

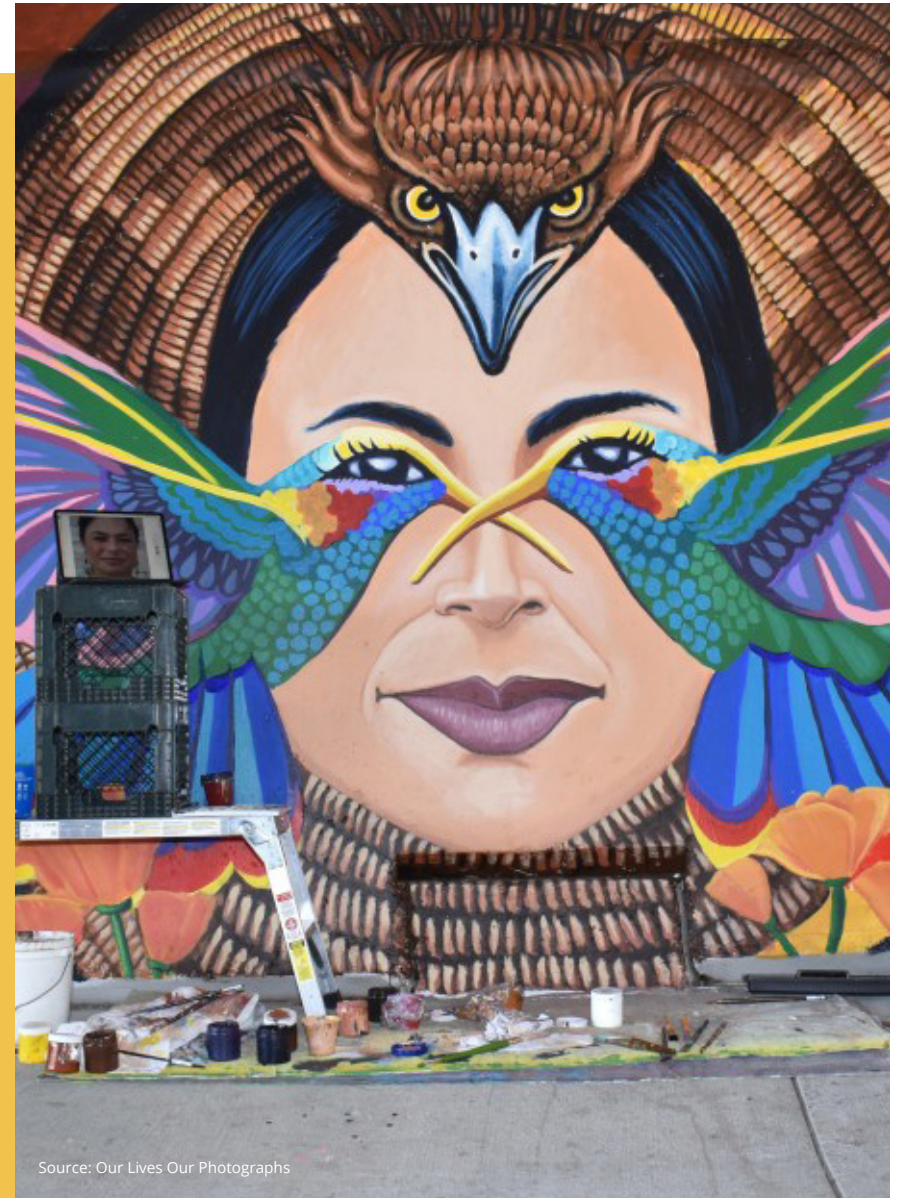
## CHAPTER 02

# LOOKING BACK TO MOVE FORWARD

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Throughout our nation's history, power exercised through policy, laws, opportunity, and resources, has been organized to enrich some at the expense of others.

The wealth seen today in San José and throughout California was built on a foundation of stolen land, slavery, and the exploitation of immigrant labor. American Indians, Blacks and other people of color were denied legal standing, the ability to own land, and the right to vote. Even as our nation has adopted laws protecting the civil rights of these groups and others, systemic racism and sexism remain deeply embedded in our society. To create a transportation system, and by extension a society, where all can flourish, we need to understand how things came to be as they are. What follows is a small strand of that story, woven around the development of our interstate system.



Source: Our Lives Our Photographs

Alfonzo Salazar's mural "We Are Still Here" near the Guadalupe River Trail.

## HISTORY OF SAN JOSÉ

In 1955, California authorized the construction of Interstate 280, a 57.5-mile-long highway paralleling U.S. 101 between San Francisco and San José. The project was designed to relieve traffic on Highway 101 and El Camino Real – traffic fueled by rapid population growth, rising car ownership, and suburban sprawl. The highway provided temporary traffic relief in San José, but at the expense of the city’s BIPOC and low-income residents.

Between 1950 and 1969, San José grew at an aggressive pace through annexations and by zoning large swaths of land for single-family residential developments. The city’s population increased more than five-fold, from 95,280 to 495,000 residents. Its total land area grew eight-fold, from 17 square miles to 136 square miles. Car ownership was key to this growth. With a car, people were able to live farther from their work and services. The freeway made it easier for auto owners to make those trips. The improvement benefited many, principally white middle- and upper-income residents who had access to Federal Housing Administration (FHA) and Veterans Administration-backed mortgages that allowed them to buy single-family homes in the suburbs. But it imposed a high cost on those who could not.

**Highways as barriers:** The construction of I-280 in the early 1960s, as well as that of Route 101 in 1926, destroyed numerous homes and businesses in low-income neighborhoods populated primarily by BIPOC communities. Many of these neighborhoods had seen decades of disinvestment in large part because they had been “redlined”<sup>3</sup> in the 1930s, classified by the FHA as high-risk investment areas because they were populated by BIPOC communities. The FHA also supported the

construction of boulevards and highways to separate Black neighborhoods from whites to prevent “the infiltration of...lower class occupancy, and inharmonious racial groups.” As a result, credit-worthy residents of these redlined areas could not get loans to purchase homes or commercial properties and those who already owned property could not get loans to renovate or repair them. The building stock gradually declined, causing these neighborhoods to be viewed as “blighted,” and hence ripe for redevelopment, compounding harm. Today, neighborhoods that are immediately adjacent to the I-680/I-280/US-101 interchange are experiencing early or ongoing gentrification, which may lead to displacement if not accompanied by efforts to retain and support existing communities. These communities also face higher environmental justice impacts, including poor air quality and increased localized air pollution from the neighboring highways, and higher levels of vehicle-related fatalities and injuries.



Source: U.S. DOT Federal Highway Administration

Aerial photo of Interstate 280 and Interstate 880/Bay Shore Freeway Interchange in San Jose.

3 Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*.



In August 2021, a study commissioned by the County of Santa Clara found that the use of leaded aviation fuel contributed to increased blood lead levels, especially for children living within a half-mile of the Reid-Hillview Airport in East San José. A high proportion of residents in this area are Latino/a/x and/or low-income.



Source: Ian Kluff

Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kluff-photo-Reid-Hillview-Airport-Mar-2008-Img\\_0444.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Kluff-photo-Reid-Hillview-Airport-Mar-2008-Img_0444.jpg)



**Exclusionary Zoning:** San José’s decision to zone much of its residential land exclusively for single-family housing also exacerbated inequity. Today, 94% of the city’s residential land is zoned for single-family. That means that apartments, condos, duplexes, and triplexes can only be built on 6% of the city residential land. According to San José’s 2020 Fair Housing analysis, 65% of the City’s housing stock is single-family homes. This imbalance restricts the supply of housing in the city, which increases its costs.<sup>4</sup> Affordable housing is also hard to come by in the city: nearly half (47%) of San José’s renters live in housing that is considered unaffordable; one in four spend more than half their income on housing-related costs; and Black, Hispanic, and Pacific Islanders face disproportionately greater barriers to securing affordable housing.<sup>5</sup>

In a recent study,<sup>6</sup> UC Berkeley’s Othering and Belonging Institute found that “cities with high levels of single-family zoning have greater resources (even relative to the generally wealthy and expensive Bay Area) in virtually every statistic we are able to measure. These cities have higher incomes, higher home values, better-performing schools, and the evidence indicates they are high opportunity in the broadest sense: children who were raised in these cities 30 years ago have better outcomes in their adulthoods. However, this is also consistent with a troubling pattern of social, economic, and racial exclusion in cities with high levels of single-family zoning... people who are excluded from these neighborhoods have fewer well-performing schools nearby, have lower incomes, and have less access to opportunity.”

<sup>4</sup> City of San José. Analysis of Impediments to Fair Housing Choice. 2020. Accessed via <https://www.sanjoseca.gov/your-government/departments/housing/memos-reports-plans/hud-reports/analysis-of-impediment-to-fair-housing-choice>

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Menendian, S., Gambhir, Samir., French, K., Gailles, Arthur. “Single-Family Zoning in the San Francisco Bay Area: Characteristics of Exclusionary Communities.” Othering and Belonging Institute, UC-Berkeley, 2020. Accessed via: <https://belonging.berkeley.edu/single-family-zoning-san-francisco-bay-area>

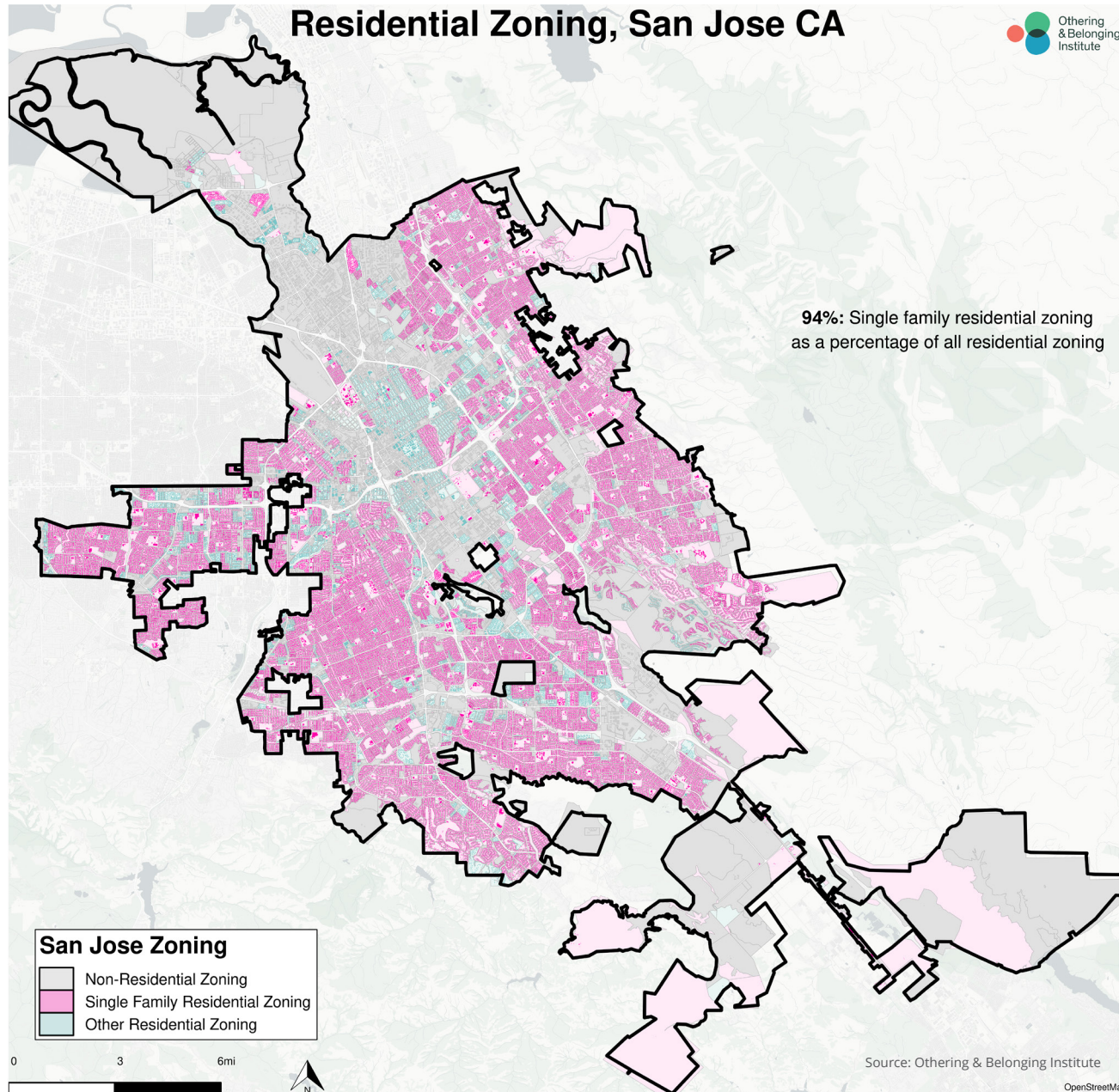


Source: Google Maps



Source: Google Maps

The Citywide Anti-Displacement Strategy identified Spartan Keys as a neighborhood that is at risk of displacement. The top image shows the 5th St and E Virginia St intersection in 2007. The bottom image shows the same intersection in 2020, following the construction of the Foundry Commons development.





**Cars key to access:** San José’s historical land-use decisions were supported by and promoted car ownership, which rapidly became the dominant form of transportation not only in San José but across the nation. Those who could afford to own a car could more easily access better jobs, housing options, schools, and services. Those who could not, did not. Faced with this stark choice, many BIPOC and low-income residents, then and now, have stretched their finances to get a car, despite the financial vulnerability it creates. According to the Center for Neighborhood Technology’s Housing and Transportation Affordability Index, 45% of San José households spend more than 45% of their income—the benchmark for affordability—on housing and transportation costs.<sup>7</sup> As a result, these residents have less income available to support their daily needs. The burden of car ownership costs in gas, insurance, vehicle registration, and repairs tend to weigh more heavily on people with low incomes who simultaneously grapple with rising rents and increased cost of living, a burden not experienced to the same degree by residents who are comparably more affluent.

**Investments prioritize driving:** For 50 years, San José was served by an extensive electric trolley service. But in 1938, the trolley was removed to make way for cars. Buses were brought in to take the trolley’s place. Both services were run by multiple private companies, until the County bought out the bus services and established County Transit (now the Valley Transportation Authority, VTA). But, the proliferation of vehicles, sprawling growth, and massive public investment in car-focused roadway improvements undermined the economics of transit. These

factors also increased the challenges faced by those dependent on public transit, who typically are BIPOC residents.<sup>8</sup> Fewer riders meant less income for the operators and consequently less service, which reduced ridership and impacted those who had no other choice. Since the late 1980s, federal funding has apportioned 80% of transportation funding for highways and 20% for public transit, maintaining a system that is inequitable as well as unsustainable. Due to the limited availability of federal funding for public transit, agencies like VTA and Caltrain<sup>9</sup> heavily rely on local and state sales tax, grants, and fares to operate and maintain service. Though sales tax receipts have continued to show positive growth, the rate of growth has slowed as expenses continue to increase. In contrast to previous administrations, the Biden administration is seeking to increase funding for public transit as a means to reduce auto-related greenhouse gas emissions.

These examples provide a thin slice of a much longer and more complicated story. Today, as housing costs continue to rise, more people are moving to bedroom communities like Tracy and Stockton while continuing to work in San José, resulting in longer commutes that necessitate a car. Housing insecurity has also resulted in large numbers of unhoused people in San José, who directly and indirectly interact with transportation options and infrastructure on a daily basis. Many unhoused people live near or in transportation structures (underpasses, bus stations, parking lots, or in the public right-of-way), but have limited to no access to the potential benefits mobility options may provide as their mobility needs are often not considered.

<sup>7</sup> <https://htaindex.cnt.org/map/>

<sup>8</sup> American Public Transportation Association, “Who Rides Public Transportation.” (2017). Accessed via: <https://www.apta.com/research-technical-resources/research-reports/who-rides-public-transportation/>

<sup>9</sup> The primary source of funding for the VTA Transit Fund, responsible for delivery of the bus and light rail service in the county, is sales tax. Sales tax based revenues account for roughly 75% of the VTA Transit Funds budgeted revenues for FY 2020 and 2021. Caltrain relies heavily on passenger fares to maintain service, though their capital budget is funded through a combination of federal, regional, and state grants.

It is essential for the City of San José to recognize this history to address challenges in a manner that facilitates the success of all. “Systems that are failing communities of color, are actually failing all of us,”<sup>10</sup> notes the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). This is particularly true given the accelerating and devastating impacts of climate change, which disproportionately impacts communities of color who, compared to others, are

more likely to be exposed to environmental hazards and more likely to live in areas with heavy pollution.<sup>11</sup> We need to act swiftly and boldly, but in partnership with all our communities at a pace that facilitates trust and enables collaboration. This is the context in which the City of San José is developing San José’s Emerging Mobility Action Plan.

<sup>10</sup> Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE), Why Working for Racial Equity Benefits Everyone. Accessed via: <https://www.racialequityalliance.org/about/our-approach/benefits/>

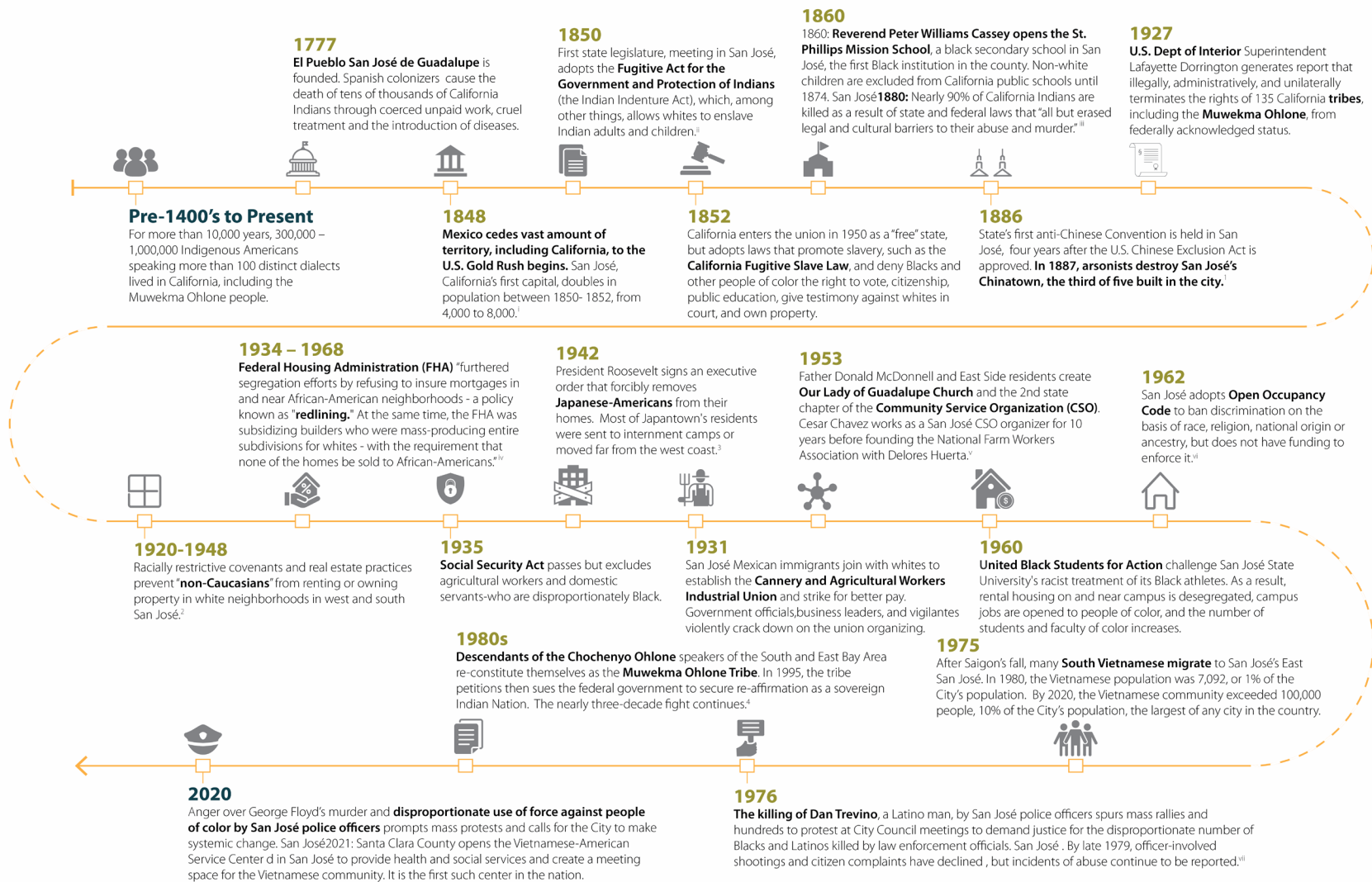
<sup>11</sup> Patnaik, A., Son, J., Feng, A., Ade, C., Racial Disparities and Climate Change. August 2020.



Source: VTA



# HISTORIC DRIVERS OF INEQUITY IN SAN JOSÉ



<sup>1</sup> Uninvited Neighbors: African-Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990, Herbert Ruffin.  
<sup>2</sup> Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians by Kimberly Johnson-Dodds, California Research Bureau, 2002. <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/18.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> An American Genocide: US and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873, by Benjamin Madley  
<sup>4</sup> An American Genocide: US and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846-1873, by Benjamin Madley; PBS American Experience: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/goldrush-act-for-government-and-protection-of-indians/>  
<sup>5</sup> Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians by Kimberly Johnson-Dodds, California Research Bureau, 2002. <https://www.courts.ca.gov/documents/18.pdf>  
<sup>6</sup> A 'Forgotten History' Of How The U.S. Government Segregated America, NPR, May 3, 2017, <https://www.npr.org/2017/05/03/526655831/a-forgotten-history-of-how-the-u-s-government-segregated-america>  
<sup>7</sup> <https://chavezfoundation.org/about-cesar-chavez/>  
<sup>8</sup> Why Two Black Athletes Raised Their Fists During the Anthem, NYTimes opinion, Oct. 16, 2018; Uninvited Neighbors: African-Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990, Herbert Ruffin  
<sup>9</sup> Police-Community Relations in San José, A staff report of the Western Regional Office of the U.S. Commission on Human Rights, April 2080. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/Digitization/69489NCJRS.pdf>

<sup>1</sup> San Jose Had 5 Chinatowns. What Happened to Them?, KQED, 6/17/21. <https://www.kqed.org/news/11877801/san-jose-had-5-chinatowns-why-did-they-vanish>  
<sup>2</sup> Uninvited Neighbors: African-Americans in Silicon Valley, 1769-1990, Herbert Ruffin.  
<sup>3</sup> JTown San Jose, History of Japantown San Jose, <https://town.org/history>  
<sup>4</sup> Muwékma Ohlone Tribe of the San Francisco Bay Area, Federal Recognition Quest: <http://www.muwékma.org/government/federalrecognitionquest.html>