Re-Constructing Hayes Valley:
Place Branding and Community in a Revitalizing Neighborhood

Gary Chan
Honors Thesis
Program on Urban Studies
Stanford University

Advised by:
Doug McAdam

Submitted:
05/16/2011
Overview of geographic area that Hayes Valley encompasses. A common theme that will be explored is the ambiguity of the extents of the neighborhood space. Various maps throughout this thesis will illustrate different understandings of the Hayes Valley’s boundaries.
# Table of Contents

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................................................... 4

Introduction ....................................................................................................................................................... 5
  Literature on Place Branding .......................................................................................................................... 9
  Project Methodology and Data Types ............................................................................................................ 12
  Project Roadmap ......................................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 1: A History of Hayes Valley
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................... 18
  Early History and Incorporation into San Francisco .................................................................................... 19
  Urban Renewal and the Central Freeway ....................................................................................................... 21
  Davies Hall Ushers in a “New Hayes Valley” ............................................................................................... 32
  Loma Prieta Unites Hayes Valleys ................................................................................................................ 38
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 43

Chapter 2: The Branding of a Neighborhood
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................... 45
  Dissecting the Hayes Valley Brand ................................................................................................................ 47
  Selling Individuality ....................................................................................................................................... 49
  Retelling Histories ........................................................................................................................................ 52
  Redefining “Hayes Valley” ............................................................................................................................ 56
  Temporal Positioning of the Branded Space ................................................................................................. 62
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 71

Chapter 3: Impacts of Branding on Community
  Introduction ..................................................................................................................................................... 73
  The Brand as Constructive Condensation and Community-Building ........................................................ 74
  The Role of Branded Space in Cultivating Place Attachment and Community ........................................ 78
  Conclusion .................................................................................................................................................... 85

Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................... 87
  Branding as a Context-Sensitive Tool ........................................................................................................ 88
  Directions for Further Research .................................................................................................................. 90

Sources Cited .................................................................................................................................................. 92
Acknowledgements

I’m lucky to have had so many individuals provide support and encouragement over the course of this project.

First and foremost, I am grateful for the guidance provided by my adviser, Doug McAdam, without whom this project would likely never have found its way off the ground. Thank you for pushing me to challenge myself and for helping make this thesis-writing experience a rewarding one.

I would also like to thank Kathleen Coll, who was instrumental in shaping this project, and Michael Kahan, Lindsay Owens, Sara Bloch and Elif Babul for their valuable help and feedback. Thanks also to my peers – Helen Kwan and Dominique Mikell in particular – for their ongoing encouragement, and to friends and family, who have been supportive through thick and thin.

Finally, I would like to extend my gratitude to and appreciation for the members of the Hayes Valley community, not just for their help throughout this process, but for their dedication to shaping a better community, not just for themselves, but for others as well.
Introduction

The stories we tell about places affect how we understand them. Often these stories are embedded in these places; they can be seen in the form of unique physical characteristics, or are present as invisible narratives that have shaped the built environment. The places that resonate on a collective level are those imbued with stories. They cannot be reduced to their physical characteristics, but instead, are places that are able to evoke emotional or psychological responses. The exploration of this notion of “place” is rooted largely in the disciplines of architecture or geography; Creswell traces the progression of thinking on place through these different disciplines (Cresswell 2004). Initially framed as an exploration of physical characteristics, the concept later expanded to encompass the social construction of places. As the realm of what a place is expanded, so too did its disciplinary breadth; recently, the concept made its way into urban planning and design as well. The concept of “placemaking” is entering the design lexicon, and the goal of creating a “sense of place” is often touted. Though Creswell does not arrive at a conclusive definition of what makes a “place,” a common theme amongst these texts is the notion of places as bearing some significance, some point to which an attachment – whether it be emotional, psychological, or otherwise – can be made.

The disappearance of places from American cities is a popular narrative within the urban studies literature. Of particular interest to urban critics is the American suburb, and in particular, those constructed in the middle of the 20th century. Within the literature and
contemporary planning practice, they are often cast in an unsavory light, and most pertinent to this discussion, are often criticized for being places without character. There are many oft-cited reasons for this, many of which trace their origin to the elevation of the suburban lifestyle as the epitome of the American Dream. The demand for suburban homes was high enough to justify construction practices that hearkened to mass production. The priority was on building quickly and efficiently, resulting in entire communities in which the only variations between houses were the shape of windows and trim on the doorway. Meanwhile, the proliferation of the automobile enabled suburbs to stretch further and further away from the urban core, linked to these city centers by highways that allowed drivers to cover vast expanses of land without so much as taking a breath of the air outside.

The combination of these factors has created what critics of planning and development practices in the mid-20th century frame as a homogenous American landscape. The physical appearance of this style of development certainly played a factor in this interpretation. However, the implications of this criticism extend beyond the matter of aesthetics; rather, suburbs are thought of as spaces lacking in character. The sense of homogeneity did not merely apply to the physical aspect of suburbs, but was read into emotional and psychological readings of the space. This character of a place – whether it be a vibrancy or calmness, a sense of order or eclecticism – provides for emotional attachment, which in turn results in a desire to maintain or improve these places. While this may seem farfetched to some, the relationship between character and emotional investment is a very real one. Strategies have been employed in order to cultivate this emotional attachment, and are by no means a new practice. Developers have used marketing techniques to give their properties their own identity: new developments often
use idyllic names or appealing slogans to make them seem like distinctive places imbued with character.

This project focuses on the Hayes Valley neighborhood in San Francisco, CA. Though Hayes Valley is an urban neighborhood rather than a suburb, it too faced issues rooted in perceptions of the space. Rather than suffering from anonymity, however, it was characterized in a much more negative light. For a period, the name “Hayes Valley” was associated with crime and blight; the physical neighborhood was better known as a place to pass through quickly, if not to avoid at all costs. Today, the district is home to different businesses that proudly boast the Hayes Valley name, and hanging on lampposts up and down the street are banners that bear the neighborhood's name in a memorable manner (spelled out in a simple font, with extra emphasis on the “yes”).

Patricia’s Green on the intersection of Hayes Street and the new Octavia Boulevard can be read as the de-facto center of the Hayes Valley neighborhood, and in many ways, is representative of the neighborhood's transformation. Named after the late neighborhood activist Patricia Walkup, the neighborhood green fittingly encapsulates many of the characteristics touted by community members. It is a unique public space that caters to visitors to the neighborhood – whether they be customers of
the many businesses along the central corridor, or patrons of the public art that is on display at the center of the green. It also serves neighborhood residents by providing ample space for socializing, for dog-owners to bring their pets, and a playground that caters to the neighborhood's young children and parents. The park now stands where a freeway overpass once was; the symbol of the neighborhood's blight symbolically replaced by the neighborhood's brightest sign of vitality.

However, this image of the neighborhood is not synonymous with the objective physical reality. Hayes Valley has undergone significant physical change since the 1970s, and traces of the neighborhood's more troubled history peek through. Empty lots still remain on either side, waiting to be developed; sitting near these lots – as well as in the park itself – are homeless men loitering, more reflective of the purported conditions of the neighborhood's past than the present on display on Hayes Street. Nevertheless, stories of the neighborhood's past few decades focus on the positive changes in Hayes Valley. The telling of select stories, and eventually, of a single dominant narrative in the form of a brand identity was an integral part of the neighborhood's transition. This project will examine this process of place branding, and explore its impact in a revitalizing neighborhood context. Through a multi-method approach, I explore what the current perceptions of Hayes Valley are, and the role branding has played in shaping these perceptions. By incorporating multiple streams of data, including demographic data, archival data, and ethnographic interviews I will discuss the effect of branding on the neighborhood's revitalization, and in particular, its impact on the perceptions and understandings of the neighborhood.
Literature on Place Branding

Place branding is defined as “the practice of applying brand strategy and other marketing techniques and disciplines to the economic, social, political and cultural developments of cities, regions and countries” (Anholt 2004, cited by Kerr 2006). Some components of this brand strategy may include creating a logo or slogan for a place, or emphasizing certain characteristics, features, or activities. The practice of marketing a place – be it a nation, city, or region – is not a new one. Stephen Ward’s Selling Places (1998) is a historical survey of place marketing, tracing the practice of marketing places to colonial America (though the practice likely existed even earlier). However, the emergence of the term “place branding” – and the development of a body of literature around the phenomenon – occurred only recently (Hanna and Rowley 2007).

Much of the research on place branding has been situated in a body of literature focused on tourism and destination marketing. The study of branding originated from a business and marketing standpoint, and as such, the topic of place branding has often been studied with an eye toward evaluating a brand's performance, as in Berkowitz's 2007 work describing nation branding in China. This approach, though useful in quantitatively justifying the application of branding (and thus, in some ways, legitimizing it as a phenomenon worth studying), presents the brand as detached from the intrinsic qualities of the place that is the subject of the brand. Often, the process is strictly framed as destination marketing; Kerr (2006) suggests the need for a discourse on place branding that doesn't emphasize the creation of a destination to draw tourists, but with greater considerations for the major stakeholders in the place being branded – an approach he calls, location branding (as opposed to destination branding). It is true that
many of the cases of branding were in fact motivated by a desire to attract visitors, and thus, most any study of place branding would include some element of tourism; however, recent projects have approached the branding of cities and nation-states with a focus on the process itself. This more historical approach chronicles the creation of the brand in a particular geographic space over a specific moment or period in time (eg. Greenberg 2008). This approach favors a more narrative-driven presentation of the branding process over analysis of the performance of the brand; the results of branding are not so much quantified as portrayed as moments within the narrative. Govers and Go, in their 2009 book, discuss both in order to deconstruct the place branding model and offer their own 3-gap model to analyze the strength of a place brand. Their model accounts for ways in which the host-guest encounter would be affected: the ability of a narrative to reflect uniqueness, the provision of an experience that matches the brand, and differences in cultural interpretations of aspects of the brand. While this model deals primarily with brands on a global scale, and while it is not wholly applicable, these can be reinterpreted for the neighborhood scale as the ability to draw on distinctive aspects of the neighborhood, the embedding of the brand image in the local context, and the perceptions of the brand to the outside audience.

Though much of the literature on place branding views the practice as a means of revitalizing the image of a city or nation-state, there is little literature that takes an in-depth look at the social impact of branding in the communities in question. Many that do take host communities into account (Park et al, 2009) do so in a way that suggests best practices for participation in the emerging tourism economy, or the role of local residents within a tourism paradigm, rather than focusing on the perception and quality of life of community residents.
more generally. For instance, Munar (2009) discusses the disproportionate power of the tourist over the resident in shaping the image of a place, a result of the current cultural and technological moment that allows for the validation or contradiction of place brands.

This lack of community-centric research is partly a result of the geographic scale of many of these studies. Many of the existing studies on place brands are conducted at the city or national scale (e.g., Kavaratzis and Ashworth, 2006; Winfield-Pfefferkorn, 2005); few address the practice on a smaller, or more local level. Dinnie's (2003) literature review suggests that much of the discourse on place branding does in fact focus on the phenomenon at a larger scale, and a subsequent analysis of literature by Hanna & Rowley (2007) confirm this trend. This precludes the analysis of branding on a more local level.

The body of work focusing on the social impacts of branding is, however, gradually expanding. Case studies have been done that discuss the social effects of intentional manipulations of neighborhood identity. For example, Reitman (2004) conducts case studies that analyze the impacts of renaming as a means of crafting a new neighborhood identity. She is careful to emphasize that renaming connotes an abandonment of the community’s old identity, which is not the case in Hayes Valley. Rather, the approach taken in Hayes Valley seems more focused on cultivating a sense of ownership of the Hayes Valley name. Fostering a sense of neighborhood identity may have positive long-run effects on community engagement (Haeberle 1987), and branding may be one means of achieving that. However, this may also cause erosion or transformation of neighborhood identity. Research into ethnically-branded or marketed neighborhoods discuss the possibility of a link between such manufactured identities and gentrification (Hackworth & Rekers 2005). Sales’s research in London’s Chinatown, on the other
hand, reveals a community that remains an important anchor for the Chinese community, despite its continued transformation into a tourist attraction (Sales et al. 2009).

Though place branding has been portrayed as a means of repairing the image of a city or nation, the intersection of branding and neighborhood revitalization is one that has not been studied in great detail. Difficulties around measuring the impact of place branding remain a challenge to this (Gartner 2009); however, where these challenges exist, there is also opportunity for additional research.

This project examines the phenomenon of place branding in the context of neighborhood revitalization, and takes a multi-method approach to the study of branding in a San Francisco neighborhood. Through a combination of semi-structured interviews, mapping exercises, archival research, and analysis of demographic data, I trace the creation and impact of the Hayes Valley brand, and the impact of this brand on different processes of neighborhood revitalization that were occurring concurrently with (and arguably, partially as a result of) the branding of the neighborhood.

**Project Methodology and Data Types**

A variety of methods were used to explore the process, content and impact of branding in Hayes Valley. This mix of methods provides a more holistic view of the processes behind Hayes Valley's physical and symbolic transformations; it allowed for the cross-referencing of different stories and accounts in order to delineate distinctions between perceptions, intentionally created narratives, and objective reality. The majority of the research for this project was conducted over a period of three months. During this time, semi-structured
ethnographic interviews were conducted with a variety of neighborhood stakeholders. The majority of the interviews was conducted over the course of three months, and was mostly conducted in person, with some over the phone. Interview questions explored experiences in and interpretations of the Hayes Valley neighborhood; however, the explicit notion of branding was brought up only toward the end of interviews (the exception to this was unless the subject discussed the notion of marketing earlier in the interview). Subjects for interviews were selected through snowball sampling, with initial subjects being identified through published accounts describing Hayes Valley. My initial subjects were those whose names appeared with more frequency in newspaper articles and neighborhood publications. This first group represents a sampling of those that were particularly active in neighborhood affairs; subjects were then asked to suggest additional contacts, including those whose names came up over the course of the interview, and in some cases, neighbors or acquaintances not as involved with neighborhood organizations.

These interviews were complemented by archival sources, many of which are available through the San Francisco Public Library or in digital form through the websites of different neighborhood groups and organizations. In addition to newspaper and magazine articles, neighborhood publications were an important source of information. The two primary groups consulted were the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA) and the Hayes Valley Merchants Association (HVMA). Though these groups are not recognized (political) bodies, they are the de facto representative groups for the Hayes Valley neighborhood. In general, they are viewed by insiders and outsiders as representative groups, and those most active in neighborhood affairs. Thus, the portrayals of the neighborhood provided by each of these
groups have the ability to carry with them backing by groups with a widely recognized sense of credibility. However, the functions of these two organizations differ. The materials distributed or endorsed by these groups – which include newsletters and postcards – were and are critical to the shaping of the neighborhood's brand. Documents produced by each of these groups contribute to the story and the lore of the neighborhood. Parts of these stories include histories of the neighborhood, as fashioned by individuals in the organizations. These accounts, which intertwine the formation of each group with the changes in Hayes Valley, become the means through which the neighborhood's history is learned and repeated. Thus, the inclusions and omissions in these histories become the history of the neighborhood.

I also used maps and mapping exercises to supplement data collected through archival research and interviews. A variety of different maps were collected from different groups, organizations and individuals. The variation in authorship of these maps added an important dimension to the analysis. Some maps were “official” in nature: maps produced by the City and County of San Francisco differ from those produced by the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association or Hayes Valley Merchants Association were in turn treated differently: while they do not hold any legal bearing, the boundaries listed are those subscribed to by each group. Finally, a series of “unofficial” maps were consulted, of which there were two primary types: the first were those produced and printed by different local and national publications regarding the neighborhood. These maps, created by “outsiders” with no official bearing on or connection with the neighborhood, were seen as both prescriptive and perceptive – as both contributing to the impression of what the neighborhood is (technically outside of the construct of branding, but still very much a part of the process) as well as interpreting what the brand of the
neighborhood represented. In addition to these collected maps, interview subjects were also asked to produce maps on pre-printed street grids. These maps varied and were in response to questions about the borders and boundaries of Hayes Valley, and significant spaces in the neighborhood. Not all respondents filled out maps\(^1\). Maps were analyzed on the basis of similarities and differences, with particular attention to the notion of boundary. This emerged as a significant point of exploration even amongst the earlier maps collected, and informed the analysis of the effect of a place brand on the understanding of a physical space. In particular, the maps were useful in the understanding of difference in ideas about the neighborhood, which spoke to both the strength of the brand and its role as a unifying force for the community.

In approaching data analysis, I was careful to pay attention to the source, content, and accessibility of information gathered. Because this project focuses on branding (which necessitates the formation and communication of a public image), I paid particular attention to the availability of the information gathered to the general public. As a result, while the description of the history of the branding process draws heavily on interview data, the analysis of the content of the brand focuses on what is publicly available: published articles, and documents from the Hayes Valley Merchants Association. This was done to ensure that the content being analyzed – the brand image – is in fact what the neighborhood advertises, and not what insiders perceive Hayes Valley to be.

\(^{1}\) This was mostly a result of the setting or medium through which the interviews were conducted, i.e. phone interviews, or because of alternative means of providing geographical provisions, such as verbal descriptions or the provision of alternative maps in lieu of rendering them on these sheets.
Project Roadmap

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first portion provides historical context of the Hayes Valley neighborhood. It begins with Colonel Thomas Hayes's original acquisition of land, and follows the neighborhood through to the aftermath of the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. Throughout this process, I locate the changes in the neighborhood within the context of city and nation-wide trends. By framing the neighborhood's history in this way, I intend to provide a contrast to the relatively insulated, neighborhood-centric image presented by the neighborhood's brand. I also emphasize the period between the opening of the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall and the Loma Prieta earthquake, a part of the neighborhood's past that I argue is critical to understanding its current state, but that is also under-represented in the neighborhood's dominant revitalization narrative. This is important in understanding the limiting effects of branding on a space's identity, and seeing firsthand the ability of the neighborhood brand to selectively mask portions of the neighborhood's past.

Building on this history, the second portion of the thesis applies the concept of place branding as a means of framing the changes in Hayes Valley. As we can see in the case of Hayes Valley, this was undertaken by the neighborhood's Merchants Association with the intention of recasting Hayes Valley commercial corridor in a more positive light. In this chapter, I examine how a new identity was crafted, and more importantly, protected from contamination by “off-brand” forces. I also look at some of the problems of the brand as a descriptive tool. In particular, the branded identity of the Hayes Valley neighborhood tends to mask racial dynamics of the neighborhood's transformation, instead positioning change in the neighborhood space as a wholly community-driven evolution. Hayes Valley's changes are positioned solely as a positive,
feel-good story – a quality that is helpful in reversing perceptions of the space, but that limit the brand’s descriptive ability. In particular, the brand obfuscates the reality of the neighborhood’s gentrification, and ignores the displacement of older residents that is occurring in the background.

In the final chapter of this thesis I analyze the impact of the brand from a more community-oriented lens. This is problematic if we are to treat the content of the Hayes Valley brand as anything more than a marketing tool. However, the Hayes Valley brand is used not only in a descriptive manner, but in a prescriptive one. The brand is limited in its descriptive capacity by these exclusions, but succeeds in affecting change in the community by framing brand objectives as manifestations of shared values. This appeal to the larger community reinforces a collective identity grounded in the neighborhood brand and leverages community resources to protect the branded space.
Chapter 1:

A History of Hayes Valley

“Great men have been born and have died in Hayes valley, distinction has fallen on the shoulders of many of her sons; but the history of Hayes valley is a history of ordinary human beings, their joys and sorrows, their ambitions, their fulfillment or failure, their quarrels and reconciliations.”

Evelyn Seeley, 1928

Introduction

In order to understand the impact of branding on the Hayes Valley neighborhood, it is necessary to expound on the neighborhood's historical context leading up to the moment of branding. While the neighborhood's brand provides a version of Hayes Valley's history, it is a history that is quite condensed and focused on the internal happenings of neighborhood. In this chapter, I will provide a brief survey of the neighborhood's history, from the initial acquisition of land by Colonel Thomas Hayes (for whom the neighborhood is named) to the state of the neighborhood just before the dismantling of the Central Freeway.

Of course, even in this attempt to provide a more comprehensive overview of Hayes Valley's history, I recognize there will be quite a bit left out; it is impossible to present a complete history of a neighborhood, let alone a completely objective one. This endeavor is complicated by the fact that the definition of the neighborhood is in constant flux. The physical
space known as Hayes Valley changes over time, and is understood differently by multiple groups. The definitions and extents of the neighborhood are fluid, leading to many areas of possible discrepancy within descriptions of the neighborhood even today. This makes the presentation of certain types of data – for instance, quantitative demographic data – rather difficult to assess and communicate. However, this also exemplifies the extent to which Hayes Valley's past was shaped by the space and trends outside of the confines of the neighborhood space; as such, I provide data that helps to contextualize Hayes Valley's changes with those of San Francisco.

**Early History and Incorporation into San Francisco**

Most accounts of the neighborhood's history draw its origin tale back to Colonel Thomas Hayes as the instrumental figure in the founding of the Hayes Valley neighborhood. Hayes, born in Ireland in 1823, moved with his family to New York at the age of five. He became politically well-connected in New York but, like many others, would be drawn west by the news of the discovery of gold decades later. Hayes arrived in California in July of 1849 and almost immediately became involved in local politics. He became a deputy sheriff within his first years there, and eventually became a county clerk, serving from 1853 to 1856.

Though Hayes had achieved a bit of political clout, his foray into land-ownership began through dubious means. In his first year in California, he appropriated 160 acres of unclaimed land for himself in what is now the heart of San Francisco and built his home there, setting himself up as a squatter. His holdings would later be legitimized by the Van Ness Ordinance of
1855\textsuperscript{1}. His estate occupied the block that is today bound by Franklin Street, Van Ness Boulevard, Hayes Street and Grove Street. In 1861, he built a park on his expansive property. The park, called Hayes Park, boasted the three-story Hayes Pavilion with a restaurant and bar, and soon became a popular destination for San Franciscans. The park was linked to rest of the city by a street railway – one of the first in San Francisco – that Hayes helped to construct in the late 1850s. The rail line ran along Market Street and connected Hayes's property to the Mission, and served not only to bring San Franciscans to Hayes Park, but to increase the Hayes Tract's land values and profile. Likely drawing on this success, Hayes subdivided his land and sold it to speculators, leading to the development of homes in the area.

Hayes died on a trip to the 1868 Democratic National Convention in New York. He therefore would not live to see the Hayes Pavilion destroyed by a fire in November of 1872. Despite the loss of this popular attraction, the neighborhood continued to grow, likely as the result of the railway Hayes helped construct. The majority of the homes in the Hayes Valley neighborhood were built before the turn of the century, and before an impending disaster that changed the face of San Francisco.

On April \textsuperscript{18}, 1906, an earthquake struck the city. Accounts state that many of the buildings in the city were able to withstand the earthquake, though they would succumb to a series of subsequent fires. To make matters worse, the earthquake damaged a critical water main, leaving the city without an adequate water supply to combat the blazes. The city was under siege from tens of fires that quickly spread amongst the city's wooden structures and eventually merged into two larger fires. Hayes Valley itself would be spared significant damage

\textsuperscript{1} This legislation passed by James Van Ness, Mayor of San Francisco and friend of Thomas Hayes, acknowledged squatter's claims to the land they occupied.
from these fires, though it would lose the Saint Ignatius College (which stood on the site of the former Hayes Pavilion) to a third fire that originated in Hayes Valley\(^2\). However, this fire would move eastward toward Van Ness Avenue and join another fire that had already burned its way toward the center of the city, rather than continue westward toward unburned territory, leaving Hayes Valley’s stock of Victorian homes mostly intact.

As a result of this citywide disaster, the area around Hayes Valley quickly changed. The destruction of San Francisco’s not-yet-completed City Hall building (at the time located on the triangular block between Market, Larkin, and McAllister Streets) in the fire led to the construction of a new City Hall as a part of a larger Civic Center to the east of Hayes Valley. This new district would also include the Civic Auditorium, the Main Public Library, the War Memorial Opera House, and Veteran's Building. These new structures – and the siting of the government and arts institutions they housed adjacent to Hayes Valley – would influence the neighborhood’s history throughout the next century.

**Urban Renewal and the Central Freeway**

As the neighborhood moved into the 20\(^\text{th}\) century, the largely American-born, white-collar, middle class neighborhood became home to an increasing number of ethnic minorities. The Hayes Valley neighborhood gained notoriety in the 1920s as the home of famous boxer Jim Corbett. In 1928, it was featured in multiple newspapers, including a multi-part series on the neighborhood, and another profile as a part of series on the Valleys of San Francisco. As the neighborhood moved toward the middle of the 20\(^\text{th}\) century, Hayes Valley would undergo a

\(^2\) The fire, nicknamed the "Ham-and-Eggs Fire," was inadvertently started by a woman in her Hayes Valley home. Sparks escaped from the chimney, which was damaged during the earthquake.
period of significant transition, and experience events that would set the stage for what transpired in the neighborhood's recent past.

It is ironic, then, that much of the neighborhood's mid-20th century history is so closely intertwined with the identity of the Western Addition, rather than Hayes Valley. A significant portion of the Hayes Valley neighborhood was included within the Western Addition Redevelopment District—an area designated as blighted by the City, and thus, eligible to be redeveloped through the City's urban renewal program. Though physical redevelopment in the Hayes Valley area did not occur until 1961, planning for the clearing of blight in the Western Addition was proposed much earlier. A San Francisco City Planning Commission publication entitled *New City: San Francisco Redeveloped* published in 1947 proposes the Western Addition Redevelopment District as a study area for potential redevelopment. The document praises the redevelopment plan, stating that it would replace "the dilapidation and disorder of more than half a century" that allegedly was the existing condition in the "blighted" Western Addition District (Scott 1947). As a result, the Hayes Valley name—and its individual identity—faded into the backdrop of the context of urban renewal. Nevertheless, the physical changes to the space that the neighborhood once encompassed (and stands in today) were particularly important in shaping the contemporary neighborhood.

The dynamics that reshaped Hayes Valley can be seen as local manifestations of national demographic shifts. In particular, the planned redevelopment of much of the Western Addition was in response to an influx of ethnic minorities—most prominently, African-Americans—into inner-cities, often in search of employment opportunities offered in major metropolitan cities; Census data indicates this demographic shift took place in San Francisco as well (Table 1.1).
While the absolute increase in San Francisco's white population more than doubled that of the black population between 1940 and 1950, the percentage change is significantly higher in the latter, a trend that would continue into the 1970s. This likely contributed to “white flight,” another phenomenon which exacerbated this demographic shift. During the same time period, many middle class families – predominantly white – left city centers in favor of suburban subdivisions. We see this trend in Census data as well: between 1950 and 1970, the white population of San Francisco decreased 26% from 693,888 to 512,902.

**Table 1.1: Population Totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1930</th>
<th>1940</th>
<th>1950</th>
<th>1960</th>
<th>1970</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>634,394</td>
<td>634,536</td>
<td>775,357</td>
<td>740,316</td>
<td>715,674</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>602,891</td>
<td>602,701</td>
<td>693,888</td>
<td>604,403</td>
<td>512,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>3,803</td>
<td>4,846</td>
<td>43,502</td>
<td>74,383</td>
<td>95,845</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>27,700</td>
<td>26,989</td>
<td>37,967</td>
<td>61,530*</td>
<td>106,927</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The 1960 "Other" category was further broken down into Indian, Japanese, Chinese, Filipino, and Other. These are summed in this table to maintain consistency with other years.

Source: US Census

This phenomenon can and has been interpreted in many ways: as a response to the influx of minorities, and particularly African-Americans, or a trend facilitated by the popularity of the automobile (and as we will see, the highway), or the elevation of a suburban home into one of the components of the “American Dream.” Regardless of the reason, this population shift left behind urban neighborhoods that had been dramatically transformed demographically. Figures 1.1-1.6 illustrate the demographic changes that occurred in Hayes Valley and the
Figure 1.1: Percentage Black Population, 1940 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 1.2: Percentage White Population, 1940 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 1.3: Percentage Black Population, 1960 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 1.4: Percentage White Population, 1960 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 1.5: Percentage Black Population, 1970 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 1.6: Percentage White Population, 1970 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
surrounding area in the period between 1940 and 1970.

These demographic changes were not experienced equally throughout the city. Rather, they were shaped by other forces. Massey and Denton's *American Apartheid* (1993) discusses some of the institutional constraints that reshaped the demographics of major cities in the middle of the 20th century, and in particular the impact of residential segregation on urban neighborhood demographics. Though Massey and Denton find that the extent to which this segregation took place in San Francisco was less than that of other cities, it is clear from the maps that the city was also impacted by these same general trends. As suggested by Hirsch (1998), whose work focused on Chicago but spoke to similar events nationally, ethnic minorities were typically concentrated in areas where a number of minorities had already established themselves. The housing stocks of these neighborhoods were sometimes of poorer quality or upkeep, which was certainly the case in the former Hayes Valley. Originally built as a middle-class expansion to the city, it became a haven for refugees of the 1906 disaster. Many of the mostly-intact Victorian homes in the area became prime subjects for conversion into multi-family complexes. Not built for the capacities they were converted to bear these homes gradually fell into disrepair; as minorities began to move into the city, they were gradually funneled into these homes.

Though race was not used explicitly as a justification for the redevelopment of districts like the Western Addition, later criticisms of the processes by which neighborhoods were deemed "blighted" (and thus eligible for redevelopment funding) suggest, at the very least a subtext of racial inequality in these decisions. For instance, Hirsch describes the clearance of black neighborhoods and relocation of area residents into poorly-designed public housing
projects, often inferior to the "blighted" conditions they experienced previously. These "improvements" were often justified by rhetoric that suggested the betterment of blighted living conditions.\footnote{Another criticism of these projects is that the families displaced by this redevelopment were often not the ones who would move into these new facilities.}

However, the guise of eradicating blight was not the sole reason that cities pursued redevelopment. As Mollenkopf discusses in *The Contested City*, there was also a political component to this. The Western Addition's proximity to the Civic Center and the rest of downtown San Francisco, combined with the racial demographic of the neighborhood at the time, made it not just a suitable target for redevelopment, but an area where redevelopment was an imperative. Mollenkopf points out the awareness on the part of government and central business district officials to the value of the land, as well as pro-growth agenda behind the official adoption of the district's 1964 renewal plan. However, in the eyes of officials at the time, economic growth did not just hinge on masking the city center's blight, but on infrastructural changes to accommodate this growth.

The Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 made it the imperative of many American cities to construct a system of high-speed motorways. Though the Eisenhower administration framed the need for these highways on the grounds of national defense, they soon became closely intertwined with the proliferation of the automobile that became more readily available to an emerging American middle class. These highways were designed to link newly burgeoning suburbs to city centers and downtowns; however, in order to do this, highways had to be built through existing urban neighborhoods. As with other urban renewal projects of the period, these infrastructure improvements targeted blighted neighborhoods, as these were the easiest
to claim through eminent domain. It is in this context that the Central Freeway found its way into San Francisco, by way of Hayes Valley and a portion of the Western Addition.

The middle of the 20th century was a period of aggressive highway-building. The Highway Act provided Federal money for projects slated to improve cities and because of the exodus of middle class families – and taxes – to suburbs outside the jurisdiction of major cities, many were eager to develop comprehensive plans. San Francisco was among these cities, and had plans for a loop of highways circling the city, as well as the construction of a Central Freeway that would bisect the city and provide easy access to the city’s Civic Center, allowing drivers to bypass urban congestion. In 1959 the Central Freeway, which was built through the current Hayes Valley neighborhood, opened to automobile traffic. Though it provided easier access to the city’s downtown and Civic Center, the Central Freeway would not prove as successful in the city’s attempts to improve the quality of life for area residents. By creating an inhospitable environment that, according to later accounts, was conducive to crime, the Central Freeway would do more to create an unsafe environment than any of the prevailing social conditions existing in the pre-renewal Western Addition.

**Davies Hall Ushers in a “New Hayes Valley”**

In addition to being adjacent to the Civic Center, the Hayes Valley portion of the Western Addition was in close proximity to arts institutions such as the War Memorial Opera House and the Veteran’s Building. The opening of the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall in 1980 – and the extension of the Arts District – helped to increase Hayes Valley’s profile, and signaled the beginning of a transformation of the neighborhood. Though it would be decades before Hayes
Valley was able to shed the image of a “blighted” neighborhood, the symphony hall – and the changes that came with it – certainly marked a step forward. The city’s performing arts hub was always adjacent to the neighborhood, but the presence of the Central Freeway overpass – and the shady activity on Octavia Boulevard – served to discourage contact between the two districts. Though the construction of Davies did not rid the neighborhood of this nuisance, it did contribute to an increase in commercial activity in the area, as well as provide a new context for outside exposure to the area.

Changes began to take place in the neighborhood even before Davies Hall’s opening. The extension of the city’s Arts District into the area created opportunities for businesses catering to patrons of the Arts District (as well as downtown workers). In light of the anticipated increase in traffic into (or, at least toward the perimeter of) the community, restaurants such as the Hayes Street Grill opened in what had previously been described as a “culinary desert” (Adams 1980). Decades of urban “blight” and inattention to Hayes Valley made rents in the retail district along Hayes Street relatively affordable, and presented the opportunity for businesses that catered to symphony-goers and opera patrons.

These changes, in combination with the increased foot traffic and “eyes on the street” created an – at the very least perceived – impact on neighborhood crime. A January 1987 report entitled Neighborhood Commercial Rezoning: Economic Impact Assessment was published by the City’s Planning Department, and included interviews with residents, merchants, and property owners in the Hayes-Gough Neighborhood Commercial Shopping Center District. In the report, a resident is quoted as saying, “The people from Davies Hall, they park here, and so there are more police around the area to look out for them. And with more police, the
neighbou‌rd is safer.” The resident clearly attributes the changes to the recently-opened symphony hall, suggesting that the neighborhood did not receive adequate attention from the police before this new demographic (“the people from Davies Hall”) came into the neighborhood. Another interview with a neighborhood merchant echoed similar sentiments about the change. In a description written by a City employee:

“*He mentions that the neighborhood was neglected by the City in terms of police protection and adequate street lighting and cleaning. The area has recently changed to accommodate opera goers. [...] According to him, now the area is ‘up and coming’ and neighborhood residents have little reason to feel resentful. The City is paying more attention to the neighborhood.*”

Description attributed to “Neighborhood Merchant”

Despite these reports, however, crime data from the San Francisco Police Department's Northern Station (which, in addition to servicing Hayes Valley, also includes the rest of the Western Addition under its jurisdiction) indicates a fairly consistent level of crimes commonly cited before and after the opening of Davies.  

**Table 1.2:** Incidences of crime by type, as reported to Northern Police Station

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>1,173</td>
<td>2,092</td>
<td>1,078</td>
<td>1,178</td>
<td>1,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>3,030</td>
<td>2,632</td>
<td>1,872</td>
<td>1,920</td>
<td>1,799</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>5,133</td>
<td>5,897</td>
<td>5,127</td>
<td>5,133</td>
<td>5,663</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SFPD Annual Reports.

---

7 There is no conclusive explanation for the increase in robbery between 1975 and 1981. One possibility is the increase in pedestrian activity in the vicinity following the opening of Davies Hall. Another set of possibilities is the increase in reported incidences, possibly resulting from the increased police attention. Further research into specific police reports, if available, would provide a more definitive explanation.
Though the impact of Davies was felt within the neighborhood, the relatively constant levels of crime – if not in direct proximity to Davies Hall, then in the general vicinity – helped to diminish the credibility of the proclamations of change in the neighborhood. However, this would not stop attempts to present San Franciscans with a “new Hayes Valley.” As stated in a 1981 brochure:

*The grand opening of the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall has heralded a new sense of pride and excitement in the Hayes Valley Community – and it shows. Almost overnight, there has been a huge influx of interesting, new shops, excellent restaurants, and service oriented businesses. The area's rich cultural atmosphere has attracted an exciting diversity of new merchants and professionals who are eager to make your visits to Hayes Valley enjoyable and memorable experiences.*

Publication by the Spencer Granville Agency

The reverse side of this brochure features a map of the new commercial storefronts that made up this “new Hayes Valley” (Fig. 1.7-1.8). One important feature to note is that the majority of these businesses was concentrated toward the eastern side of the highway, with little cross-over to the other side. Of the 29 businesses featured on this map, only 5 are located on the eastern side of the Central Freeway overpass; the other 24 are on the same side of the freeway as Davies Hall, and the majority of them within a block of the symphony hall.

Though Hayes Valley was changing, there was still disagreement as to the exact boundaries of the area. One period news article characterized Hayes Valley as a district featuring Victorian homes, the San Francisco Zen Center, and the original site of Hayes Park (Dees 1976); another pointed to the emerging commercial district between the Civic Center and

8 When asked about the Spencer Granville Agency, a business owner in the neighborhood from this period was unable to identify whom or what it was. Other searches yielded no results.
Over the past two years, the Hayes Valley near San Francisco's Civic Center, has experienced a remarkable renaissance. Recognized as one of the city's most spectacular examples of urban re-jewelization, The Hayes Valley is now a bustling community of fine shops, restaurants, and businesses.

The grand opening of the Louise M. Davies Symphony Hall has heralded a new sense of pride and excitement in the Hayes Valley Community – and it shows. Almost overnight, there has been a surge of interesting, new shops, excellent restaurants, and service-oriented businesses. The area's rich cultural atmosphere has attracted an exciting diversity of new merchants and professionals who are eager to make your visits to Hayes Valley enjoyable and memorable experiences.

The Hayes Valley is ideally located immediately adjacent to San Francisco's Civic Center. The area is easily accessible by public transportation and parking is easy.

Within a radius of a few blocks, you will discover the Museum of Modern Art, the Opera House, Opera Plaza (housing the SFMOMA) and Civic Hall among other fascinating places of interest.

Come discover the new Hayes Valley. Whether you're on your way to the symphony or opera, or you just want to enjoy a relaxing day of shopping and an intimate meal - visit our new neighborhood. You'll be pleasantly surprised.

**Figure 1.7: Brochure advertising “The New Hayes Valley”**

Source: San Francisco Public Library

**Figure 1.8: Map of businesses in “The New Hayes Valley”**

Source: San Francisco Public Library
the Central Freeway as Hayes Valley (Drewes 1982); still another, showing Hayes Valley as a rectangular block, ranging from Buchanan Street to Gough Street – far enough east to encompass the Central Freeway, but oddly enough, not enough to include the new businesses that opened near Davies Hall (Adams 1981). In most other references, however, the freeway was an ever-present barrier – one that served as a dividing line between the multiple Hayes Valleys. Two articles⁹ – both in the SF Examiner – discuss changes in Hayes Valley; however, each portrays Hayes Valley as being located on different sides of the highway. Adams’s 1981 article discusses these different ideas of the neighborhood’s extents and describes the efforts of neighborhood activists to strictly define the neighborhood’s boundaries to capture what they believe to be Hayes Valley, but perhaps more importantly, to exclude areas that they believe were not a part of Hayes Valley.

Despite this division, however, one of the legacies of this period was an emerging sense of neighborhood pride. This is perhaps exemplified in these accounts of resurgence of the Hayes Valley, which describe the efforts and attitudes of those moving into the neighborhood. One article described the changes as such: "Buildings that looked decidedly wrong -side-of-the-tracks are being transformed into something bordering Cow Hollow chic" (Adams 1980). This is in contrast to the disinvestment that Massey and Denton point out as a sign of a declining neighborhood: “The presence of dilapidated dwellings changes the context within which other landlords and homeowners make their decisions on whether or not to invest.... The presence of even a small number of dilapidated buildings is taken as a signal that the neighborhood is going 'downhill.'” If that was indeed the case in Hayes Valley, the change in the neighborhood around

---

⁹ Dees 1976 and Adams 1980
the time Davies was built was a sign of greater things to come.

**Loma Prieta Unites Hayes Valleys**

On October 17, 1989, a magnitude 6.9 earthquake struck the San Francisco Bay Area and caused substantial damage to the city. Among the most significant structural damage to come from the quake was the collapse of segments of two San Francisco freeways: The Embarcadero Freeway, which ran along the western edge of the city, and the Central Freeway. This latter freeway bisected Hayes Valley, and as previously noted, was viewed as a nuisance – but unchangeable reality – in the neighborhood, one that perpetuated a state of blight despite gradual socioeconomic changes to the neighborhood. However, the damage sustained to the freeway during the Loma Prieta earthquake triggered a series of political battles surrounding the fate of the freeways that would ultimately serve to unite the neighborhood.

San Francisco was host to some of the earliest successful freeway revolts in the nation. In 1959, protesters and neighborhood activists successfully convinced the Board of Supervisors to vote against any new freeway construction, a position that was maintained into the 1960s (preventing the extension of both the Central Freeway and the Embarcadero Freeway, as well as the construction of the Panhandle Freeway which was to run through Golden Gate Park). The protests framed freeways (and especially urban interstates) as “concrete monsters,” and were bolstered by contemporary urban literature criticizing highways at the time (Mohl 2004).10

Though citizens were successful in stopping new freeways, the notion of demolishing existing freeways did not appear to be actively pursued, despite the plethora of social ills

---

10 According to Mohl, race was not one of the frequently-cited reasons behind the revolts in San Francisco; rather, aesthetic, environmental, and historic preservation arguments prevailed.
attributed to them. Even as late as the 1980s, early articles describing the beginnings of the transformation of the neighborhood related to the opening of Davies Hall treat the freeway as a fact of existence in the neighborhood. Nowhere was there a suggestion that this reality would change. This is not surprising, as there was no precedent for this action: though earlier freeway protests in San Francisco were successful in stopping the construction of more freeways, there were no successful instances of demolishing already-existing freeways. It was not until the structure sustained damage from the earthquake that a sense of possibility toward replacing (rather than repairing) the Central Freeway began to emerge.

On the other hand, early efforts to demolish the Embarcadero Freeway were already underway for a few years. The freeway was the subject of ire since the 1950s, and was criticized for obscuring views of the San Francisco Bay, as well as blocking off San Francisco's historic waterfront; protests in the 1960s prevented the extension of the overpass, but no action was taken toward reversing the damage for decades. Then, in 1986, a proposition calling for the demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway made it onto the June ballot. Though the proposition did not pass, leaving the skyway intact, the political groundwork for the subsequent removal had been laid. Nevertheless, it was not until the structure sustained damage from the 1989 earthquake that the movement to demolish the Embarcadero Freeway bore fruit, and even then, it took many years and significant political sacrifice on the part of the Mayor's office for removal to become a reality. The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) presented plans to repair the damaged freeway; however, public opposition – galvanized by Mayor Art Agnos, who was openly anti-freeway – eventually moved CalTrans to replace the structures with surface boulevards, and in the process attempt to repair parts of the city's damaged urban
Though there was popular support to tear down the freeways, there was also strong opposition, especially from the Chinese-American community. Following the earthquake, merchants in Chinatown suffered from a decline in business; they feared the further impact of removing a vital connection to the neighborhood. However, Mayor Agnew persisted and eventually, the Board of Supervisors relented. On February 27, 1991, demolition of the Embarcadero Freeway began, setting a precedent that would soon be followed with the Central Freeway.

Though the process of dismantling the Central Freeway lagged far behind the earlier effort to tear down the Embarcadero Freeway, there was a clear sense from community members that it was a neighborhood nuisance. The on-the-ground conditions of the neighborhood prior to the demolition of the freeway fueled the reputation of Hayes Valley as crime-ridden in the eyes of many San Franciscans. Thus, the efforts to mobilize support for the demolition of the highway were largely predicated on the notion of restoring the neighborhood divided by the structure. The campaign was largely a grassroots one, led by various groups both within and outside of the Hayes Valley neighborhood. Merchants and residents worked with public officials to develop alternatives to restoring the freeway to its original state. Other groups, such as the Bicycle Coalition, also enlisted members to participate in the campaign. The period following the Loma Prieta earthquake saw the emergence of partnerships between several neighborhood groups – among them the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association (HVNA) and the Hayes Valley Merchants Association (HVMA) working together toward a common goal.
The HVMA, which already existed on a rather unofficial capacity amongst retailers west of the Central Freeway, was one of the groups that became active in calling for the damaged overpass to be dismantled. A loose-knit association of merchants banded together to deal with the issue of crime, the HVMA was one group that pushed for the dismantling of the Central Freeway from very early after the freeway was damaged. The HVNA was another organization that campaigned to tear down the freeway. Like other groups, the HVNA was initially founded to address the issue of crime in the neighborhood; however, the HVNA was more inclusive, simply by nature of dealing with neighborhood issues, rather than those primarily related to the commercial district. Founded by community members (including the late Patricia Walkup, for whom Patricia's Green is named), the HVNA mobilized behind the issue of dismantling the Central Freeway.

While the HVMA remains largely focused on the retail aspect of the neighborhood today, and has become the primary agent behind the crafting of the Hayes Valley brand, the HVNA has taken on a more diverse range of issues in the neighborhood at large. However, what characterized the action of these groups during the freeway battle was not the difference between the groups, but their partnership, and their ability to cooperate with non-Hayes Valley activists groups (such as the Bicycle Coalition) in working toward a common goal of dismantling the freeway.

However, the push to demolish the Central Freeway would prove to be another hard-fought political battle, as it was in the case of the Embarcadero Freeway. While the neighborhood groups’ emphasis on the opportunity to repair the physical and social fabric of a neighborhood may have resonated with those in the inner city that lived close to these
conditions, it was more difficult to convince those that lived in the suburbs and typically relied on the highway as a part of their commute. A long period of inaction from the City and Caltrans resulted in increased traffic congestion and rising frustrations.

The City and Caltrans were in the midst of a multi-year process of identifying alternatives. As with the Embarcadero Freeway, CalTrans made plans to repair the damaged structure; however, CalTrans could not proceed without City authorization. The City, which itself was opposed to the reconstruction of new highways, sought to explore alternatives to CalTrans’s proposal to strengthen and widen the lower deck to accommodate traffic in both directions. In 1992, the Board of Supervisors voted against the construction of above-ground freeway ramps north of Fell Street, ending the possibility of the freeway being extended to its original length. However, the question of what to do about the portion south of Fell Street remained, and after years of inaction, citizens took matters into their own hands. Frustrated with traffic congestion resulting from the closed freeway, local community leaders (operating as the Coalition to Save the Central Freeway) collected signatures to put Proposition H on the November 1997 ballot, a measure that would not only authorize construction of CalTrans's proposal, but to repeal the 1992 ban on construction north of Fell Street. The proposition passed by a margin of 53.5% to 46.4%, and the Board of Supervisors formally endorsed CalTrans's proposal.

However, over the course of the following year, the task force appointed to consider alternatives decided upon the Octavia Boulevard Plan as a better alternative to an overhead freeway. Octavia Boulevard would be redesigned as a four-lane surface boulevard, with an additional lane on either side to accommodate local traffic and bicycles. The boulevard would connect to a reconstructed overhead ramp that would come to grade at Market Street. With a
proposal to put before voters, activists mobilized to get the new plan on the next year’s ballot. In 1998, Proposition E was placed on the ballot, and would “repeal 1997’s Proposition H and authorize Caltrans to replace the Central Freeway with an elevated structure to Market Street and a ground-level boulevard from Market along Octavia Street” (Voter Information Pamphlet, 1998). This proposition also passed 52.8% to 47.1%; however, those in favor of the overhead freeway would respond in kind. Finally, in 1999, the issue was to be decided once and for all. Proposition J would “repeal 1998’s Proposition E and authorize Caltrans to retrofit and widen the lower deck of the Central Freeway” (Voter Information Pamphlet, 1999). This time around, however, the proposition – if successful – would require a two-thirds vote to be repealed, all but ensuring that the decision on this ballot would be final. The Proposition failed, though, with a final breakdown of 47.3% in favor of the overhead freeway, and 52.6% in favor of the surface boulevard.

The Loma Prieta Earthquake served to unite the Hayes Valley neighborhood, both physically and symbolically. The different community groups in Hayes Valley – usually founded in response to neighborhood crime – were united by the common issue of removing the damaged Central Freeway overpass. The resulting partnership between groups not only resulted in a substantial victory for the community, but laid the groundwork for a more united Hayes Valley.

**Conclusion**

Hayes Valley's history has had a tangible impact not only on the physical fabric of the neighborhood, but on how the neighborhood is interpreted in the modern day. While this account is certainly not a complete telling of the neighborhood's history, my hope is that it
provides sufficient context for the exploration of how the neighborhood has been reshaped by the Hayes Valley brand. However, differing accounts of a shared history can not only affect how we interpret the present, but also play a powerful role in shaping the future. It is with this in mind that the next chapter traces the efforts of one particular group in their efforts to redefine Hayes Valley.

In the next chapter, I look at the image of Hayes Valley, as presented by the Hayes Valley Merchants Association. Through efforts to re-image the neighborhood and attract shoppers to the retail space, Hayes Valley's merchants have created an image of Hayes Valley that is defined not just in physical space, but through the character of a constructed Hayes Valley identity. The next chapter discusses the transformative impact of this brand that emerged in the 1990s on perceptions of the neighborhood, tracing the creation of the brand and shift in identity over the last twenty years. In this process, the neighborhood's history is re-imagined or reshaped to create this image. Hayes Valley's history is condensed and simplified in order to provide a more concise, memorable narrative as the contemporary Hayes Valley's origin story.
Chapter 2:
The Branding of a Neighborhood

“If any one valley is indicative of San Francisco, that valley is Hayes... Hayes Valley, where history has been made by families who settled there, shaped by the universal emotions of everyday folk, maintains the integrity of its personality”

Evelyn Seely, 1928

Loma Prieta shattered the status quo. The damage caused by the earthquake made it impossible for the city to leave things the way they were. Something had to happen. And it did.

John King, 2004

Introduction

Neighborhoods, like any place, are often defined by many differing – and sometimes conflicting – identities. These identities, in turn, are amorphous entities, composed of the collective histories, experiences, and perceptions of not only members of the community, but also those outside of it; they are shaped by both internal and external forces. Branding is one means by which stakeholders attempt to take control of a place’s image or identity. The creation and proliferation of a coherent, consistent identity makes goods and companies – or in some cases, places – memorable. Brands are a reference point to which people – most often consumers – can associate emotions and experiences.

In this chapter I focus on the Hayes Valley brand, and in particular, the content of the brand and its impact on perceptions of the neighborhood. In this discussion, I will focus on the
most prominent current reading of the Hayes Valley brand. While other attempts have been made to establish an identity for the neighborhood (see page 36) the descriptions of Hayes Valley in this chapter will be largely based on the most common understanding of the neighborhood. Though there are certainly other interpretations of what the neighborhood is, the prominence of this particular brand suggests that this is the dominant public image of the neighborhood, and that those wishing to approach the neighborhood for the first time from an outsider's perspective will be exposed to a similar first impression of Hayes Valley.

However, as is true of any brand, there is more to the “product” (or in this case, place) than is represented by the brand. Part of this difference lies in omissions – the Hayes Valley brand is an incomplete representation of everything the neighborhood embodies. Rather, it is a narrative of the neighborhood's history, an attempt to provide a coherent glimpse of an identity that is constantly changing, amorphous, adapted and re-imagined by the players and onlookers. By analyzing how this narrative came to be and the motivations behind it, one can attain a more complete understanding of the dynamics of social change in a neighborhood – in this case, Hayes Valley.

The local merchant community, which is the primary agent behind the brand, portrays Hayes Valley as a unique retail destination that rose from the ashes of a crime-ridden neighborhood. Though neighborhood change has been occurring since the late 1970s, it was not until the early 1990s – when the fight to dismantle the damaged Central Freeway overpass began – that a semblance of a Hayes Valley identity started to emerge. The Hayes Valley brand serves as an anchoring point that influences the neighborhood's composition, one that portrays itself as an idealized representation of San Francisco. However, the brand simultaneously
excludes significant aspects of the neighborhood's history in order to maintain a cohesive and appealing neighborhood identity.

Though these exclusions are effective in providing a condensed, memorable image of the neighborhood, they are problematic when the content of the brand is used as means of description. In subscribing authority to the narrative as told by the neighborhood's brand, the realities behind changes in the neighborhood are obscured. Thus, in this chapter, I will also discuss how the brand is currently shaping perceptions of Hayes Valley as a revitalizing (or revitalized) neighborhood, and how it serves to mask the negative effects of the neighborhood's recent economic prosperity.

Dissecting the Hayes Valley Brand

The Hayes Valley neighborhood has been highlighted in multiple publications as a unique, one-of-a-kind shopping district. For instance, a San Francisco Chronicle article describes Hayes Valley as having “emerged with an edge: hotter than Union Street, smarter than Haight Street, artier than Clement Street, hipper than Union Square and more sophisticated than 24th Street” (Garchik 1995). Another more contemporary description from Via Magazine states that Hayes Valley has “become and remains a hub for quirky connoisseurs of all sorts” (Franklin 2005). Interviews with stakeholders have yielded such descriptors as “funky” and “hip.” While each of these descriptions certainly captures part of the story, it should also be recognized that they are not able to completely capture what Hayes Valley is; rather, they are a part of a Hayes Valley brand that has embodied the dominant portrayal of the Hayes Valley neighborhood.

In order to discuss the impact of the Hayes Valley brand on perceptions, it is important
to first discuss what is meant by the Hayes Valley brand. Though there are many different perceptions of the Hayes Valley neighborhood's identity – each of which is valid – this project will focus on a very specific reading of the neighborhood. More specifically, this project will discuss the identity of Hayes Valley as a shopping and retail destination – one with a very particular character – that both informs and is a result of the variety of businesses and people that occupy the neighborhood. The “vibe” of the neighborhood is only one aspect of the more complicated, underlying reality of the neighborhood, and it is important to note that this distillation of the neighborhood's character is an intentional one.

Much of the agency in the creation of the neighborhood's brand was in the hands of the Hayes Valley's merchant community, often through the Hayes Valley Merchants Association. Though they have cooperated with other neighborhood groups in the past (namely the Arts Coalition and Neighborhood Association, both of which also boast members of the Merchants Association), as a retail-centric group dependent on visitors to the neighborhood, the Merchants Association is the one with the highest stakes in the creation of an appealing brand. Though these other groups certainly have a role to play in shaping the image of the neighborhood, the actions of the HVMA are particularly outward-focused and oriented to marketing. The HVMA, initially composed of a small group of merchants in the early 1990s, has swelled since more retailers have moved into the neighborhood. According to one early member, in 1991, the group consisted of 9 members; today nearly 40 businesses are in some way involved with the HVMA. Through their activism in the neighborhood and role as the unofficial body overseeing the retail aspect of Hayes Valley, the HVMA has crafted a very particular image associated with the Hayes Valley name; this image of the most unique, quirky
shopping district in San Francisco is the primary aspect of the Hayes Valley brand.

**Selling Individuality**

A large component of the Hayes Valley brand is the notion of uniqueness, perhaps best embodied by an artisan, non-mainstream aesthetic that the HVMA argues is embodied in the neighborhood. This was the most commonly cited trait of the neighborhood amongst the interviews conducted, and is also how Hayes Valley is portrayed in the press and guidebooks, and is evident by the plethora of boutiques and artisan shops present in the neighborhood. This identity is both reflected in and determinant of the type of businesses that are established in Hayes Valley. The primary retail spine of the neighborhood consists of an eclectic mix of restaurants, clothing shops, art galleries – but they are united by a common theme. As described by Russell, a merchant in the neighborhood:

RUSSELL: *I'd just describe it as the most unique neighborhood of the city because it has all sole proprietorship stores, individual, creative. No chain stores. Because with other neighborhoods, when you've got Peets and Starbucks and Gap and Banana Republic, it makes everything look the same as any shopping area of any city or across the country.*

As one of the founding members of the Merchants Association, it is not surprising that Russell views the primary nature of the neighborhood as a retail environment. According to him, what sets Hayes Valley apart – its claim to fame – is its lack of chain stores. It has been spared the homogeneity that other neighborhoods bearing such stores suffer from; rather the retailers in Hayes Valley are not only independent, but also “individual” and “creative.” Many of the storefronts feature artisan foods or designer goods, and some storefronts also double as
showcase spaces or galleries for (often local) artists.

MARK:  I think that’s how it gets marketed as, well, this kind of hip, cool shopping area of San Francisco that hasn’t been encroached on by too many corporate or commercial businesses, so it’s still pretty unique to San Francisco. Even though San Francisco as a whole is pretty unique, this street truly is very... uh... well, I guess it’s unique and artistic, a unique taste of what San Francisco can be everywhere. (Mark, July 2010)

Mark’s account echoes what Russell stated – that it is relatively untouched by “corporate” retailers, contributing to its uniqueness. That fact, in combination with the “hip, cool” vibe in the shopping district, lends to the attractiveness of Hayes Valley, in the context of San Francisco, and of retail districts in general. Though the neighborhood’s image as an artistic, unique space helps to attract not only potential customers but prospective retailers, it also serves as a barometer by which to exclude. In addition to the physical distinctions, there are also symbolic omissions from the Hayes Valley brand – the primary one of which is the chain stores (and in particular, national chains) typified by companies such as Starbucks and Gap. As can be seen from these two examples, part of Hayes Valley’s identity hinges on its position as a retail destination whose strength lies in its uniqueness. Both informants make the distinction between Hayes Valley and other neighborhoods based on the presence of chain stores and corporations.

The independent nature is important to the neighborhood’s public image, and is cited as the primary factor that sets Hayes Valley apart. Though this feature of the neighborhood was initially the outgrowth of the group of merchants and artists that moved into the neighborhood in the 1980s, this characteristic would soon be threatened as the neighborhood’s image (and demographics) began to change. As more people began to move into Hayes Valley, and as the
neighborhood received more positive press coverage, the area became more and more attractive to chain stores. Specific actions, in the form of neighborhood protests and legislation, have contributed to the protection of this particular aspect of the neighborhood's identity.

In particular, the Starbucks Corporation attempted to open a retail space within Hayes Valley's commercial district, on the corner of Hayes Street and Gough Street. This proposal was met by uproar from the neighborhood, with merchants and neighbors alike protesting to keep the ubiquitous coffee shop out. The battle surrounding this potential intrusion, and the neighborhood's subsequent victory, galvanized the Merchants Association to approach the City with a more permanent means of preserving the independent nature of Hayes Valley's commercial corridors.

In March 2004, San Francisco's Board of Supervisors passed legislation that banned "formula" chain retail in select commercial districts in the City, including Hayes Valley (Garofoli 2004). Members of the different neighborhood groups took ownership of this political victory, and it soon not only codified an aspect of the neighborhood's identity, but provided a means through which the neighborhood's brand could be bolstered. Hayes Valley was no longer merely a neighborhood that happened to lack chain stores; rather it became the first in the city to take the stance against formula retail in favor of independent, local businesses. It became a claim to fame for the neighborhood, and though other areas followed suit in later years, it has remained a vital component of Hayes Valley's self-marketing.

The image of a neighborhood composed of a series of unique, independent shops helped to bring positive attention to Hayes Valley, and the backing of legislation meant to protect this aspect of the neighborhood further enhanced the strength of the neighborhood's
claim to uniqueness. Following the passage of this legislation, Hayes Valley received more press, highlighting the community as the first in a major US city to gain such protection. Even before this legislation passed, though, the press was a key player in the reversal of the image of Hayes Valley as a neighborhood characterized by Russell as “a couple of old junk stores and printing shop, check cashing place. Just sort of random stores.”¹ The media attention resulting from the Loma Prieta earthquake’s damage to the Central Freeway overpass shined a bright light on the changes that had been occurring in the neighborhood below. The gutsy quality of the early shops in a dangerous community gave Hayes Valley the “edge” that attracted attention to the neighborhood— from a distance.

Retelling Histories

As can be seen in the previous section, actions taken to protect the character of Hayes Valley also have an effect on the composition of the neighborhood. However, the reach of the branding process extends beyond the current (and future) state of the neighborhood; rather, it also extends into shaping accounts of Hayes Valley’s past. Though nearly any account of a neighborhood’s history is incomplete (and the one presented in the previous chapter is certainly not comprehensive), Hayes Valley’s history as represented by the neighborhood’s brand is quite selective. Emphasis, simplification, and omissions are used to fashion a very particular historical narrative that has a profound effect on the neighborhood’s image.

Certain moments of Hayes Valley’s history are highlighted in order to shape a particular understanding or impression of the neighborhood. For instance, the inclusion of the

¹ Personal Interview, July 2010
neighborhood's cameo in the 1924 silent film *Greed* – as identified by the Merchants Association's timeline – draws emphasis to a particular moment in the neighborhood's history. Meanwhile, others are altogether omitted: the period of urban renewal in Hayes Valley between the 1940s and 1960s is hardly referenced, and even then, is done so very indirectly.

Though this simplification is an essential part of branding, it is also problematic, not just because of what it omits, but because of the implications and associations it makes as a result. For instance, on the same timeline, the 1960s are described as the period when “African American businesses move into Hayes Valley;” the period prior to the Loma Prieta earthquake is succinctly summarized simply as the “less-than-savory days.”

This portrayal of the recent past frames this portion of Hayes Valley’s history as something that is to be erased from – or at least downplayed in – the neighborhood’s collective memory. This was likely an attempt to dramatize the degree of change in the neighborhood, and can be interpreted as another means of emphasizing the contrast between the neighborhood’s contemporary reality with a more troubled past. However, the evocation of the neighborhood’s past racial composition (as seen in the maps in the previous chapter, the neighborhood’s demographics were in fact) suggests a correlative – and perhaps even causal relationship – between the entry of African American businesses and blight. It also positions those who would later enter Hayes Valley as redeemers of the neighborhood, and strongly implies that the “less-than-savory” character of the neighborhood has a racial dimension. This framing of the neighborhood’s past affects contemporary understandings of the neighborhood’s historical narrative. This history is often told relative to the freeway battle, which is treated as the central pivot on which the contemporary histories of the neighborhood turns. While this
series of events was certainly an important one in the neighborhood's history, it has been elevated to the status of a creation tale.

The Merchant Association's telling of the neighborhood's history draws particular attention to the actions of the merchants in response to the damage done by the Loma Prieta quake. The HVMA's website describes their efforts as such: “Starting with their first demonstration under the freeway, calling for its demolition, the few brave merchants who had opened shops in 1989 and 1990, began the movement to regain Hayes Valley” (HVMA 2008). This account makes it clear that the merchant community is not just an important force in the neighborhood but the key player in what is to be interpreted as the transformation – bordering on rescue – of the neighborhood.

Omitted from this retelling of history are the gradual, more subtle changes that were already occurring prior to the freeway's removal. For instance, there is little to no mention of the portion of Hayes Street beyond where the Central Freeway once existed. The businesses that moved onto the 300 block of Hayes Street, though some of the earliest remaining businesses (and often cited as neighborhood institutions), are often not credited as pioneers in the socioeconomic revitalization narrative of the neighborhood. As described on the HVMA website, “Some of the businesses that braved the less-than-savory days are still around, such as the Hayes Street Grill, now twice its original size. Many of the shops developed in the '90s, making Hayes Valley a real destination spot [sic]. The combination results in a wide diversity in clientele.” These early businesses are relegated to the status of survivors, rather than being portrayed as pioneers, their longevity in the neighborhood is spun as a testament to the existing neighborhood's diversity. The impact of Davies Hall has become secondary to that of the
freeway, and this first wave of merchants, though located in what would become the contemporary Hayes Valley, has a history more strongly associated with the Arts District than the Hayes Valley neighborhood; because of this disconnect, it is the Merchant Association's version of history that is the more commonly known today.

The history of the branded neighborhood is inextricably tied to the freeway. In this narrative, the freeway serves as a symbol of what was wrong with the neighborhood. Though merchants and residents certainly recognize that crime was pervasive, the presence of the freeway was often closely associated, if not in a causal relationship (such as providing a dark place for drug transactions to take place), then at the least, as a sign of a neglected space. According to this narrative, it was crime that united merchants, and the freeway battle that brought merchant and resident together, united in the fight to tear down the freeway. The HVMA's account of the neighborhood's history closes with this: “Fast Forward to 2008...after many Block Parties, self-promotion and lots of hard work by many new merchants, Hayes Valley has become 'THE' most vibrant shopping and dining district of San Francisco, where, chain stores are BANNED!!” (HVMA 2008).

Because of the Merchants Association's more public nature, their telling of the neighborhood's history has shaped how Hayes Valley's socioeconomic change is understood by a general audience. This simplified history is the one that is most closely associated with the Hayes Valley name, and the reality of gradual neighborhood change starting in the late 1970s is increasingly being eclipsed by a revitalization narrative that only starts in the early 1990s. References to the neighborhood's more distant past – the time before Loma Prieta – are comparatively sparse, and the few allusions that are made juxtapose the neighborhood's
current state with the crime-ridden neighborhood that had existed since the period of urban renewal. However, even these accounts lack specificity when aired in the public sphere, reducing Hayes Valley to a land of muggings, drug dealing, and prostitution.

Further, the severity of this rhetoric – the opening of storefronts or moving into the neighborhood has been framed akin to entering a war zone – has the effect of perpetuating a narrow view of Hayes Valley’s past. This is not to discount the true dangers that merchants encountered: as crime figures in the previous chapter indicate, there were very real dangers to living in the neighborhood. However, confining the neighborhood’s past to one dimension creates a hyperbolic interpretation of reality. This also influences how the neighborhood’s influx of newcomers – a large contingent of which is composed of white, middle-class individuals – relates to and understands the neighborhood’s past.

This is emphasized by the clearly dichotomized descriptions of the neighborhood presented by the brand. The positioning of the earthquake and the resulting freeway battle as a turning point creates a strong sense of contrast with the neighborhood’s darker past, which was vital to the re-imaging of the neighborhood. Essentially the history of the neighborhood has been successfully rendered in “before” and “after” fashion, with the freeway battle as the key turning point in the story.

Redefining “Hayes Valley”

Often, the motivation behind place branding is to counteract negative portrayals of a place's history or current state. Hayes Valley too was battling a negative image that served as an obstacle to its flourishing as a retail district. In the 1990s, the name “Hayes Valley” was closely
associated with crime – drug dealing, prostitution, burglary, and other such nuisances. A merchant provides an account of the state of the neighborhood at the time:

RUSSELL: The projects that used to be up the street between Buchanan and Webster, they were some of the worst in the city because they were the old, barrack-style built around an interior courtyard. So that was back in the day when pit bull fighting and crack was just... crazy. There was prostitution all along underneath the freeway. Stores like Nomad's was forever being shoplifted. So yeah, crime was a major problem.

Though the crime itself began to decrease as police began to work more closely with merchants, the lingering fear of violence was in of itself an obstacle that discouraged potential customers from visiting – or even passing through – Hayes Valley. Early efforts to retake ownership of the name “Hayes Valley” were complicated by the violence associated with the neighborhood:

PATTY: Hayes Valley was sort of a dirty word to tell you the truth, until... it didn't really start happening until after the freeway came down, and there was conscious redevelopment of housing and what-not. So, that didn't happen until the 90s, for sure. It was a much later development because the Hayes Valley did not have a good brand at all. It was a terrible brand.

As stated by Patty, a merchant whose business was located east of the freeway since the early 1980s, it was not until the fall of the freeway that Hayes Valley's reputation began to take a turn for the better. Up to that point, Hayes Valley was a “terrible brand,” strongly associated with drug dealing, prostitution, and other criminal activity. Burglaries were, according to business owners, commonplace, and merchants began to band together in order to provide a support network to fight against crime. This informal network, which eventually became the
Hayes Valley Merchants Association, tasked itself with dealing with crime, and perhaps just as importantly, convincing people that Hayes Valley was changing. These merchants had their eyes on more than simply attracting customers to their own individual stores, but to the larger shopping district. They took it upon themselves to redefine the space. Russell, who was one of the founding members of the HVMA, describes their early motivations:

*RUSSELL:* So I moved here first in 1990, which is when I opened this store. So at that time, because very specifically the 500 block of Hayes Street was in between a derelict freeway and some of the worst housing projects in the city, this block was starting to, well wasn't starting to, but a few of us were attempting to make it a shopping street and kind of reclaim its vitality. Because there was such a small group of us, it was like okay, we have to identify and tackle this problem and make the change. (Russell, July 2010)

From the beginning, there was a sense of ownership over the process, as well as a realization of the obstacle of crime in Hayes Valley, not merely as a nuisance, but as a factor that deterred visitors to the neighborhood. One former merchant recalled, “We would sometimes have a block party every month because we just needed to get the word out, get people to come down”.2 “Getting the word out” about the changes occurring in Hayes Valley was an important part of their objective of turning the neighborhood into a retail destination. To do so, it was important to associate the emerging space with an identity. By embracing the Hayes Valley name, the merchants were able to establish a sense of partnership with the surrounding neighborhood while simultaneously setting themselves apart:

2 Personal Interview, July 2010
MADELINE: He came in one day with an old map of San Francisco, a real estate map, and it had Hayes Valley. And this was called Western Addition, which we didn’t want to be part of, the larger Western Addition because that includes the Fillmore and... well, maybe Fillmore is the border. Anyway, it included the projects, and it included a lot of negative thinking. If you said Western Addition, people thought of crime. So we didn’t want to be Western Addition. And Hayes Street, we realized was more the 300 block, the symphony and the opera crowd that was always there, Hayes Street Grill. So we wanted to expand it more, and [he] just came in with this map one day, and Russell and I just looked at it, and said, “Oh Hayes Valley.” So we just told everybody, “let’s call it the Hayes Valley.” It’s also kind of, we’re nestled, we’re a little valley, and we thought that was a cozy sounding name. (Madeline, July 2010)

Madeline, another of the merchants who moved into the neighborhood in the early 1990s, describes the process of taking ownership of the Hayes Valley name (the man she referred to asked to be kept anonymous in a later interview). She notes the importance of associations of certain characteristics with particular neighborhood names, citing the Western Addition as an example. As seen in Patty's description of Hayes Valley above, the Hayes Valley name was not necessarily much better; however, it provided something with which merchants could identify. One means of doing this was to create a visible link between the neighborhood and this new name. One of the first instances of a physical marker bearing the Hayes Valley name was a painted billboard welcoming visitors to the neighborhood (Fig. 2.1). Located on the corner of Franklin and Hayes, the sign was one of the earliest attempts to tie the changes that were happening to a particular brand or name – in this case, the name Hayes Valley:

RUSSELL: One of the earliest things [the Merchants Association] did, we hired a local artist to essentially paint a billboard which was on the side of what was the last building on the right-hand side of the street where the new building has gone up on Hayes and Franklin. There used to be an empty parking lot, so on this wall we had an artist create a painted billboard in sections that we mounted on the side of the building so that when people were coming up 9th turning onto Hayes heading toward Fell
and Oak and the freeway, they would see this sign which was essentially, 'Welcome to Hayes Valley.' (Russell, July 2010)

According to Russell, the billboard was initially directed at those passing through the neighborhood, often in automobiles rather than on foot. This action, along with some neighborhood events in the early 1990s (namely, block parties), helped to associate the changing neighborhood with a concrete identity. Rather than seek outside help in organizing these activities, the merchant community planned and promoted these block parties themselves. These events were often promoted through word of mouth and printed materials, the latter often in the form of printed postcards distributed by merchants to customers and friends. The Hayes Valley Merchants Association – with which many early merchants were involved – spearheaded many of these events. Though there were other activities and events centered on neighborhood improvement, these were often not as strongly outward-focused.
and generally were not held with the intention of portraying Hayes Valley as a destination, in the way these block parties were. They were a wholly locally-run production, driven primarily by the goal of putting the Hayes Valley name out there, and to begin to change existing perceptions of the neighborhood. These events were part of a larger effort to re-image Hayes Valley, away from the existing perceptions of Hayes Valley as a dangerous, crime-ridden neighborhood to a safe and attractive retail district:

**RUSSELL:** The neighborhood recognized the need for this to be larger, and it was going to be a very time consuming thing, and addressing all of the crime that affected the whole neighborhood in more detail, and we the merchants wanted to focus to on the main business corridor, and keeping the storefronts open, starting to create block parties, which we did with all of these old postcards. We started creating these block events and these art events, where people were invited to the neighborhood every couple of months, to make sure people knew that this neighborhood is changing, that there are shops here, that it’s safe to shop.

The changes in the neighborhood, which included stepped-up police activity and increased pedestrian traffic, began to help chip away the image of Hayes Valley as an unsafe neighborhood, plagued by crime. The neighborhood once nicknamed “Death Valley” was gaining a reputation as a quirky, funky retail district. The re-imaging of the Hayes Valley neighborhood in the 1990s set the stage for a dramatic transformation of the neighborhood. Two decades after the initial damage to the Central Freeway, one of the clearest indicators of change in the neighborhood is the set of banners proudly bearing the text “hayesvalley” (emphasis original to source) lining Hayes Street and select adjacent streets (Fig 2.2-2.3). This text can be read as the “logo” for the neighborhood's commercial district. While the banners do not explicitly advertise anything other than the neighborhood's name, the emphasis on the
“yes” within the neighborhood's name suggests optimism, and evokes positive feelings toward the neighborhood, a marked difference from perceptions of the neighborhood in the early 1990s.

Figure 2.2: Banner, located at Hayes Street and Octavia Boulevard

Source: Researcher

Temporal Positioning of the Branded Space

By most accounts, Hayes Valley is a neighborhood that has undergone a socioeconomic revitalization. Over the last 30 years, and especially in the latter two decades, the neighborhood is described as having experienced a steady resurgence. As stated in Chapter 1, the opening of Davies Symphony Hall brought with it a host of new businesses, and attention turned to the stock of (relatively) low-priced Victorian homes in proximity to downtown was seen as a sign of change. However, the historical narrative of the neighborhood presented by the Hayes Valley
Merchants Association traces the origin of this revitalization to a later date; an important part of the brand is the framing of the changes that occurred in Hayes Valley as happening strictly following the Loma Prieta earthquake.

A look at the changes in median household income and average family income based on Census data indicate that between the 1980 and 1990 census, a fairly significant shift had already taken place in the district as a whole, and predates a similar increase between the 1990s and 2000s (Tables 2.1 and 2.2). While the creation of a clearly-defined retail identity for the neighborhood made these changes more visible and accessible to the public, this socioeconomic data indicates that these changes were already occurring in the neighborhood prior to the dismantling of the Central Freeway, and are perhaps more closely tied to the opening of Davies Hall.
Table 2.1: Median Household Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hayes Valley*</th>
<th>%Change</th>
<th>San Francisco</th>
<th>%Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$23,809</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$37,633</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$34,398</td>
<td>+44.475%</td>
<td>$46,402</td>
<td>+23.301%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$47,429</td>
<td>+37.883%</td>
<td>$57,077</td>
<td>+23.005%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on approximation of extents of Hayes Valley neighborhood
(Figures adjusted for inflation to 2000 dollars)

Source: US Census

Table 2.2: Average Family Income

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Hayes Valley*</th>
<th>%Change</th>
<th>San Francisco</th>
<th>%Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>$33,859</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>$58,684</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>$30,435</td>
<td>-10.113%</td>
<td>$60,890</td>
<td>+3.759%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>$36,053</td>
<td>+18.459%</td>
<td>$75,836</td>
<td>+24.546%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>$54,013</td>
<td>+49.816%</td>
<td>$95,538</td>
<td>+25.98%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Based on approximation of extents of Hayes Valley neighborhood
(Figures adjusted for inflation to 2000 dollars)

Source: US Decennial Census

However, the brand's presentation relies on the key historical moment of the freeway battle as the turning point in Hayes Valley, and describes the neighborhood's transformation following the freeway's demolition as largely positive. This is not to say that this series of events was not important to the neighborhood's long-term transformation. A look at crime data from the 1990s and 2000s shows that neighborhood crime levels were fairly consistent with 1980s levels, and that progress in the form of reduced crime was not apparent until construction of the new boulevard.
Table 2.3: Incidences of crime by type, as reported to Northern Police Station

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td>1,190</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>1,365</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>393</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary</td>
<td>2,037</td>
<td>1,666</td>
<td>1,528</td>
<td>898</td>
<td>824</td>
<td>827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larceny</td>
<td>6,526</td>
<td>6,130</td>
<td>5,188</td>
<td>1,612</td>
<td>1,884</td>
<td>1,252</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: SFPD Annual Reports.

However, the brand attributes a heroic characteristic to the neighborhood's merchants, who are positioned as the primary agents of change. In the context of marketing the neighborhood, the brand is successful as a descriptive tool; however, when looking at neighborhood transformation as a larger socioeconomic process, this simplification of the Hayes Valley's history is problematic. This is not just because of its tendency to present an oversimplified history, but because of its ability to affect the contemporary understanding of the neighborhood. Hayes Valley is presented largely as the product of citizen-activists entering and saving a neighborhood in despair. This characterization masks larger trends – and more pertinently, the victims of this transformation. In particular, the problem of displacement is not one that is openly acknowledged.

The Hayes Valley brand is effective in helping “sell” Hayes Valley's changes to outsiders in the neighborhood, and it is partly because of this success that the neighborhood enjoyed the economic prosperity that it did. However, this prosperity brought with it strife for those that could not afford to stay in the neighborhood – whether because of increased rents or a higher cost of living. This is a side of the neighborhood's economic change that is not referenced by the brand. When comparing it to corresponding sets of Census data to those above, we see that the upwardly trending income is inversely correlated to the percentage of African-American
**Figure 2.4:** Percentage Black Population, 1990 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
**Figure 2.5:** Percentage White Population, 1990 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 2.6: Percentage Black Population, 2000 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
Figure 2.7: Percentage White Population, 2000 US Census

Source: www.socialexplorer.com
residents in the neighborhood, which suggests the displacement of the predominantly African-American residents as the neighborhood's socioeconomic status increased (Figs. 2.4-2.7). This displacement is commonly-linked to the process of gentrification, a term that in popular use has attained a negative connotation.

Moreover, the brand does not fully acknowledge the extent or dynamics of the neighborhood's change in racial composition. As stated earlier, the correlation of the neighborhood's mid-20th century past and the influx of African-American businesses is used to emphasize the contrast between the past and the present, while acknowledging the neighborhood's history. Further, by positioning the neighborhood's gentrifiers – many of whom, according to Census data, were part of the white middle-class – as having braved the neighborhood's tumultuous conditions, the brand narrative portrays them as heroic figures. This movement can be interpreted as an entrance into a forsaken – and symbolically uninhabited – space, a proposition that suggests a colonial relationship between the gentrifiers and older residents of the neighborhood. The existing social fabric is symbolically marginalized; it was not until the community's newcomers moved in that the neighborhood could be interpreted as a properly-functioning neighborhood. While this is clearly not the case, this is strongly implied, especially as a result of the brand's stark before-after dichotomy. Further, this narrative can be read as a double-edged sword, used to protect the newly-established social order imported by the neighborhood's gentrifiers while simultaneously marginalizing those that lived in the neighborhood before their arrival. While this is likely not an intentional contortion of history, it demonstrates the masking effect of such a narrative and the shortcomings of a neighborhood brand as a tool for neighborhood revitalization.
Though the brand can be used to describe the changes that have occurred in Hayes Valley, it also presents an insufficient picture of the reality of these changes, and of the neighborhood’s current state. While symbolic exclusions served to strengthen the positive image of Hayes Valley, under a more critical lens, it is clear that these exclusions of the brand also have a harmful effect of masking structural forces. The emphasis on the positive is helpful as a marketing tool that served to change negative perceptions of Hayes Valley, but its cost is an understanding of the larger social impact of the neighborhood’s change. It positions the neighborhood’s rise in socioeconomic status as simply a feel-good story, emphasizing the positive impacts the neighborhood’s economic revitalization brought with it.

Conclusion

Neighborhood transformation is certainly possible without branding, but the efforts and actions taken in the Hayes Valley neighborhood to associate a particular image with the neighborhood’s name – especially within the merchant community – was a critical force in the shaping of the contemporary understanding of the Hayes Valley neighborhood. Different actions undertaken by the Hayes Valley Merchants Association did not just spur change in the neighborhood’s retail core, but also helped strengthen the neighborhood’s brand by creating clear points of symbolic omission.

Though the brand can be used to describe the changes that have occurred in Hayes Valley, it also presents an insufficient picture of the reality of these changes, and of the neighborhood’s current state. While these symbolic exclusions served to strengthen the positive image of Hayes Valley, under a more critical lens, it is clear that the exclusions of the brand also
have a harmful effect of masking structural forces. It positions the neighborhood’s rise in socioeconomic status as simply a feel-good story, emphasizing the positive impacts the neighborhood’s economic revitalization brought with it. The emphasis on the positive is helpful as a marketing tool that served to change negative perceptions of Hayes Valley, but its cost is the disregard for the larger social impact of the neighborhood’s change.
Chapter 3:
Impacts of Branding on Community

“Hayes had its early sprinkling of pioneers, its Yerba Buena Cemetery where pioneers were buried. But its real story is in the struggles and achievements of a community of people who ate heartily, drank heartily, lived heartily; who went to schools and churches and theaters and prizefights; who loved their home and had a distinct feeling – one way or the other – for their neighbors.”

Evelyn Seely, 1928

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed the motives and processes behind the Hayes Valley Merchants Association's creation of a Hayes Valley brand. This brand stemmed from an effort to promote a new image for the neighborhood – away from one associated heavily with crime, and toward one rooted in Hayes Valley's identity as a retail center defined by its intrinsic uniqueness and local character.

In creating this brand image, members of the Merchants Association emphasized the unique, local-oriented quality of the various shops and restaurants that emerged in the neighborhood. This brand was largely centered on the identity of the commercial district as uncorrupted by name-brand intruders – in the case of Hayes Valley – large, non-local chain stores. It is also defined by what it is not: Hayes Valley is no longer the crime-ridden neighborhood it once was, yet still has an aura of edginess about it. However, this is now manifested in the shops rather than on the streets. This new image for the neighborhood –
which became the dominant identity of Hayes Valley – has helped to recast Hayes Valley in the eyes of outsiders. While mostly accurate, the neighborhood grew into what it was portrayed as in this brand. In other words, the brand became more than a descriptive tool, but was – even from its conception – an integral part in describing what the neighborhood was to become.

This chapter will look at the prescriptive function of the brand, and its ability to serve as a rallying point for neighborhood activism. Previously, I discussed the shortcomings of the descriptive role of the neighborhood brand, namely that the brand image tends to oversimplify the historical processes the neighborhood has undergone in favor of a narrower – and more positively framed – version of the neighborhood's historical narrative. Though the brand's descriptive function is an important one, particularly, in its ability to influence perceptions of the neighborhood, it is in its prescriptive role that the brand actively reshapes the neighborhood space. In creating a brand for the neighborhood, the Hayes Valley Merchant's Association created an idealized image of what they hoped the area would become. The brand narrative produces an anchoring identity for the neighborhood, and provides a common origin with which community members and organizations can identify. Through the association of the commercial district's origins with the dismantling of the Central Freeway, the Merchants Association is able to leverage Hayes Valley's inclination toward neighborhood activism to maintain a strong brand image while framing their actions as within the interests of the neighborhood at large.

**The Brand as Constructive Condensation and Community-Building**

Early efforts at community organizing were born of necessity, but because of the
physical and social fabric of the neighborhood, were also very much disjointed. What community organizing was occurring in Hayes Valley in the 1980s and 90s took place in different parts of the neighborhood, and was typically spearheaded by relatively isolated groups centered on the issue of crime. Madeline, who owned a shop west of the old freeway overpass, provides this description of the dynamics between different groups:

MADELINE: There was some animosity about it, but then we just really had to really just focus, pull back in on this block only and Russell and I would just concentrate on this block, and let the rest of them really focus on what they wanted to do... people just have different concepts.

Commenting on the difference between the merchants who would go on to form the HVMA and merchants on the other side of the freeway, Madeline points out the differences in clientele and patrons as a reason for different approaches to community building. Robin, a member of the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association, also commented on the lack of connectedness of between groups in the neighborhood:

ROBIN: When the neighborhood started organizing, it was around crime issues around here, initially. That's how I got to know Patricia Walkup.... She really organized the neighborhood, got it together. She was the founder of the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association. There were other neighborhood associations, but they didn't have any members, and they weren't active or anything.

 Though informal groupings like those described by Robin existed, there was little cooperation between these groups. Though many of these pockets of community activity identified with the name Hayes Valley, they were nonetheless isolated and rarely integrated into the whole of the neighborhood. The presence of multiple “Hayes Valleys” was just as much a
result of the physical fabric of the neighborhood as it was the presence of different fragmented communities. This only started to change with the freeway battle which, in retrospect, now looks to be an especially important moment in the construction of a unified neighborhood. Subsequent efforts to dismantle the damaged structure did more than reunite the neighborhood physically, but served as a single cause that brought relatively isolated neighborhood groups together. This successful effort – a significant victory for the newly united neighborhood – served as an origin moment for the Hayes Valley Neighborhood Association.

The Hayes Valley Merchants Association was also able to claim this victory as the genesis of their own efforts; however, this moment was not just referenced as a starting point for the organization, but for the neighborhood's retail corridor as well. By attributing the origin of the shopping district to this battle, rather than pointing to the entity that was in existence decades prior, the HVMA positions the district as something neighbors have a direct stake in, despite not having a strong affiliation to the stores and restaurants themselves. This is also reflected in articles that describe the emergent Hayes Valley neighborhood. Writes Leah Garchik (1995), “The razing of the freeway that once shadowed the Civic Center, segregating San Francisco's eastern business district from its western residential neighborhoods, gave the city and unexpected gift: Hayes Valley”. This account and others that suggest this direct link between the former freeway and the “new” neighborhood perpetuate this causal relationship.

Thus, the Hayes Valley brand not only reshapes outside perceptions of the neighborhood, but facilitates community activism by creating a common ownership of the community's progress. By chronologically (and causally) situating the revival of the commercial corridor immediately following the Central Freeway's demolition, the Hayes Valley brand
celebrates the efforts of those involved in that political battle, suggesting that they contributed to the creation of the neighborhood core. Further, by framing the neighborhood's retail district as a manifestation of the entrepreneurial spirit inherent in the neighborhood (as opposed to merchants that moved into the neighborhood from elsewhere), the interests of the branded space become those of the larger Hayes Valley neighborhood. Thus, the Hayes Valley brand does more than reshape perceptions from the outside. It also serves as an idealization toward which the community is constantly moving.

However, the Hayes Valley brand simultaneously serves as a divisive and unifying force. By framing a value that many community members hold as a defining quality of the neighborhood and linking it to the neighborhood's origin story, the merchant community is able to mobilize community members to protect the branded space – in this case, by preventing the intrusion of uses that do not fall into the brand image. One example of this can be seen in the Starbucks Corporation's attempt to open a franchise on Hayes Street, as documented in the previous chapter. This was not only met with opposition from the Merchants Association, but other community members as well. This opposition eventually led to the passing of legislation prohibiting chains from opening in the Hayes Valley neighborhood, a move that simultaneously protects the neighborhood's claim to uniqueness and reinforces the brand image. By positioning the potential intrusion of Starbucks into the neighborhood as a threat to its local culture – one that is attributed to the efforts of the neighborhood's residents – the merchant community was able to leverage the strength of the brand to unite the neighborhood.

The brand identity serves as a common identity – one that not all stakeholders take ownership of for themselves, but one that they readily acknowledge is a part of their
community. Though the neighborhood brand is by nature exclusive, it also attempts to unite through its claim to embodying community values – in this case, the importance of local culture and individuality. The emphasis on individuality and uniqueness – essential aspects of the image that Hayes Valley presents – is used as justification to exclude. This not only has an effect on how the neighborhood is understood by outsiders in the current moment, but gives the brand a prescriptive role that dictates the direction of neighborhood change.

The Role of Branded Space in Cultivating Place Attachment and Community

While this may suggest that most of the community's members strongly identify with the neighborhood brand, this is not quite the case. The subjects I interviewed universally acknowledged the Hayes Street commercial corridor as a part of their neighborhood, and most of them acknowledged it as one of the defining features of Hayes Valley; however, for the most part, their conceptions of the spatial contours of the neighborhood do not conform to the strict commercial confines of the branded space. Further there were strong symbolic oppositions to the elevation of the branded image as being wholly representative of the neighborhood.

Distinctions were drawn between the commercial area and the rest of the neighborhood:

**ROBIN:** You go to Hayes Street, and Hayes Street is not really representative of the neighborhood. It's kind of like the spaceship that landed here. Very people in the neighborhood go shopping there. It caters more to people who are going to the symphony or the opera, or people here coming to those shops... I mean, I'm not opposed to it, but I never go shopping there. ... There's not a grocery store there... there's not a post office, there's not a bank, not a hardware store... nothing you would use. So people often think of Hayes Valley as Hayes Street, but it's really not...Those people who hang out on Hayes Street don't live in the neighborhood, generally.
Despite this seemingly disparate relationship between the commercial district and the rest of the Hayes Valley neighborhood, there is still a sense that it is an integral part of the neighborhood. In fact, the branded space, though contested in these accounts, serves as a common reference point in these otherwise contested descriptions of the neighborhood. On one hand, some respondents were careful to point out a distinction between the neighborhood’s commercial spine and the rest of the neighborhood; on the other hand, the neighborhood’s branded space was the only commonality between different descriptive accounts of the neighborhood. While the overlap is not particularly surprising, it does reveal the relative strength of the association of the Hayes Valley name with this space. In fact, the differentiation of the two can also be interpreted as a testament to the strength of the brand—that there is a strong enough retail identity to the commercial district that it shows up in varying accounts of the neighborhood.

Perhaps even more interesting, though, are the distinctions that separate different interpretations of Hayes Valley outside of the space of the brand. Though there is an almost universal acceptance amongst respondents of, at the very least, an inclusion of the brand image of the neighborhood (as well as its physical extents), there are fluctuations in the ideas around the limits of Hayes Valley. This is evident in the various maps subjects generated (Figs. 3.1-3.6).

In order to better understand this, it is helpful to approach this from the framework of place attachment. Originally rooted in the discipline of environmental psychology, place attachment is a relatively broad concept defined simply by Low and Altman in their review of work as “the bonding of people and places” (1992). Hidalgo and Hernandez, in a later paper
Figure 3.1: Map generated by interview subject

Figure 3.2: Map generated by interview subject
Figure 3.3: Map generated by interview subject

Figure 3.4: Map generated by interview subject
Figure 3.5: Map generated by interview subject

Figure 3.6: Map generated by interview subject
defines it as “an affective bond link people and specific places,” with a further delimitation of a “desire to stay close to the object of attachment” (2001). Low presents a typology of place attachment in another work that breaks place attachment into six categories: genealogy, loss or destruction, economics, cosmology, pilgrimage, and narrative. The last of these is particularly helpful in understanding the impact of the brand: in a sense, the Hayes Valley brand represents a narrative encapsulated in a physical space. However, the prescriptive element of the brand also allows it to transcend this role, as well as its defined location.

In the case of Hayes Valley, the brand is an artificial point of place attachment, one that is more situated in the symbolic representation of a place than in the location of the place itself. Though location is important to the brand, even more so are Hayes Valley's character and history. The branding of the neighborhood creates a situation in which residents' experience of rootedness is in the symbolic Hayes Valley more than the physical place; in simpler terms, they are “attached” to Hayes Valley because of what it represents more than, in strict geospatial terms, what is or is not a part of the neighborhood. While this certainly varies on the individual level, collectively, residents' attachment to the neighborhood is grounded not within a single, clearly-defined space, but an amorphous, ambiguous space. The range of these interpretations of the physical space all exist under the “Hayes Valley” identity. Though there is no clear image of where Hayes Valley is, there is still a clear association with a Hayes Valley identity. The Hayes Valley brand attempts to clarify this by offering its own set of physical bounds, and linking this space with a set of characteristics; however, as we have seen, this is viewed by some as inadequate.

Despite a widespread acknowledgment of the inability of the neighborhood retail
district to sufficiently represent the neighborhood, there exists an attachment to a “Hayes Valley.” On the larger community level, Hayes Valley is physically ambiguous; there is no consensus as to the extent and contours of the neighborhood. Thus, “Hayes Valley” occupies more than a physical space, but a symbolic space. To residents and stakeholders, Hayes Valley exists outside the bounds of the commercial district; however, though the understandings of the extents of these bounds vary, there is still a strong tie to the idea of “Hayes Valley,” such that there are points of symbolic exclusions. Unlike the period prior to the freeway battle, these differences do not represent a multiplicity of distinct “Hayes Valleys,” but variations on the same neighborhood. The branded space is the commonality that links them all, both physically and symbolically.

A 2003 paper by Brown et al. is particularly helpful in framing the idea of place attachment in Hayes Valley. The study was situated in a neighborhood in Utah, and looked at the relationship between place attachment and indicators of neighborhood decline. Studies of place attachment – this one included – approach attachment from the binary framework of physical or social attachment, and categorize observations and findings within these categories. While these are important, and were aspects of the neighborhood described favorably in the interviews, I argue that place branding also allows for symbolic attachment to one's neighborhood. In particular, the Hayes Valley brand, in capturing an idealization of the neighborhood's character, presents another point of attachment for residents and community members. This is pertinent whether or not one agrees with the content of the brand; by simply proposing a definition of the neighborhood's character, it allows for contention, and for one to elucidate his or her own symbolic understanding of the neighborhood.
Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I argued that the Hayes Valley brand, as a descriptive tool, is flawed at best. It, like any brand, is limited by omissions of the brand image – omissions that, while helpful in the pragmatic application of the brand, are problematic when looked at outside of the context of a marketing tool. However, the Hayes Valley brand has risen to serve another function: that of a prescriptive tool that not only shapes the direction of the neighborhood's change, but in doing so, has sustained unity between previously disparate neighborhood groups. By positioning the neighborhood commercial district as the product of community activism, and by framing brand-strengthening efforts as protecting these earlier successes, the Merchants Association is able to mobilize neighbors to protect the brand image of Hayes Valley.

The creation of the Hayes Valley brand – encapsulated in the neighborhood lore proliferated predominantly by the merchant community – played a critical role in maintaining the progression of the neighborhood's change, and ultimately, cultivating a strong sense of place attachment within the community. Though the branding of Hayes Valley – and any neighborhood – is not without problems, it has proven, at least in this case, to bring about positive effects. In particular, the Hayes Valley brand can be understood as the creation of an artificial point of place attachment. Simply put, the “Hayes Valley” that is the subject of the community's pride is not the “Hayes Valley” that the brand markets. However, without this marketed version of the neighborhood, this unified Hayes Valley would not likely exist in the same form. Hayes Valley remains a strong community, unified by a common bond to a neighborhood only loosely defined by physical space; more important to this sense of unity is an appeal to a common history and identity. The creation of an identity by the merchant
community promoted a narrative of neighborhood change that brought increased attention to the emerging neighborhood. Because of the association of a common origin of the larger neighborhood to the commercial district, the success enjoyed by the commercial core became the successes of the neighborhood. This not only empowered other initiatives, but tied these initiatives to the Hayes Valley name. Out of – or at least, in conjunction with – the Hayes Valley's brand has emerged a sense of community centered not simply around the unique quality or physical location of the neighborhood, but that have become closely tied to ideas of activism, efficacy, and community.
Conclusion

This project explored the branding of San Francisco’s Hayes Valley, a neighborhood which experienced significant physical and socioeconomic change over the last several decades. I argue that in the midst of the last two decades, place branding helped to ground the neighborhood’s identity in a central, easily identifiable space, as well as direct some of the changes underway in Hayes Valley. Though the process of branding was primarily rooted in re-framing Hayes Valley’s commercial corridor as an attractive destination, it also had a larger effect of solidifying community interactions within the larger neighborhood space. The branded image of the neighborhood – though almost universally agreed to be not an entirely accurate description of the neighborhood, nevertheless became a rallying point for community members in preserving at least one aspect of the neighborhood’s character.

In exploring the branding of the neighborhood space, I was particularly interested in how it affected understandings of the neighborhood’s physical contours. The commercial-oriented nature of the brand affected understandings of space within the larger community. It simultaneously emphasizes and renders unimportant boundaries of and within Hayes Valley. On one hand, it has resulted in a fairly well-defined commercial district, a space clearly delineated by brand iconography, namely banners bearing the neighborhood’s name. However, this is constrained to a limited space; meanwhile, the neighborhood outside this retail corridor is ambiguously defined, with boundaries in a state of flux.

This dichotomy was clear not only in dealing with understandings of physical space, but also in symbolic interpretations of the space. While many interview subjects acknowledge the branded
space's characteristics, they also made clear distinctions between the character of the neighborhood's retail district and the rest of the neighborhood. I expected for more residents and stakeholders to resonate with the neighborhood's brand image; rather, many read the neighborhood as very clearly divided.

However, I argue that this branded space played an important role in the creation of the strong sense of community that now exists in Hayes Valley. The freeway battle stretching from the Loma Prieta earthquake to the eventual felling of the freeway brought disparate neighborhood groups together behind a common cause, and as a result of the neighborhood brand, a common space. The cause of bettering the neighborhood became physically embodied in the neighborhood's commercial corridor, which was positioned as a product of the collective struggles to bring the freeway down. The contemporary neighborhood's story, as told by the merchant community, began with this struggle, which community members all had a stake in, and thus, were also invested into protecting from intrusion. While the neighborhood retail corridor is not indicative of the greater Hayes Valley — a sense of division certainly exists, though it is more a friendly co-existence than one grounded in opposition — the branding of the space has created a dynamic in which the community at large is invested in protecting the interests of the space.

**Branding as a Context-Sensitive Tool**

As this thesis has demonstrated, the creation of a neighborhood brand played an important role in bringing about positive change in Hayes Valley. It not only helped to re-define an area burdened by a bad reputation, but served as a point of reference for other instances of community engagement. However, it is important to emphasize that branding is not a one-size-fits-all panacea for addressing similar problems in urban neighborhoods, or that other neighborhoods should follow a
similar trajectory to that of Hayes Valley. Rather, the success of the neighborhood's brand hinges on the unique historic and social context in which this process took place.

There are a few key factors that make the case of Hayes Valley a unique one, but the most visible – and likely most important – aspect of the branding of Hayes Valley is the historical context in which it took place. As I have stressed throughout, a place's history plays an important role in shaping contemporary understandings. In this narrative of branding the neighborhood, the freeway battle was a crucial point in the neighborhood's formation. This was a highly public political battle, and though community groups such as the HVMA and HVNA largely took ownership of the subsequent victory (which, to their credit, their involvement played a large part in), it was one that involved many participants from outside the community, and was largely embroiled in city-wide politics. This is important to point out, as the success of the neighborhood brand was largely reliant not only on the public nature of this battle, but on the dramatic neighborhood narrative that resulted from it. In particular, the HVMA was able to capitalize on the combination of these two factors to begin to reverse the image tied to the name “Hayes Valley.” However, the emphasis on this moment in the neighborhood's history comes at the expense of a more inclusive narrative of Hayes Valley's socioeconomic shifts. Though the brand frames this moment as a turning point in the neighborhood, I argue that it in doing so, it masks the changes that were already set in motion by the opening of the nearby Davies Symphony Hall. In emphasizing the more dramatic freeway narrative, the brand roots the origins of Hayes Valley’s transformation within the neighborhood (rather than the adjacent Arts District), and as a result, frames future changes as efforts to protect the collective values of the neighborhood.

An important part of branding, is ensuring that the “product” fits the brand; in this case, the image of Hayes Valley as a retail district whose character hinged on a sense of uniqueness not only
relied upon its stock of independently-owned boutique stores, but has actually necessitated measures to maintain this branded image. These actions protect the branded space from “off-brand” invaders. However, it also had unintended consequences. The re-framing of Hayes Valley as the product of a band of community activists masks the reality of the neighborhood’s historical socioeconomic transition, as well as the narrative’s almost-colonial subtext. By portraying the neighborhood’s gentrifiers as heroes, the brand masks a racial dimension to the neighborhood’s change, in which the largely African-American Hayes Valley was equated to a neighborhood in need of saving. The brand’s clear differentiation between the periods before and after the Central Freeway’s demolition exacerbates this, as it attempts to compartmentalize this part of the neighborhood’s history solely in the past.

At the risk of overstating the importance of this one process, it is important to reiterate that place branding should be seen as a tool and not a solution; in the case of Hayes Valley, it was one practice within a much larger process of community transformation. Nevertheless, neighborhood branding appears to have potential in the cultivation of community engagement and neighborhood pride. The distillation of an attractive, clear, and easy-to-communicate image of the “new” Hayes Valley was significant in portraying the neighborhood as having departed from its less-desirable past. Moreover, it presented community members with a point of emotional attachment, even one that is not necessarily agreed upon as representative of Hayes Valley.

**Directions for Further Research**

This project examined the application of a place brand in the historic and social context of Hayes Valley. While the methodology and scope of the project limits the generalizability of the results, it also allows for a more nuanced exploration of the impact of the brand on a particular space. In
particular, it proved fruitful not just in providing a view of the potential of branding in the neighborhood context, but also a better understanding of how branding was integrated into the socioeconomic transformation of Hayes Valley. Further, this approach provided a closer view of how the merchant community leveraged the neighborhood’s existing community groups to strengthen the brand. This reinforced the brand’s prescriptive influence over the neighborhood’s commercial district, and in the process, perpetuated the cooperation between disparate groups initially established during the battle to dismantle the freeway. It is with this avenue of insight in mind that I propose further research on place branding continues to situate the practice within a specific social and historical context. Though this limits the ability to generalize findings, it is only through this context-sensitive approach that issues beyond brand performance – such as the consequences of displacement and unintended implications of the brand – can be explored in depth.

That being said, there is still value to a more quantitative, generalizable exploration of branding. The apparent success of branding in Hayes Valley suggests that there is potential for application of branding as a tool in other similar scenarios, and as such, that it would be a subject worth further study. Though this project did not attempt to quantify the impact of the brand, such research could be valuable in identifying best practices.

Finally, the branding of the Hayes Valley neighborhood was, at its core intended to improve the performance of a commercial retail environment. Nevertheless, the brand had an impact on the nature of civic engagement in Hayes Valley. Further research exploring this link would be valuable, not only in identifying useful strategies, but in looking more fully into the potential of branding as a tool for cultivating civic engagement. Executed carefully, branding has potential as a tool utilized by community groups and members to leverage existing resources and mobilize populations to take ownership of their communities, and to reshape them for the better.
Sources Cited


