose for their organization, the Good Government League, had been used by civic groups in San Francisco, San Jose, and other

cities nationwide during the Progressive Era.²² The League's candidates ran under the slogan "Elect Men of Character," much like the earlier reformers, and showed a similar tendency to conceive issues in deeply ethical terms. All of the councilmen were new to politics; four of the five members were engineers or plant managers in large firms. They shared much more in common with the public-minded technicians envisioned by Thorstein Veblen in his *Engineers and the Price System* (1921) than with the politically inactive managers who populate C. Wright Mills's *White Collar* (1951).²³

Political Advertisement Political Advertisement Political Advertisement Political Advertisement Political Advertisement

ELECT MEN OF CHARACTER

VOTE FOR


R. WARD CRARY, Jr.

CRARY


ALBERT J. DIETRICH

DIETRICH


EDWARD A. VALENTINO

VALENTINO

FOR COUNCILMEN

WED. MAY 29, 1946

ENDORSED BY EL CERRITO GOOD GOVT. LEAGUE
E. C. WIEGMANN, PRES. 411 CLAYTON AVE. W. H. KINNEY, VICE PRES.

This ad is paid for by 51 subscriptions from citizens of El Cerrito.

The members of the Good Government League resembled the Progressives of the turn of the century in their reform rhetoric, platform, and professional and managerial backgrounds. But their experiences during the Great Depression and World War II nurtured among them a much more expansive sense of the public sector.

Campaign advertisement in *El Cerrito Journal*, May 28, 1946.

The League's similarity to the reformers of the Progressive Era was perhaps most visible in its campaign to end gambling. Immediately upon taking office, the new city council appointed Edward Dietrich, a research engineer and a League activist, to become the new police commissioner. Dietrich conducted a thorough investigation before proposing a sweeping anti-gambling ordinance in late 1946. To inspire public support, he framed the measure as critical for combating juvenile delinquency, and received the strong backing of the *El Cerrito Journal*, the PTA, and the city's veterans and fraternal clubs. After just a few months in office, the reformers were able to outlaw all of the gaming that had been legalized during Prohibition. "It is indeed gratifying to know," commented Dietrich, "that El Cerrito will no longer have to 'gamble' on its reputation."²⁴

Yet the reformers and the population they represented also had a much larger conception of what the public sector could and should do than their Progressive Era predecessors. As the *El Cerrito Journal* argued: "Civic moral stability and positive publicity are fine phrases in society in so far as they go. But, they, in themselves, do not build libraries nor pave streets. . . . Money and money only can do this."²⁵ Several of the council members had served on some kind of public relief, rationing, or draft board or on a civil defense or Red Cross committee during the Depression and World War II. They showed no hesitancy in creating a comprehensive public infrastructure for the city and developing sophisticated revenue generating policies, as well as pursuing new sources of state and federal funding. Through the council's aggressive direction, a boom in the construction of public buildings paralleled the postwar housing surge. Over the next decade, the city built five new schools, a police headquarters, eight city parks, a modern public library, a city administrative center, and miles of new streets, street lighting, and sewer systems. At first, the city council had to continue with the "pay as you go" policy of its predecessors. But with the appointment of a city manager in 1948, El Cerrito pursued a series of bond measures, culminating with a capital improvements program outlined in the city's first Master Plan in 1956.²⁶

Edward Valentino, who served on the city council for a decade and as mayor for two terms, later described the reformers' approach to policy-making as consensual. "There really wasn't any one individual who made a difference," he recalled in the 1980s.²⁷ "We were kind of an unusual group because we invariably all agreed on what should be done. There was very little discord amongst the managers." Valentino's use of the term "managers" is significant here. He and the other League members served as councilmen and mayors, but never held the title of "manager." Valentino himself was the superintendent of a chemical plant during these years (the mayor and council members all held full-time jobs), and did not see a great contrast between his work for the firm and his work for the city. He did not see himself as a "politician."

As high-minded and skillful as the new council members may have been, the most critical factor in their success was the homogeneity of the growing city, not only in terms of class and race, but also in the high level of homeownership and the consensus of political views. While this may sound no different from our stereotypical image of the postwar suburb, the city's new residents were not withdrawn, complacent, and Republican, but very aggressive in creating a strong public infrastructure and community life.

What came to define the “City of Homes” most in the postwar era, of course, was the fact that its most prevalent form of shelter was the owner-occupied home. By mid-1946, the 3.6-square-mile city was beginning to experience a building boom that would last through the 1950s, by which time nearly all of its available land was developed for single-family housing. There was no doubt for whom these affordably priced homes were targeted. With a median age of only 29.8 years in 1950, El Cerrito was clearly a destination for young families.²⁸

In terms of class and race, the perceptions of El Cerrito’s most famous residents are instructive.²⁹ All four members of the rock and roll band Creedence Clearwater Revival, one of the most successful groups of the late 1960s and 1970s, grew up in the city. As bassist Stu Cook remembers, “El Cerrito was an all-white bedroom community. . . . It was middle class with barely a bit of upper middle class. But mostly it was solid middle class to lower middle class working people.” Creedence drummer Doug “Cosmo” Clifford describes how each band member represented literally a different stratum within the city. “El Cerrito had kind of a class difference, highlanders and flatlanders, highlanders being the folks that lived up on the hill who had money and working-class folks who lived down in the flatlands. Stu’s dad was a wealthy lawyer, so he was a highlander. I was kind of a midlander. My dad was a machinist, my mom worked at Emporium Capwell’s, so we lived sort of on the hill but not up where the professional people lived. John [Fogerty] was a flatlander living in a divorced home with his mother, who was a schoolteacher. That was the El Cerrito I remember.” These comments are born out in census figures of the era, which show most residents to be middle-income, ranging from blue-collar union workers to a variety of managers and professionals.

The 1950 census also highlights the city’s very limited racial diversity. Less than 8 percent of El Cerrito’s eighteen thousand residents were classified as “non-white,” the largest minority being persons of Japanese descent, followed by African Americans and Chinese Americans.³⁰ Yet it is important to distinguish the new city from other postwar communities like Cicero, Illinois; South Boston, Massachusetts; or nearby San Leandro, California, which openly resisted integration. El Cerrito’s public schools were integrated before the war, and the city was home to an orphanage for Chinese American boys that became nationally recognized in the 1930s and 1940s.³¹ The city also became an important center for returning Bay Area Japanese Americans who had been interned during the Second World War.³² At a history roundtable in 1999, Asian and African American residents of the era remembered El Cerrito to be very good on race relations. “El Cerrito to me has always been a diverse town,” remarked Vanda Jones, who “knew no color barrier growing up in El Cerrito.” The regional NAACP did not report any cases of discrimination in the city during the period. The community would become increasingly diverse in the 1960s, and, today, people of color comprise 47 percent of the population.³³ This is not to say that the suburb has always been an idyll of racial tolerance, but it was not marked by the hostility and discrimination that characterized much of the rest of the nation (a good example being nearby San Francisco, which in the late 1940s was already making plans to demolish its largely African American Fillmore district).³⁴ In any case, race was not used as a means to divide the electorate during the heyday of the city’s political consensus. If anything, the rhetoric of fairness expressed so

consistently by the new reform administration reflected and perhaps even shaped much of the community's tolerant attitude toward racial and ethnic diversity.

It is also important to note that an overwhelming majority of the city's population was not born and raised in California, nor did they come from big cities. A sample study of El Cerrito residents in 1947, the first full year of reform leadership, finds that most of the population had migrated from less urbanized regions of the northern United States, most notably the Midwest and Great Plains states, and from Europe, with the largest concentration from southern Italy.³⁵

Less than 1 percent of this population was born and raised in San Francisco, while fewer than 10 percent had lived in the City by the Bay prior to moving to El Cerrito.³⁶ In other words, El Cerrito did not consist of a "white flight" population as that term is traditionally understood, that is, white residents fleeing major cities and their expanding populations of people of color. More accurately, El Cerrito's new arrivals were fleeing their own all-white hometowns, which during the Depression and war years offered few prospects for the future. As significant, and in stark contrast to the suburbs of southern California, only 6 percent of El Cerritans were from the Jim Crow South.³⁷ In Orange County, arguably the birthplace of the modern, libertarian-oriented conservative movement, over 25 percent of residents were southerners—perhaps the most crucial distinction between the politics of the two California regions.³⁸

The city's close proximity to UC Berkeley, meanwhile, was not a significant factor in the city's progressivism during these years. In the immediate postwar years, few residents were employed or were attending the university, while none of the leaders of the Good Government League were faculty or administrators from the Berkeley campus.³⁹ On the contrary, as we have seen, the League's candidates were overwhelmingly managers and professionals employed by large corporations like Standard Oil, the Santa Fe Railroad, and Stauffer Chemicals, precisely the type of "Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" so often characterized as apolitical during the postwar era.

It is not surprising then, that a city with an overwhelmingly white, middle-class population, made up of residents from the northern United States who owned their own homes and who were raising children, would so actively endorse a reform and development agenda. Through the late 1940s and 1950s, voters repeatedly elected League candidates for mayor and city council, and strongly supported major bond and appropriations measures. The council found it could rely on popular participation to create policy, and formed several fact-finding committees to review city finances, planning issues, school performance, and the creation of parks and

Table 1 • Geographic Origins of El Cerrito Residents, 1947 (n=542)	
California	140 (25.8% of total)
Midwest	129
Great Plains	86
Foreign-Born	80
Northeast	42
South	33
Pacific Northwest	18
Southwest	14

recreation services. The *El Cerrito Journal* could reasonably boast: “Giving the government to the people whenever it is possible is making the ghost of Jefferson the sixth member of our city council.”⁴⁰

The reformers also benefited from the city’s wide range of voluntary associations and clubs, which were very active in local politics. Many were created in the postwar years as alternatives and even as rivals to the city’s existing groups, much like the neighborhood improvement clubs that created the Good Government League. New chapters of the Veterans of Foreign Wars and the Rotary Club, for example, were formed alongside the older American Legion and Lions Club branches. A “Merchants Association” was created in 1948, differentiating itself from the Chamber of Commerce by claiming that its mission was “to establish a closer harmony between business, residents, and our city administration.” At the same time, the local Parent Teachers Association exploded in membership, numbering over twelve hundred families. Consisting almost entirely of women, the PTA’s advocacy made the construction of a new middle school and five new elementary schools a top priority for the city.⁴¹

These organizations, despite their different memberships and interests, behaved similarly in civic affairs. First, they were adamantly nonpartisan, following the lead of the Good Government League, which sought to “embrace every section of our city.”⁴² “THE AMERICAN LEGION IS NON-POLITICAL” the *El Cerrito* post announced in capital letters in early 1946, “whatever position or sides any of our members takes in the political field, the American Legion sponsors NO ONE.”⁴³ The Merchants Association similarly announced it was “not representative of any particular part of the city, but will function for the general city,” while the Lions, Rotary, City, and Exchange clubs all pledged their support for a city-wide program of internal improvements, regardless of who occupied City Hall. At his 1948 annual address, the head of the Chamber of Commerce endorsed a long list of infrastructure projects, declaring: “We have striven to lend our city government every possible assistance with its program of progress.” The clubs’ consensus was especially strong on the issues of new schools and recreational facilities for children. In 1948, “a record outpouring of voters” passed two school bond initiatives by a stunning seven to one margin. There was no organized opposition. An independent candidate for city council expressed a similar unanimity for funding parks and playgrounds, though in a very dramatic manner: “I shall pick the weeds one by one on my knees until I clear a place where our youngsters can play.”⁴⁴

El Cerrito’s veterans in particular, as homeowners, parents, and increasingly, community leaders, played a major role in this consensus. By 1960, nearly 40 percent of the city’s adult male population were veterans of either World War II or the Korean War.⁴⁵ They shared a new and substantial relationship to the federal government, as seen in the pages of the *El Cerrito Journal*.⁴⁶ Well after 1945, the *Journal* printed a “Veterans News” column describing entitlement programs such as pensions and life insurance, special tax exemptions and refunds, Veterans Administration benefits, and educational opportunities through the GI Bill. The local veterans’ organizations, meanwhile, whose enrollments climbed exponentially after the war, reflected their members’ community concerns. The city’s American Legion and VFW posts publicly and loudly endorsed the 1948 school bond measure. “We can no longer afford to permit our children to be herded into dingy classrooms, and be obliged to receive their grade



The transformation of El Cerrito from “Little Reno” to the progressive “City of Homes” happened very quickly. The city’s homogeneity, in terms of class, race, homeownership, military service, and family size made this possible. This photo, of children supporting a parks initiative, captures both a sense of the racial composition of the postwar city and the consensus among residents for building a strong public sector and civic culture.

Courtesy of the El Cerrito Historical Society.

school training in double shifts,” declared the American Legion.⁴⁷ Most of the city’s veterans of course did not participate in community affairs overtly as veterans, but as voters and by serving on the citizens’ committees. The first of the reform mayors, Melvin Heinkel, was a colonel during the war, and other veterans became leaders of the Chamber of Commerce and service organizations.

Perhaps the best indication of the city’s postwar consensus, however, came from the political left. In the 1940s, El Cerrito had an active branch of the Communist Party, which endorsed its own candidate in the recall election. Roy Noftz had been an auto plant worker and a Workers’ Alliance activist. But the party in its campaign literature made no mention of his résumé. It identified Noftz solely as “a leader in many of the fights that finally ended in the recall of the former City Council.” Especially telling is the candidate’s ten-point “progressive program.” Topping the list was his vow that “the city must be completely freed from control by the gambling and liquor interests,” followed by a demand for “an adequate recreation program for young people.” Calling for the “improvement of streets and sidewalks, adequate drainage and sewer systems,” the Communist’s platform read much like the goals

of the many other organizations in the city. Only at the bottom of the list did Noftz state his views on foreign affairs, pledging to “work against anything that I believe will lead to World War III.”⁴⁸

The idea of the Communist Party adapting to the needs of suburbia and fighting for “adequate drainage” is remarkable in its own right. But the program put forward by the local branch was in fact consistent with the party’s pro-development agenda throughout the postwar world. What is more revealing is the fact that a long list of constituencies traditionally thought to be conservative (if not reactionary)—shopkeepers, homeowners, and Legionnaires—now shared so much in common with a “Red” like Roy Noftz. This broad consensus, for an expansive and publicly managed infrastructure, did not end with McCarthyism. In 1957, the head of the city’s Chamber of Commerce gave a stern warning against “all the things citizens might do to make the city a ghost town.” These included: “failure to co-operate in civic movements, refusal to serve on community betterment boards and committees, and knocking every progressive movement or fostering such movements.”⁴⁹

This consensus was not limited to city affairs, as El Cerrito consistently backed Democratic presidential candidates in the postwar years.⁵⁰ More revealing, however, is the city’s voting record when the rest of the nation’s suburbs turned more conservative in the late 1960s and 1970s.⁵¹ The city stood in stark contrast to the suburban communities that formed a core constituency in what Kevin Phillips famously identified as the “emerging Republican majority.”⁵² El Cerritans in particular did not support the Sun Belt’s most successful politicians during these years, California’s own Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, but instead voted for all of their opponents, most notably George McGovern and Walter Mondale, who lost in Republican landslides. When the city population shifted to a majority of baby-boomer families in the 1990s, residents became overwhelmingly Democratic, for example, providing Al Gore with more than 80 percent of their ballots in 2000.⁵³ Perhaps the most lasting legacy of the 1946 Good Government movement was its transformation of El Cerrito into an attractive community for future generations of young, liberal-leaning, and more racially diverse families. These newer constituents have continued to vote for liberal candidates, a tradition that has lasted for more than seventy years.

While the list of like-minded citizens who supported the “City of Homes” consensus in the late 1940s and 1950s may sound impressive, there were two major groups of residents whose concerns were not being addressed. Young mothers and their preschool-age children were two of the suburb’s largest constituencies. For them, affordable childcare was perhaps the most pressing issue, and on that front the reformers offered no initiatives. City Hall’s inaction was not unusual. Despite the federal activism that had created thousands of nursery schools and daycare centers across the country during the Depression and World War II, the concern in peacetime was non-existent.⁵⁴ As a national preschool advocate exclaimed in 1947: “The bald fact is that almost no one in authority gives a hoot about little children. . . Working mothers and their children have been thrown to the wolves.”⁵⁵

In El Cerrito, young women with preschoolers had to go it alone, and many did, but not as individuals. In 1940, five years before the creation of the Good Government League, a group of PTA moms formed their own organization.⁵⁶ The El Cerrito Preschool Cooperative, or ECPC as it came to be known, was part of a grassroots movement to provide early education to thousands of children nationwide.⁵⁷ Women like Lucile Fogerty, an ECPC president

whose sons later formed Creedence Clearwater Revival, were taking bold steps for their families' welfare. They were also choosing a new understanding of childhood that shared little in common with the way they themselves had been raised. The new preschool's experience challenges still another popular image of the era: the stereotype of the suburban housewife.⁵⁸

To join a cooperative preschool, a family paid a small fee and monthly dues. Most importantly, they made a major time commitment to the organization. It was the mothers overwhelmingly who took on all of the administrative and financial responsibilities of caring for the many children enrolled, who ranged in age from two-and-a-half to five years old. Each preschool had to hire a licensed teacher to operate in the state, but could only remain affordable with several mothers acting as assistant teachers each school day.

ECPC was at first located in a church basement, where it provided childcare for over five hundred families during the war.⁵⁹ It was in the immediate postwar years, however, when the school and the movement for cooperative preschool education really came of age. By 1960, there were over one thousand co-ops nationwide. Three hundred were created in California alone, and the San Francisco Bay Area, particularly the East Bay, was a major source of new schools.⁶⁰ Most impressively, it was the El Cerrito mothers who took the extraordinary step of purchasing a lot and building their own school. They were the first co-op in the country to do so.⁶¹ The women mobilized the city's consensus to their advantage, and in the process engaged the entire city in the larger social project of affordable childcare. Since the school was self-funded and completely dependent on donations to complete any major project, the members' neighbors, merchants, and city officials all needed to take part. In addition to holding a variety of fundraising events over a four-year period, the women enlisted a "Businessmen's Committee" to raise one-third of the cost of the project. The city council, meanwhile, contributed a large parcel of city land for the school, leased at the rate of just one dollar per year. Local contractors and unions donated their services, and the members kept costs low by doing much of the construction themselves. The school opened in 1947 and has remained the co-op's home ever since.⁶²

Though ECPC's story may seem unique, the mothers' commitment was typical of co-ops around the Bay Area and across the country, whose members joined for a variety of economic, social, and ideological reasons. First and foremost was the need for an affordable childcare option. Typically, an ECPC mother was caring for three children: an infant; a child in elementary school; and a middle child not yet old enough to attend kindergarten. For example, Lucile Fogerty, who was raising five boys and whose husband was a union printer, could not afford a "drop off" nursery school. And although the school day was too short to allow a mother to hold a full-time job or return to school full-time, it did free up enough time to be a necessity for the family's and the mother's own well-being.⁶³

Second, the members' commitment to the preschool reflected a critical need for community, which was amply addressed by the organization. As described earlier for the city as a whole, most of the parent members were migrants from less urbanized regions of the Midwest, Pacific Northwest, and Great Plains states.⁶⁴ Far from their hometowns, these women could not rely on traditional networks of kin and longtime neighbors for help with raising their children, and found the camaraderie offered by the co-op a major attraction.⁶⁵ By joining, women like Lucile Fogerty of Great Falls, Montana, were able to befriend dozens of other parents, as the schools relied heavily on teamwork and social events.⁶⁶



In 1940, a group of El Cerrito mothers organized a cooperative preschool. The El Cerrito Preschool Cooperative provided affordable childcare and early education to hundreds of families during World War II and the postwar era. President Lucile Fogerty (top) holds a poster for a fundraising event. Her son, John Fogerty (bottom), who became the leader of the rock band Creedence Clearwater Revival, participates in a country fair the school held each year.

Richmond Independent, Sep. 26, 1947; *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, Oct. 2, 1947.

Third, the preschools offered the women many opportunities to make use of their education and work backgrounds. At ECPC, nearly all of the mothers had gone at least to high school, and most had worked outside of the home during the war.⁶⁷ The busy and expanding co-op they joined required their skills in such areas as accounting, scheduling, and writing and editing. Again, the example of Lucile Fogerty is instructive. A high school graduate, Fogerty served as the school's auditor, music director, and curriculum chair. After her sons "graduated" from ECPC, Fogerty enrolled in college, earned her bachelor's and master's degrees, and taught special education for twenty years.⁶⁸

A fourth and last major reason why women like Lucile joined the cooperative was their strong identification with the school's principles. The co-op's consensual model of governance appealed to many on an ethical and intellectual level. The mothers were also challenging a long accepted set of beliefs—that a family's youngest children were best raised at home by their mother or other relatives, not in an outside institution by other parents and teachers. The sense of enthusiasm and interest in their new approach to childcare is perhaps most visible in the amount of effort each preschool devoted to parent training. ECPC, like co-ops nationwide, required parents to complete an orientation program before they could assist in the classroom. Their training continued under the tutelage of the school's director and with lectures by pediatricians and child psychologists. The ECPC mothers also worked closely with UC Berkeley's Institute for Child Welfare. Professors Catherine Landreth and Lois Meek Stolz, two of the most important advocates for preschool education at the time, both spoke at the school.⁶⁹

The principle of learning through free play was central to the cooperative preschool approach. This idea defined every aspect of a school: its activities, schedule, even its physical layout. As a pamphlet that ECPC helped publish explained: "Play is the child's way of learning. By experimentation he is finding out about the world around him and about his own powers. . . . Play is, at the same time, a serious thing to him and deserves the respect of adults."⁷⁰ Here the children were treated like citizens, with rights to be respected and a conception of personal freedom asserted through play. At the school, parents and teachers deliberately refrained from directing the children's play or intervening in their quarrels. Lucile Fogerty herself discussed this approach in an article she wrote for *Parents Magazine*.⁷¹ "Sooner or later, every human being must learn to get along with other human beings. Such learning must start at childhood. If an adult constantly intervenes in minor difficulties, which the child might solve himself, the results may be unfortunate. Obviously the child is deprived of the opportunity to experiment with ways of solving situations and getting along with other children." The arguments of pushing and shoving that might result from free play were all part of the learning process. Co-op moms like Fogerty believed firmly that these experiences would not only ease their children's adjustment to kindergarten, but also help them to resolve conflicts on their own and ultimately create a more peaceful civil society.

In addition, the co-ops sought to raise the children's awareness of other cultures, through songs, stories, foods, and special performances.⁷² Inspired by the creation of the United Nations in San Francisco in 1945 and the emerging civil rights movement, the co-ops sought to prevent a resurgence of the racism and religious hatreds of the Second World War. At

ECPC, the best evidence of this multicultural mission occurred in 1953, when the school elected an African American woman as its president.⁷³

In short, the women of the El Cerrito co-op and the many other cooperatives of the Bay Area shared little in common with the stereotype of the postwar “June Cleaver” housewife. The children they raised, who came of age in the 1960s, were thoughtfully nurtured, not taught simply to conform and consume, by their co-op moms.

Perhaps the most telling example of the consensus of political views the postwar generation shared is the development of El Cerrito Plaza, one of the East Bay’s first modern shopping malls. The shopping mall has been the symbol of many negative (if not devastating) trends in American life: the rise of car culture, the disintegration of urban downtowns, and the decline of civic culture, among others. But once again, the experience in El Cerrito is more complicated—and decidedly more progressive. The Plaza, which opened in the summer of 1958, was built for the very pragmatic public policy goal of bringing in revenue for city services.

Even before the end of World War II, local merchants were lamenting the fact that despite the city’s huge growth in population, most residents were doing their shopping elsewhere. At first, the Chamber of Commerce and Merchants Association tried a variety of promotions to address the problem, which were very much like the “Buy Local” campaigns of today. The city promoted events such as “Shop at Home Days,” but the trend only worsened.⁷⁴ At the same time, El Cerrito’s city manager observed that poor sales were not only hurting merchants, but also the entire community’s financial situation. Overwhelmingly residential, the city did not have the industrial or retail base to support the quality of life its residents demanded. “Unless El Cerrito can find some source of taxation other than nuisance taxes, or other than increasing the burden on the owners of real property, our community will suffer.”⁷⁵

True to form, the city council created a Citizens Conference for Civic Improvements to study the problem. The group researched shopping habits in El Cerrito and other communities of similar size.⁷⁶ They found that between 1952 and 1955, local sales of big-ticket items like appliances and autos had fallen by 12 percent, “while dollar sales per occupied dwelling declined by 23 percent in the same period.” The committee also noted a transformation in consumer behavior, which was true not only of the city, but also of the entire country. In the new, car-oriented United States, consumers now preferred “one-stop, complete shopping facilities.” In El Cerrito, the “scattered, strip type development does not promote the foot traffic necessary” to attract shoppers in large numbers. The committee concluded that a “major shopping center” was therefore an “urgent necessity,” and “immediate action” was needed before a nearby community attracted its own shopping mall. The citizen’s group was also well aware of the city’s fiscal needs. Sales and commercial property taxes only accounted for 20 percent of city revenues in the 1955–1956 fiscal year. A mall was needed “not only to meet the shopping requirements of the people of El Cerrito, but also to provide local government with a stronger and better balanced tax base.”⁷⁷

Two years after the report was released, the El Cerrito Plaza, a fifty-four-store complex, opened its doors for business. The Plaza was the largest shopping mall of its kind in the East Bay and immediately dominated retail markets in northern Alameda and western

Contra Costa Counties. Overnight it became the city's largest employer and taxpayer. The City Manager estimated the mall would generate \$100,000 in property and sales taxes for the 1959–1960 fiscal year.⁷⁸ The mall had its own symbolic importance. It was built on the site of the infamous dog-racing track, the same location where the Castro family built their hacienda and the federal government managed its wartime trailer park. When construction began on the mall in 1957, the last previous tenant was a drive-in movie theater.

In terms of design, the Plaza was sleek, modern, and reflected none of the surrounding area's past or present. The mall's central building was a three-story rectangular block flanked by a concourse of smaller stores and twenty-two acres of parking. Though physically impersonal, the Plaza should not be confused with the multinational corporate chains and absentee property management firms of today. Occupying the mall's main building was Capwell's, a quality department store based in Oakland. Woolworth's was the only national retailer in the plaza, and while several tenants were branches of regional chains, the majority were "mom and pop" businesses, among them a florist, drycleaner, and donut shop.⁷⁹

The local nature of the mall was also reflected in the relationships these businesses cultivated with the city. The anchor firm Capwell's, which dominated the plaza with over 230,000 square feet of retail space, took these community ties very seriously. On the eve of the store's grand opening, the *Berkeley Daily Gazette* published a special section with articles on the history of the firm, interviews with store managers, and biographies of the mall's architect and developer.⁸⁰ It is a remarkable document (especially in light of today's corporate box stores and online shopping), since every article stresses the local roots of the firms and people involved. "We at Capwell's realize our great responsibility to the community," the new store's manager, Clarence Compton, announced. "It is with pride and humility that we serve this growing area and we sincerely hope to merit the respect and confidence of all our neighbors."⁸¹ Compton made sure to point out that Capwell's employees were typically members of local clubs and churches, who "have traditionally become contributors to community life." He also stressed the economic benefits to El Cerrito, which included a \$6 million investment in the new store and a staff with an annual payroll of \$1 million. "Capwell's El Cerrito employees are, in majority, residents of the surrounding area and will bring their patronage to this area, thus directly benefiting local merchants and businesses. Contributions such as these mean savings to the area homeowner."

These comments were not simply lip service for opening day, recalls Paul Grunland, the store's merchandise manager.⁸² Good community relations were a fundamental aspect of Capwell's institutional culture. "We came here to embrace this town," Grunland remembers of the new store's preparations, and describes his experience of interacting with the city as a "wonderful relationship, like a marriage." These relations reflected the firm's overall approach to retail, which emphasized "pure service," offered by a "low profile" staff that did not use "the hard sell" but acted "on the customer's terms."⁸³ Capwell's also purposely hired locally and promoted "from within," so that customers interacted "with their neighbors and friends." "Good house-keeping" was also critical. The store actually steam cleaned its sidewalks each morning. Grunland belonged to both the Rotary Club and Chamber of Commerce and was friends with the fire and police chiefs and city manager.⁸⁴

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WEDNESDAY, JULY 9**

Opening Ceremonies at 12:20 p. m.
Shop Wednesday 12:30 to 9:30

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Capwell's famed big selection
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big, breath-taking variety of mer-
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Now 4 Finer Stores: OAKLAND WALNUT CREEK HAYWARD EL CERRITO

The City of El Cerrito strongly encouraged the development of El Cerrito Plaza, one of the first modern shopping malls in the Bay Area. The mall provided a major source of revenue for the city, and its fifty-four stores, most locally owned, took their community ties very seriously.

Capwell's, an Oakland-based retailer, was the mall's anchor tenant.

Berkeley Daily Gazette, July 8, 1958.

The shopping mall also addressed, at least partially, a legacy of the city's Wild West heritage. El Cerrito never had a "downtown" retail district, but instead developed in classic western style, along a stagecoach line and as a cluster of clapboard buildings that included a dry goods merchant, a blacksmith, and two saloons.⁸⁵ Although the number of buildings increased, the basic layout remained the same. El Cerrito also never had a town green or city square, or any space for public assembly for that matter. If anyone

wished to protest in front of City Hall, they would have to stand in the middle of San Pablo Avenue, the city's main street.

The Plaza certainly transformed the shopping habits of the city, but not by under-selling businesses and destroying "Main Street," as has been witnessed throughout the country in the last two decades with the advent of Walmart and other big box stores. The Plaza in fact might have had the unintended effect of helping to sustain businesses that might have closed if the mall had never come to town (e.g., the windowless taverns and used car dealerships that still exist today). In other cases, the mall's magnetic effect on the region's shoppers helped some retailers, like a full-service hardware store and a furniture dealer, to expand.⁸⁶

The Plaza most certainly *did not* create a space for civic engagement and public assembly. As Lizabeth Cohen has described, the private ownership of shopping malls prevented their use as sites for political organizing. The El Cerrito mall did, however, deliver on its intended purpose, to provide a stream of funding for city programs. Most impressive of these were a community center (1965), swimming pool (1962), recreation center (1965), and community theater (1970). Though perhaps less inspiring than political rallies, these resources have benefited tens of thousands of residents over the last fifty years.⁸⁷ The El Cerrito experience suggests that more research needs to be done, not just in the Bay Area but for the country as a whole, about the intentions of city planners, merchants, and residents, and the level of public benefit that commercial centers have brought to their communities.⁸⁸

What has been described here was really the city's heyday. The thousands of families who bought homes and raised children in El Cerrito in the late 1940s and 1950s largely stayed put. But they grew older, and their children moved on. In the 1970s the population declined by twenty-three hundred residents, and by 1990 the city's median age had climbed to over forty. Two of the postwar elementary schools were no longer necessary and were closed. The shopping plaza also fell into decline, at first as a result of competition from newer, neighboring malls, and then with the purchase and closure of Capwell's by the Ohio-based retail giant, Federated Department Stores. The loss of this sales tax revenue, along with the impact of Proposition 13 and a retired population's declining income, had a constricting effect on city services. In oral histories conducted in the 1990s, all of the long-time residents, regardless of ethnic background, described the loss of the strong community feeling of earlier years.⁸⁹

Since 2000, however, the city has experienced a rebirth, echoing in many ways the trends and concerns of the postwar period. Hundreds of middle-class families, priced out of most of the Bay Area's housing market, have moved in. They are overwhelmingly Democratic voters, and have backed school and park bond measures and a new generation of progressive city council members. The city, meanwhile, has helped in the complete revitalization of the shopping plaza and a long-defunct art deco theater, as well as initiate several green sustainability projects, including innovative approaches to solar energy, recycling, and water conservation.⁹⁰

This revival highlights several points of change and continuity in the development of the city since 1945. In so many ways, El Cerrito is a very different place from the community that grew up after the war. People of color now account for 47 percent of the population, compared to 8 percent in 1950. There are far fewer veterans and stay-at-home moms, and

residents are more likely to be employed by the tech industry than by Standard Oil or the Santa Fe Railroad.⁹¹

The city is still, however, very much a “City of Homes.” El Cerrito became even more of a bedroom community with the introduction of the Bay Area Rapid Transit system in 1974, and has remained solidly middle class. Most of the city’s voluntary associations are still very active, like the El Cerrito Preschool Cooperative, which celebrates its seventy-fifth anniversary in 2015. The city still relies on property and sales taxes for its revenue, and has never seriously considered industry or gambling to solve its fiscal problems. It still operates on a city manager plan, with the same council of five members and several citizens’ committees helping to make policy. The city has also maintained its reputation for transparency, and has been able to sustain its public services, even during the recent recession.⁹²

These continuities speak to more than just the history of this small city. They help us to cultivate a more nuanced perspective on suburbia in the Bay Area and the country as a whole. El Cerrito’s postwar history certainly challenges the idea that the era can be divided neatly by decade, especially the ever-popular idea that the 1950s had no positive role in shaping the counterculture of the 1960s. The city’s progressivism, meanwhile, contrasts with both the “Lonely Crowd” conclusions of postwar sociologists, as well as the academic work of the 1990s and 2000s that focused on re-segregation and the end of civic culture. In fact, the El Cerrito reformers appear to have a good deal in common with the present-day mayors of several U.S. cities, who, accordingly to Thomas B. Edsall, are raising hopes that “local officials can restore support for government activism.” In a recent op-ed for the *New York Times*, Edsall concludes: “Urban America is now on a reconnaissance mission for progressive politics.”⁹³

At the very least, the El Cerrito example poses new questions of a historiography that has for so long viewed suburban development in the bleakest of terms. As seen in the experience of this one small community, the Bay Area has provided an environment for a variety of middle-class political tendencies to flourish. The Progressive Era’s focus on moral reform and efficient, clean, and participatory government; the New Deal’s calls for a strong public infrastructure and economic security; and the present generation’s multicultural and environmental concerns have all played prominently in the city’s brief history. Perhaps the time is now ripe for a new look at the postwar suburbs, viewing them not only as destroyers, but also as models of civic energy and a strong and creative public sector.

NOTES

1. In the 1950s, a wave of popular and academic studies became bestsellers, each highlighting in varying ways the anonymity, conformity, and apolitical nature of suburban life. See, for example, David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing American Character* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1950); and William H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956).
2. Sylvie Murray provides one of the most incisive challenges to the 1950s stereotype of conformity, consumerism, and conservatism in *The Progressive Housewife: Community Activism in Suburban Queens, 1945–1965* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). This article reaches similar conclusions for the postwar Bay Area’s suburbs. For the best single-volume account of the era, see James T. Patterson, *Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945–1974* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997). For California, see Kevin Starr’s *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace, 1940–1950* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2002) and *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1940–1963* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2009).
3. Lizabeth Cohen synthesizes much of this work and perspective in *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003). For California, see especially Mike Davis,

- City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003); and Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). For scholarship on suburbia and segregation in the late twentieth century, see Robert D. Bullard, et al., eds., *Residential Apartheid: An American Legacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993); and W. Dennis Keating, *The Suburban Racial Dilemma: Housing and Neighborhoods* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
4. Contra Costa County, where El Cerrito is located, grew from 100,000 to over 404,000 residents in these years. "San Francisco Bay Area . . . Household Population, 1930–2000," http://www.mtc.ca.gov/maps_and_data/datamart/stats/house.htm; U.S. Dept. of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1960 . . . Part 6 California* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1961), 6–89; and City of El Cerrito, *Your City Government, 1948–1949* (El Cerrito, CA: City of El Cerrito, 1949), 9.
 5. *Richmond Independent*, November 12, 1954.
 6. Edward Staniford, *El Cerrito: Historical Evolution*, (El Cerrito, CA: El Cerrito Historical Society, 1976) 13–31; El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005) 7–12; and Earl Scarbrough, "The Adobe at Cerrito Creek," (El Cerrito: typescript, 1975).
 7. *El Cerrito Journal*, September 11, 1947; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 32–39, 45–49; El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 3–48, 68; and Neva Calvert Carpenter, *Harem Scarem in El Cerrito* (Clovis, CA: privately printed, 2006).
 8. Craig Werner, *Up Around the Bend: The Oral History of Creedence Clearwater Revival* (New York: Spike, 1998), 19; *Richmond Independent*, c. 1942, *Contra Costa County Cities and Towns: El Cerrito, 1934–1988*, El Cerrito Public Library Reference Collection, El Cerrito, CA; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 39–44; and *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, January 6, March 15, 1934 and December 2, 1940.
 9. *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, January 6 and March 15, 1934; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 44, 48–50; and El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 82.
 10. *El Cerrito Kennel Club Official Program*, November 19, 1934 and other ephemera in El Cerrito Kennel Club file, El Cerrito Historical Society Archives, El Cerrito, CA (hereafter ECHSA); *El Cerrito Journal*, September 11, 1947; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 41–44, 49; El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 78–79.
 11. *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, March 15, 1939, February 24, 1941; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 37–44; *El Cerrito Journal*, September 11, 1947; Earl Warren, *The Memoirs of Earl Warren* (New York: Doubleday, 1977) 130–131; and Ed Cray, *Chief Justice: A Biography of Earl Warren* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1997), 100.
 12. For the impact of the war effort on the Bay Area, see Marilyn S. Johnson, *The Second Gold Rush: Oakland and the East Bay in World War II* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).
 13. Jim Goggin and Peter Clute, *The Great Jazz Revival* (San Rafael, CA: D. Ewald, 1994), 29; *El Cerrito Journal*, September 20, 1945; and *San Jose Mercury*, September 27, 2012.
 14. *El Cerrito Journal*, August 19, 1943 and September 11, 1947; Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 68; and El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 85.
 15. *Life*, March 26, 1945, 12–13.
 16. *El Cerrito Journal*, April 26, September 20, November 8, and December 6, 1945.
 17. *El Cerrito Journal*, November 8, December 6, 1945 and February 1, 7, 1946.
 18. *El Cerrito Journal*, December 6, 1945.
 19. Prior to the election, Mayor Davis personally published a one-issue "newspaper," innocuously titled the *El Cerrito Review*, devoted to red-baiting the League. *El Cerrito Journal*, April 11, 1946; and materials in "1946 Recall Election file," ECHSA.
 20. At a city council hearing, one man expressed the League's bipartisan character as well as his anger at the allegations of communism. "I have served on two Young Republican Clubs of California, I have seen duty in the Navy, and the veterans of El Cerrito are deeply insensed over this matter. . . . I feel that the charges of Communistic activities represents an underhanded attack, and represents dirty politics. Should this last minute attempt hinder the recall movement, we have just started to fight." *El Cerrito Journal*, April 4 and 11, 1946.
 21. *El Cerrito Journal*, April 11 to May 30, 1946; and *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, June 6, 1946.
 22. For the classic discussion of California politics during the Progressive Era, see George Mowry, *The California Progressives* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951). For the Bay Area's Progressive Movement, see Walton Bean, *Boss Ruef's San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952); William Issel and Robert W. Cherny, *San Francisco, 1865–1932: Politics, Power and Urban Development* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986) and Michael Kazin, *Barons of Labor: The San Francisco Building Trades and Union Power in the Progressive Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989).
 23. Veblen, of course, was describing a revolution within the economy, of a "soviet of technicians" taking control of industrial production for the public good. But his sense that engineers and managers were both socially responsible and fully capable of taking administrative control is helpful when thinking of the postwar suburban middle class and its approach to politics. Thorstein Veblen, *The Engineers and the Price System* (New York: B.W.

- Huebsch, 1921) and C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951).
24. The city council next moved to clean out the gambling houses that were operating outside of the city's jurisdiction in a nearby area of unincorporated land. "Big Bill" Pechart had reopened his Wagon Wheel casino in this section. In 1955, the city took advantage of a national crime commission report to annex the area. "The Final Years of Gambling in El Cerrito," (news clippings collection, 1949–1955) ECHSA; and Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 82.
 25. *El Cerrito Journal*, July 11, 1946.
 26. *El Cerrito Journal*, January 9, 1947; El Cerrito Planning Commission, *City of El Cerrito, California: The Master Plan* (El Cerrito, CA: 1956); City Manager to City Council of El Cerrito, "Ten Year Improvement Program," May 12, 1958, El Cerrito Public Library Reference Collection; and City of El Cerrito, *Your City Government*.
 27. *West County Times*, August 2, 1987; and *El Cerrito Journal*, May 2 and 16, 1946.
 28. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1960, Volume I: Characteristics of the Population, Part 6 California*, 6–89. In the late 1940s, the *El Cerrito Journal* proudly announced the total of new homes built each year, and the numbers were very impressive indeed: 352 homes in 1947, 360 in 1948. *El Cerrito Journal*, January 1, December 30, 1948.
 29. The following comments are quoted in Werner, *Up Around the Bend*, 18–19.
 30. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1950, Volume II: Characteristics of the Population, Part 5 California* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1952), 5–53.
 31. Self, *American Babylon*, 103–111.
 32. Yoshiko Uchida, *The History of Sycamore Congregational Church, 1904–1974* (El Cerrito, CA: The Church, 1974); and *Contra Costa Times*, April 6, 24, 2011 and December 11, 2013.
 33. *El Cerrito Wire*, December 5, 1999; The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People–El Cerrito Branch Records, BANC MSS 84/63c, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, CA; and 2010 U.S. Census, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml.
 34. Elizabeth Pepin and Lewis Watts, *Harlem of the West: The San Francisco Fillmore Jazz Era* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2006) 165–167.
 35. The survey examined 542 persons listed as residents of El Cerrito in the 1947 R.L. Polk Directory for the City of Richmond and surrounding communities. The California Birth and Death Indexes were then examined to determine each resident's state of birth. For the California-born residents, a combination of U.S. Manuscript Censuses, voting lists, and city directories were further consulted to determine these persons' county of birth and childhood.
 36. *Ibid.* To determine each sample subject's residency in the decades before 1947, the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Manuscript censuses and voting lists and city directories covering the years 1932–1947 were consulted.
 37. Marilyn S. Johnson found roughly similar results for the East Bay region as a whole during the war era. Only 4.2 percent of East Bay residents were from what Johnson designated as the South (excluding Texas, which she counted among the "West South Central" states). Johnson, *Second Gold Rush*, 43.
 38. McGirr, *Suburban Warriors*, 46.
 39. The 1947 R.L. Polk city directory for the region lists the occupations of many residents, but only infrequently specifies their employers. Still, it is clear from the job titles provided that few were connected to UC Berkeley. Below is a sample study derived from the research described in footnotes 35 and 36.

Occupations of El Cerrito Residents, 1947 (n = 304)

Manual or Semi-Skilled Labor	82 (27% of total)
Skilled Trades	53
Business Owners	50
Managers/Professionals	44
Clerks/Salespersons	38
Public Employees	20
Teachers/Librarians	9
Other	9

40. *El Cerrito Journal*, June 20, 1946; January 23, 1947; and City of El Cerrito, *Your City Government*, 4–5, 12–13.
41. *El Cerrito Journal*, April 4, May 23, 1946; January 15, 22, 1948; May 26, 1949.
42. *Ibid.*, April 11 and May 23, 1946.
43. *Ibid.*, February 14, 1946.
44. *Ibid.*, May 23, 1946; March 13, 27, 1947; and February 12, 1948.

45. Of the 8,847 males in El Cerrito who were over the age of fourteen in 1960, 3,982 were veterans. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1960, Volume I: Characteristics of the Population, Part 6 California*, 6–271.
46. *El Cerrito Journal* from 1944 to 1953. See, for example, *Journal* items on the GI Bill (September 9, 1948 issue); VA hospitalization (July 1, 1948); and veterans' loans (July 25, 1946).
47. *El Cerrito Journal*, February 5, 1948.
48. "Vote for a Program!" campaign circular printed by the El Cerrito Branch of the Communist Party, undated, ECHSA; and *El Cerrito Journal*, May 16, 1946.
49. *Richmond Independent*, August 21, 1957.
50. Since the New Deal, El Cerrito has supported only one Republican candidate for President, Dwight D. Eisenhower, in his re-election campaign of 1956. California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote* (Sacramento: 1940–2012).
51. The suburban vote increased from one-third to nearly one-half of the national electorate in the years 1960–1988. At the same time, the urban vote declined to less than thirty percent. "While the suburbs grew larger, they also grew more Republican," the veteran political reporter Bill Schneider wrote in 1992. See Schneider's analysis of suburban voting patterns in the July 1988 and 1992 issues of *The Atlantic Monthly*.
52. "Contemporary suburban demography is very much on the conservative side," Phillips observed in 1969, providing an assessment of suburban voting patterns that would prove accurate across much of the nation until the election of Bill Clinton in 1992. Phillips did not discuss the suburbs of the San Francisco Bay Area, however. The last Bay Area county to support a Republican presidential candidate was Napa in 1988. For discussions of the suburban vote on the national level, see Kevin Phillips, *The Emerging Republican Majority* (New York: Arlington House, 1969), 182; Charles E. Lamb, *Housing Segregation in Suburban America since 1960: Presidential and Judicial Politics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Gil Troy et al., eds., *History of American Presidential Elections, 1788–2008* (New York: Facts on File, 2012).
53. California Secretary of State, *Statement of Vote* (Sacramento: State of California, 1964–2008).
54. National Advisory Commission, *Bulletin of Information for Emergency Nursery Schools* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1934) Issues 1–5; James L. Hymes, Jr., *Early Childhood Education Living History Interviews: Book 3* (Carmel, CA: Hacienda Press, 1978), 5–17; Hewes, *It's the Camaraderie*, 50–52; Dorothy Jean Stewart, "Preschools and Politics: A History of Early Childhood Education in California," Ed.D dissertation (UC Berkeley, 1990), 56–81. For the situation in postwar California, see Natalie M. Fousekis, *Demanding Child Care: Women's Activism and the Politics of Welfare, 1940–1971* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011), 9–20, 35–39, 50.
55. James L. Hymes, "Planning Ahead for Young Children," address reprinted in the *Bulletin of the National Association for Nursery Education* [hereafter *NANE Bulletin*] (March 1948), 2.
56. On the eve of the war, the El Cerrito mothers applied for funds from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to open a cooperative school and hire a director and two teachers. When the WPA was ended by Congress in 1942, the El Cerrito preschool had to become completely self-supporting. *El Cerrito Journal*, September 17, 1947.
57. For the history of the cooperative preschool movement, see Katharine Whiteside Taylor, *Parent Cooperative Nursery Schools* (New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University, 1954); Dorothy Hewes, *"It's the Camaraderie": A History of Parent Cooperative Preschools* (Davis, CA: Center for Cooperatives, 1997); and Robyn Muncy, "Cooperative Motherhood and Democratic Civic Culture in Postwar Suburbia, 1940–1965," *Journal of Social History* (Winter 2004), 285–310.
58. A rich literature correcting this perception of a nation of June Cleaver housewives has emerged over the past twenty years. See especially Murray, *Progressive Housewife*; and Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945–1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
59. G. R. Fogerty, "We Built Our Own Preschool," *Parents Magazine* (August 1949), 42, 92–93; and *El Cerrito Journal*, September 17, 1947. Several local newspapers provided extensive coverage of the cooperative in the 1940s and 1950s, often printing five to six articles each month on the school's activities. These items are collected in the ECPC Scrapbooks Collection, ECPC Archives, El Cerrito, California [hereafter ECPC Scrapbooks].
60. The East Bay Council of Cooperative Pre-Schools was the first regional co-op association in the United States. Hewes, *It's the Camaraderie*, 63, 84–85, 99, 116.
61. Fogerty, "We Built," 42; and *El Cerrito Journal*, September 5, 1946, January 11, 1947.
62. *El Cerrito Journal*, September 28, 1944; August 2, September 17, 1945; August 15, September 5, 1946; January 11, 30, 1947; August 25, 1949; c. 1940s and 1950s clippings in ECPC Scrapbooks Collection; and Fogerty, "We Built," 92–93.
63. Metropolitan Transportation Commission, "San Francisco Bay Area Households . . . 1930–2000," http://www.mtc.ca.gov/maps_and_data/datamart/stats/house.htm and *El Cerrito Journal*, September 23, 1943, c. January 1981, ECPC Scrapbooks; and Hank Bordowitz, *Bad Moon Rising: The Unauthorized History of Creedence Clearwater Revival* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007), 8.

64. These findings are based on a study of 145 parents who belonged to the preschool in the 1940s and 1950s. The information on their lives was gathered from a variety of sources, most notably the 1930 and 1940 U.S. Manuscript Censuses; *R.L. Polk Directories* for the Cities of Berkeley and Richmond, California, 1940–1960; the California Birth and Death Indexes; the U.S. Social Security Death Index; the State of California Registrar of Voters Lists for Alameda and Contra Costa Counties, California, 1940–1960; obituaries printed in the *Oakland Tribune*, *Richmond Independent*, and *Contra Costa Times*; and the ECPC Scrapbooks Collection.
65. During the postwar years, twenty-one of ECPC's twenty-seven presidents came from other states, among them Nebraska, Kansas, Oregon, and Utah. Only six of the 145 ECPC parents identified in a sample study were from the traditional South, while less than 10 percent of ECPC members grew up in the more urbanized Northeast. Ibid.
66. *El Cerrito Journal*, c. 1981, ECPC Scrapbooks; and Hewes, "It's the Camaraderie," 332–334.
67. Like most postwar moms across the country, they had also delayed beginning their families during the Great Depression and the war. On average, the ECPC mothers did not have their first child until they were 26.5 years old. See footnote 64 for the materials used to gather this information; and Landon Y. Jones, *Great Expectations: America and the Baby Boom Generation* (New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, 1980), 23–27.
68. *Oakland Tribune*, October 14, 1981, December 21, 1988; *El Cerrito Journal*, May 29, 1947, January 3, 1952, c. January 1981, ECPC Scrapbooks; Werner, *Up Around the Bend*, 14, 18; and Bordowitz, *Bad Moon Rising*, 8.
69. *Richmond Independent*, December 11, 1947; *El Cerrito Journal*, January 22, 1948; clippings, c.1945–1960, ECPC Scrapbooks; and Dee Dee Leif, et al., eds., *Pointers for Participating Parents* (San Francisco: East Bay Council of Cooperative Pre-Schools, 1963), 156–173.
70. East Bay Council of Cooperative Pre-Schools, *Anyone Can Start a Cooperative Nursery School* (Oakland: Community Welfare Commission, 1953), 11. This pamphlet was first published in 1946.
71. Lucile Fogerty, "When Children Quarrel," *Parents Magazine* (November 1949), 44, 84.
72. *NANE Bulletin* (December 1946) 6–7; and "An Experiment in Intercultural Living," undated *NANE Bulletin* article in author's possession.
73. *El Cerrito Journal*, October 22, 1953; and clippings, c. November 1953, ECPC Scrapbooks.
74. *El Cerrito Journal*, July 1, 1948; February 3, 24 and March 31, 1949; "I wonder what has happened to the Avenue prosperity of [the city's] fat years," commented the *El Cerrito Journal's* editor. "I hear, on every hand, that money is tight, collections are cold, and the banks are reading comic books at lunch time." *El Cerrito Journal*, July 29, 1948.
75. *El Cerrito Journal*, March 31, 1949.
76. "Report of the Citizens Conference for Civic Improvements," May 1, 1956; copy in ECHSA and in author's possession.
77. Ibid.
78. *Oakland Tribune*, June 18, 1958.
79. "El Cerrito Plaza" (brochure), El Cerrito Plaza file, ECHSA.
80. *Berkeley Daily Gazette*, July 8, 1958.
81. Ibid.
82. Paul Grunland, "El Cerrito Plaza: Birth of a 'Shoppers' Paradise," presentation sponsored by the El Cerrito Historical Society, October 10, 2013.
83. Capwell's was a full-service operation. In addition to its many retail departments, the store offered a range of services including a travel bureau, beauty salon, and appliance repair shop. Though the firm had four branches, Grunland recalls that "each store was different," as managers were able "to lean on" the firm's buyers to meet their shoppers' preferences. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. El Cerrito was actually named "Rust" for a brief period after William Rust, the town's blacksmith and first postmaster. Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 13–31; and El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 3–12.
86. City of El Cerrito, *General Plan* (El Cerrito: 1967, 1975, 1992); City of El Cerrito, *San Pablo Avenue Design Concept Plan* (Berkeley: Duncan and Jones, 1967); Grunland, "El Cerrito Plaza," and *Contra Costa Times*, June 11, 2013.
87. Cohen, *Consumers' Republic*, 257–289; and Staniford, *El Cerrito*, 63, 101, 107.
88. For a good introduction to historiography on the American shopping mall, see the forum discussion in the October 1996 edition of the *American Historical Review*. Of special interest is Kenneth T. Jackson's commentary, which is surprisingly hostile to Thomas W. Hanchett's innovative assertion that federal tax policies promoted shopping mall development in the post war era. In contrast, Jackson's comments on Lizabeth Cohen's paper, which describes downtown decline, racial segregation, and the end of political community, are completely uncritical.
89. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1960, Volume I . . . Part 6 California*, 6–89; Information Publications, *California Cities, Towns, and Counties* (Palo Alto: 1990), 125; *El Cerrito Wire*, December 5, 1999; and El Cerrito Historical Society, *El Cerrito*, 124–127.

90. El Cerrito Plaza file, ECHSA; Information Publications, *California Cities, Towns, and Counties* (Palo Alto: Information Publications, 1990–2008); State of California, *Statement of Vote* (Sacramento: 1998–2012; City of El Cerrito, *A Greener El Cerrito* (newsletter, issues for 2008–2014); and http://water.epa.gov/grants_funding/cwsrf/upload/El-Cerrito-Case-Study.pdf.
91. U.S. Department of Commerce, *Census of Population: 1950, Volume II: Part 5*, 5–53; and 2010 U.S. Census, http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml.
92. For the current city council, citizens' commissions, and budget information, see the city's website, <http://www.el-cerrito.org>.
93. *New York Times*, April 29, 2014.