

Neocolonialism in Sacramento

By: Khalil Ferguson

The Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon defines colonialism as "...the conquest of a national territory and the oppression of a people... Within the context of occupied territory, colonialism comes forth as dichotomizing force, enforcing oppressor and oppressed roles..." this definition allows us to examine the basis for neocolonialism which has been substantiated by Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana; he contends, "[T]he essence of neocolonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the trappings of international sovereignty. In reality it's economic system and thus its political system is directed from the outside." Within the Black community, gentrification can be viewed as neocolonialism, as it stems from the lack of political and economic control over the neighborhood which we reside in. Gentrification is rampant throughout the United States, particularly California, and more microcosmically in the City of Sacramento. The examination of neocolonialism is apparent in Sacramento through urban developmental policies guided by the auspices of laissez-faire market fundamentalism and macroeconomic regulatory premises, otherwise known as economic neoliberalism.

Gentrification in Sacramento and Neocolonialism on the continent of Africa stem from the same neoliberal policies and have the same degradational effects. The erosion of communal relations and the displacement of low-income individuals are an afterthought in place for urban development policies that seek to attract direct investment in an attempt to revitalize the community. Therefore, it can be observed that community members who reside in the jurisdiction of the specific areas have no economic or political control over policies that affects their livelihood, in line with the premise of neocolonialism outlined by Kwame Nkrumah.

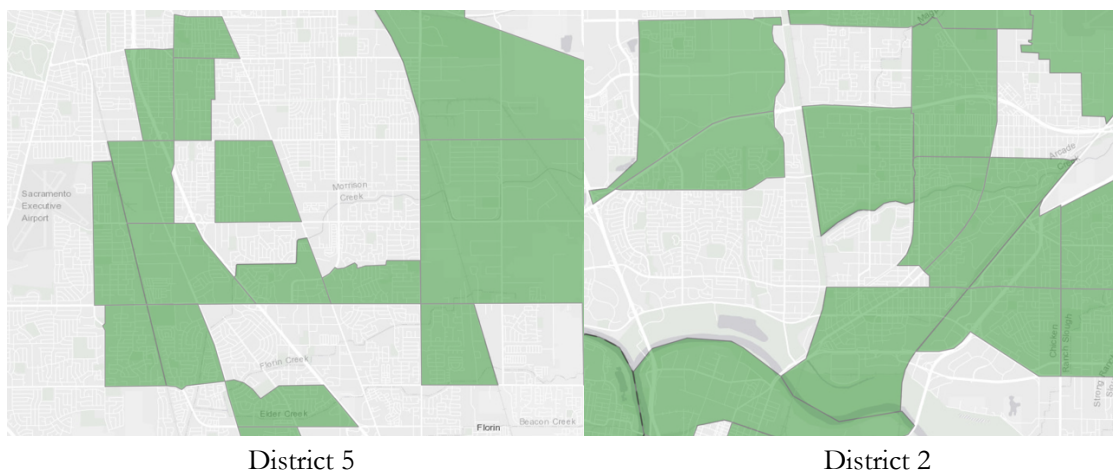
As I have lived in Sacramento and attended Sacramento State, studying Economics and International relations, I have noticed distinct similarities between the imposition of free market policies in the political economic sphere that aid in the exacerbation of socioeconomic issues for Black people domestically and globally.

The conditions faced by my people are the results of racist policies such as redlining, segregation, and over-policing. Legitimized by the state apparatus and capitalist finance institutions, these de jure and de facto practices created a dependency relationship between us and the state. As I observed the history of Oak Park and the characteristics of suburbanization leading to white flight, I found that the same colonial systems of control were used to mitigate problems in the neighborhood as were used in colonial Africa – a punitive and militarized criminal justice system. In addition, I have found that the ramifications of these policies are what have created the environment allowing for gentrification.

The premise for the economic neoliberal politic is financial liberalization, privatization, slashing of government spending (austerity), and the cultivation of a business climate ripe for inward capital investments. In Africa, the imposition of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) allowed for the privatization and commandeering of the African Economy under the purview of a free market-oriented economy. Similarly, these policies are apparent when analyzing gentrification here in Sacramento. The idea of New Market Tax Credits (NMTCs), and Opportunity Zones, are propensities contributing to growing gentrification. In fact, the propagation of Opportunity Zones can be traced to Richard Nixon who was a supporter of laissez-faire economics. The rhetoric

reinforces trickledown economics; contending that the means to lift populations out of poverty was to incentivize, and encourage private developers to invest in downtrodden communities (those affected by redlining, over-policing, and mass incarceration), resulting in the ostensible creation of jobs while the developer benefits from deferring taxes on capital gains throughout the longevity of investment holdings. However in 1995, a [study](#) conducted by the British government on the efficacy of enterprise zones concluded that tax-break incentivized policies do work to spur investment, but do not create jobs and do not lift people out of poverty. Additionally, an article posted by [Forbes](#) reinforces the statement that financial gains of Opportunity Zones largely benefit the investor relative to the community.

In my analysis, it came as no surprise that state designated Opportunity Zones are profound throughout Oak Park, an area which has already been affected by gentrification, as well as Del Paso Heights.



Already, the consequences of these neoliberal policies appear in the disproportionate amount of Black people within the homeless population. A recent [article](#) published by the *SacBee* shows how Black people, although making up 13 percent of the county's population, makeup 34 percent of the homeless population. This is the result of rising rents associated with redevelopment, pressure from migration from the Bay Area, and the inflation of prices on consumer goods accompanied by stagnant wages. Since displacement is inherent to gentrification – by definition, the removal of a lower class for a more affluent group of people, the connection between colonial domination of a territory and gentrification of a community is inextricably linked to neoliberal-neocolonial policies.

From Nixon, to Clinton, to Obama, and finally Trump the rhetoric surrounding Opportunity Zones has been reified despite having displayed perpetual shortcomings for Black people. This economic stance is also counterintuitive as low income communities makeup some of the largest consumer bases; a better strategy would be to directly invest into these consumer demographics in a more bubble-up economic manner. As a region we need to be more intentional, and inclusive when planning to develop areas that are composed of marginalized individuals. Bringing these populations from the periphery of our economy to the core should be the priority of both the public and private sector if we are to end the oppression of Black lives under this neoliberal economic regime.