

2. The Island at the Center of the Bay

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In *The Island at the Center of the World*, Peter Shorto (2004) recovers the forgotten origins of New York, the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam that occupied Manhattan Island in the first half of the seventeenth century. His argument that the past still resonates today is music to the ears of any historian. More than that, it speaks to the geographer, for whom the distinctiveness of place is fundamental, as is the way every locale is connected to the wider world. How surprising what an unprepossessing little island can portend! As everyone knows, New York went on to become the center of the United States and, at times, the world (Burrows and Wallace 1998; Scobey 2002; Cassis 2006). But the elemental geographic truth of the power of place is all too often forgotten, along with the buried landscape of Manhattan and displaced Mannahatta Indians (Sanderson 2009).

In that spirit, I introduce Treasure Island as a foil for larger purposes. This odd little island at the center of San Francisco Bay has a surprisingly rich history, much in need of recovery at this moment when it is the target of fantastic plans for a gleaming urban hub. An otherwise modest mid-century artifact has a great deal to tell us about the past development and present state of the San Francisco Bay Area—the high-tech capital of the global economy. Moreover, this pancake of an island can be a launching pad for a wider inquiry into history and geography at scales far beyond the Golden Gate.

Treasure Island, like Manhattan, lies at the center of several worlds. One of these is San Francisco, once the queen city of the Pacific coast and full of global pretensions. Another is California, shining star of American capitalism and destined to become the biggest and most important state in the nation. A third world that once pivoted on San Francisco Bay is the American military projected across the Pacific Ocean. A fourth is the high-tech wonder world over which Silicon Valley and the Bay Area rule today. The fifth and final world is that of a globe beset by dramatic climate change, which may seal the fate of all low-lying islands.

Borrowing from Shorto's title is fruitful in another way. The Bay Area and New York have this in common: given their immense success as globalized cities, centers of capitalism, and cultural icons, they are both prone to building monuments to advertise their success. New York has the Brooklyn Bridge, Empire State Building, World Trade Center and memorial, Trump Tower, and much more. San Francisco

has the Golden things. Treasure self-promotion

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has the Golden Gate Bridge, Transamerica pyramid, and Civic Center, among other things. Treasure Island and its world's fair fit into this cavalcade of monumental self-promotion.

At the same time, lurking behind the hubris is always a dark backstory of a blighted place. For Manhattan that backstory runs from slavery through Irish gangs and the wolves of Wall Street (Burrows and Wallace 1998). As for the City by the Golden Gate, we won't have to look far to see the buried skeletons popping up under our noses. In 2013, for example, as plans were being laid for the redevelopment of Treasure Island into a clone of the new San Francisco, radioactive contamination was discovered in the soil underneath playgrounds and parking lots of a residential area taken over from the US Navy (Lagos 2014). The dangerous particles embedded in the mud are a legacy that the San Francisco's elite, the island's developers, and the Navy would rather forget, but the past has a habit of coming back to haunt the present, "weighing like a nightmare on the brains of the living," as Karl Marx ([1852] 1963) so artfully put it.

The remembrance of things past triggered by these invisible messengers should alert us to the full array of problems plaguing this strange island at the center of the bay. Treasure Island may appear as beautiful, a tranquil scene illuminated by the bright California sunshine, touched by the magic of the Pacific fog sweeping in over the city, and offering splendid views of the urban and natural landscape on all sides—a place ripe with possibility for everyone. Nevertheless, as in the story penned by Robert Louis Stevenson from which it takes its name, Treasure Island is just as likely to be revealed as a cursed spot, doomed to disappoint our fantasies, reveal our follies, and ultimately fade beneath the waves.

Fantasy City

Treasure Island was born in fantasy as the site of the Golden Gate International Exposition (GGIE) of 1939, San Francisco's third entry in the lists of world's fairs.¹ Brash and beautiful, the exposition was a marvelous hodgepodge of buildings in Art Deco style and design bling borrowed from cultures around the Pacific Rim. At the center shone the spire of the Tower of the Sun, echoing the step-back skyscrapers of the 1920s. Within the great halls of Industry, Science, and Homes and Gardens were showcased exhibits from some forty nations and as many US states. Ironically, the most popular part of the fair was the Gayway amusement area, especially Sally Rand's naked girls in cowboy hats, bringing back memories of San Francisco's Old Barbary Coast (James and Weller 1941; Rydell 1993; Pipes 2007).

The GGIE fit the model of world's fairs in proclaiming a kind of utopia of modern living and global fraternity. Over the previous century, world's fairs had been the principal showplaces of industrial accomplishment and unrelenting modernity in the advanced capitalist countries, yielding such wonders as London's Crystal Palace, Paris' Eiffel Tower, and Chicago's White City. San Francisco got in on the act with the Midwinter Fair of 1894, which left the Japanese Tea Garden in Golden

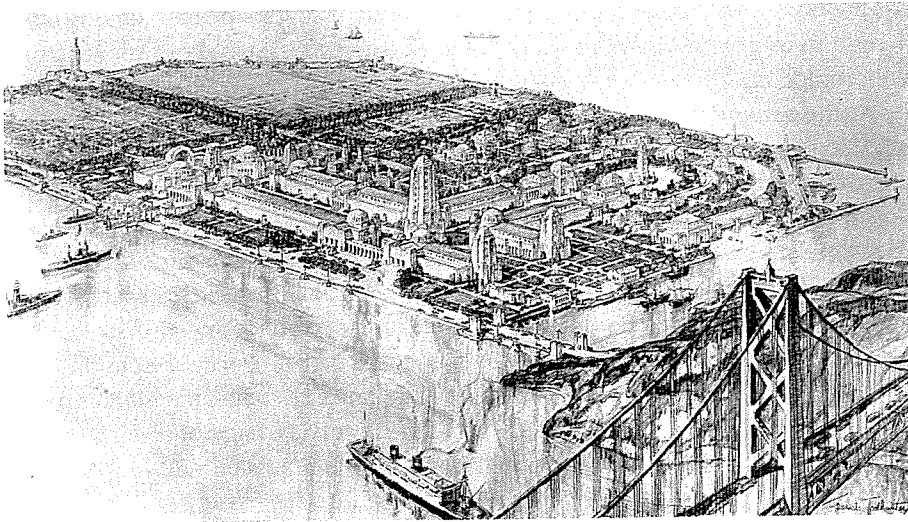


FIGURE 2.1 Aerial drawing of Golden Gate International Exposition at Treasure Island, 1935. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

Gate Park, and the Panama Pacific International Exhibition of 1915, of which the Palace of Fine Arts remains in the Marina District on the city's northern waterfront (Ackley 2015). World's fairs were meant to be ephemeral, throwing up wonderful meringues of faux palaces, exhibit halls, and amusements that melted away after the fair's close (Rydell 1984). The GGIE opened in 1939 and lasted just two seasons. Treasure Island remained.

The original excuse for the GGIE was the opening in the mid-thirties of the Golden Gate Bridge and the San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge. The site chosen at the midpoint of the Bay Bridge—by far the more important of the two bridges—was certainly appropriate. One can well understand the local pride in the world-class accomplishments of the Bay Area engineers who had designed and built the two massive bridges in record time and under budget. The twin bridges were, furthermore, a powerful statement of the region's expanding network of highways and connections to the rest of the country in the automobile age.

In the course of planning the exposition, its purposes were expanded to take in the entire Pacific basin, making it an international fair. It was therefore festooned with imagery from Asia and the South Pacific, all presented in the spirit of unity and cooperation. Not coincidentally, the proposal for an artificial island in the middle of the bay was born as a plan for an airport to serve the international ambitions of San Francisco—fully a decade before the fair of 1939. The idea was that seaplanes plying the Pacific mail routes could take off and land in the bay and that regular planes would use the flatscape of Treasure Island. In keeping with this joint project, some of the fair's buildings were designed to serve as terminal and hangars for the future airport.

The GGIE was a cheerful veneer over the serious intentions of San Francisco capitalists to promote American domination of the Far East (Brechtin 1999). Those

ambitions ran into a brick wall with the rise of the Japanese empire, and the Treasure Island fair closed hastily under the cloud of approaching war in 1941. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor snuffed out happy notions of a harmonious Pacific basin. Fittingly, the Navy took over the island to serve the war effort, and the civilian airport project for Treasure Island was shelved. Instead, the airport moved to its present location on the Peninsula.

Just as galling to San Francisco's bloated self-regard was that New York mounted a parallel world's fair in 1939–1940 that put the Golden Gate International Exposition in the shade. New York's fair grabbed the headlines and the credit for imagineering the American Century (Gelernter 1995). The General Motors Pavilion, in particular, won all the plaudits for its gigantic Futurama model of an "autotopic" city, designed by Norman Bel Geddes, which presaged the glory days of American suburbanization of the postwar era.

The kicker is that New York had much less to do with the invention of postwar suburbia than California. It was here that television was invented and sitcoms mass produced, catalytic cracking for cheap gas was introduced and the car culture farthest advanced, and single-story bungalows and mass-produced tract housing were perfected (Walker 1995, 1996). Los Angeles took the prize as the postwar suburban paradise, but the Bay Area was exploding outward just as rapidly (Walker and Schafran 2015).

In the end, the Bay Area has grabbed bragging rights from both Los Angeles and New York over the last generation (Storper et al. 2015). Silicon Valley is the acknowledged world center for the fantasies of electronic modernity today, from personal devices to internet portals to social media. Today's equivalents of the world's fairs of the past are the great electronics extravaganzas, such as Oracle OpenExpo and Apple's showcases (formerly MacWorld) held annually in San Francisco. Indeed, the whole city has become a kind of fantasyland of new companies and young techies and the landscape of trendy cafes and restaurants.

Today, Treasure Island is being extolled as the latest and largest bauble in the diadem of San Francisco's new fantasy world. The city has been booming ever since the crash of 2008–2009 and has added new companies, jobs, and workers at a dizzying pace since 2010. Now promoters are targeting the island for a vast new urban development scheme, complete with offices, hotels, and high-rise condos, as well as low-rise housing, commercial space, and a bit of environmentally friendly wetlands. Given that Treasure Island is more central to the whole Bay Area than downtown San Francisco, the new plan appears to be nothing less than a play to make it the new downtown of the metropolis—the island at the center of the center of the high-tech world.

Treasure Islands

When the promoters of the GGIE named the reclaimed land Treasure Island, they were echoing the legacy of the California Gold Rush, the event that put San Francisco on the map. The Gold Rush has remained the founding myth of the city and Northern

California, endlessly revisited and celebrated (see, for example, Caughey 1948; Rohrbaugh 1997). The California Gold Rush was a global event that the imagination of people around the world with the promise of easy fortunes for hardy adventurers (Chinese Argonauts called it Gold Mountain). More than that, California gold and silver infused a rapidly industrializing country and Atlantic economy with much-needed money to grease the wheels of commerce.

Treasure Island is, of course, the title of a children's adventure book by Robert Louis Stevenson published in 1883, but the connections are closer than it might seem. Stevenson was drawn to California from his native Scotland after falling in love with a miner's wife. They married in San Francisco in 1880 and took up residence for a summer in the Napa Valley, where Stevenson wrote *The Silverado Squatters*. A decade later, they returned to sail from San Francisco to the South Pacific in Stevenson's continuing search for fantasy. Meanwhile, San Francisco capitalists were gaining control over much of Hawaii and the Philippines. Another parallel is the mythology of the pirates of the Caribbean on which Stevenson drew in *Treasure Island*, the British equivalent of the glorified tales of the Old West that were at the time common currency of San Francisco literature and, later, Hollywood films and TV.

California went on to be much more than a gold mine, growing into a prosperous region on the strength of its trading networks and manufacturing, centered on the Bay Area. As the mining era wound down, a new source of wealth was revealed in the immense productivity and diversity of the state's agriculture and food processing. It went on to be the greatest agricultural state in the nation in the twentieth century and the leading force in modern agribusiness based on advanced organization, aggressive marketing, massive irrigation, hybridization, and petro-farming (Walker 2004; Romero 2015).

San Francisco ruled over all it surveyed in the nineteenth century as the commercial and banking hub of the state and of the Pacific slope. The city was a virtual *Treasure Island* of finance that lent and invested its accumulated capital to build up enterprise throughout the American West and across the Pacific basin. As the twentieth century dawned, a new innovation, branch banking, was taken up by San Francisco's A. P. Giannini, and it propelled him to the apex of US finance. By the time of the Golden Gate International Exposition, Bank of America had become the largest in the world (Nash 1992).

Meanwhile, Los Angeles grew rich on citrus farming and oil in the early twentieth century, exploding across the Southern California landscape and doubling the Bay Area in size. The City of Angels industrialized by canning foods, making equipment for the oil industry and refining petroleum, building aircraft and vehicles, and mass-producing films in the studios of Hollywood (Hise 2004). Los Angeles' rapid growth demonstrated another force in the prosperity of the Golden State: immigration. Workers of every stripe have poured into the state since the Gold Rush, lending their skills and initiative to the booming enterprise that is the California economy. By the end of World War II, Los Angeles was poised to overtake Chicago as the number one industrial city in the country.

Much less well known than mining, agriculture, or movies in the history of California is the role of the construction industry, both residential and commercial. At the time of the building of Treasure Island, the state was the construction capital of the country and probably of the world. In the middle of the twentieth century, Californians invented or perfected most of the technologies used to build modern highways, tunnels, dams, aqueducts, airstrips, and refineries. Leading engineering companies of the era included Kaiser, Bechtel, Utah Construction, and Morrison-Knudsen (Walker 1996). For example, Oakland-based Henry Kaiser built highways in the 1920s, dams in the 1930s, ships during the war, and housing tracts and cars afterward; in the process, by 1950, he assembled one of the greatest industrial empires in the world (Foster 1989).

The New Deal era under President Franklin Roosevelt in the 1930s greatly augmented the federal government's willingness to fund infrastructure and regional development projects. The construction of an airport for the Pan American fleet provided a perfect justification for federal support. The US Post Office was already subsidizing the Pacific mail service, the first regularly scheduled air routes in history, and the New Deal was investing in airports around the country (Leighninger 2007). Not only did this signal the rising star of air travel in general, it also spoke to the pivotal place of California in the age of aeronautics and the growing heft of California in national politics. Exemplifying the latter, Henry Kaiser was one of the few big capitalists to support Roosevelt and was amply rewarded with federal contracts for everything from the Grand Coulee Dam to the Bay Bridge. So, not



FIGURE 2.2. Berkeley landfill, June 1987. Photo: Bob Walker. Courtesy of Bob Walker Collection, Oakland Museum of California.

surprisingly, the New Deal paid the tab and the Army Corps of Engineers undertook the reclamation work for what was to become Treasure Island.

After World War II, California surged to head of pack to become the leading state in the nation in terms of economic output and population. The triumph of the Golden State was driven by a fruitful combination of Los Angeles manufacturing, aerospace, and entertainment industries; Bay Area finance, food, and early electronics; and Central Valley agribusiness. To add to the propulsive mix, California hitched its wagon to resurgent Japan and other rising industrial powers of East Asia.

This tight intersection with the booming trans-Pacific economy continues today with the state's links to China, from handling containers passing through the largest ports on the West Coast to cutting deals for local architects, engineers, and financiers to help build the booming cities of the east. No other part of the United States has deeper connections across the Pacific in trade, technology, finance, business services, and corporate linkages (Walker and Lodha 2013). This is not such a far cry from Stevenson's fascination with the South Pacific first gestated in nineteenth-century San Francisco and the dreams of far-off adventures that filled the imaginations of the reading public in an age of imperialism, which he captured so brilliantly in *Treasure Island*.

The Arsenal of Democracy

For half a century, Treasure Island was part of a different imagination—that of the United States military—as the Navy took over and refused to budge. The naval installation is an apt metonym for the military occupation of the entire San Francisco Bay since the dawn of the American conquest of California and for the country's repeated confrontations across the not-so-Pacific Ocean in the twentieth century.

One of main reasons for the forcible seizure of the northern half of Mexico between 1846 and 1848 was that the United States coveted San Francisco Bay, the best natural port on the Pacific coast of the Americas. California bookended the US continental empire-state and gave Washington an open door to Asia. With the annexation of California in 1846, the US Army immediately took over the Spanish-cum-Mexican garrison at the Presidio and built Fort Point to guard the newly christened Golden Gate. Soon, a military archipelago developed on the islands and promontories around San Francisco Bay, which served as the US military launching point for a century of warfare around the Pacific.

From early on, the Army ran logistics from Black Point (Fort Mason) between North Beach and Cow Hollow and grabbed Alcatraz for a prison. Later, it used Angel Island for mustering troops, along with a string of bases around central California. The Marin headlands bristled with artillery batteries at Forts Cronkite and Baker, as did the Presidio and Fort Funston on the San Francisco side. From the Presidio, the Army could oversee an empire, whether commanding Indian wars around the

West or the conquest of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898 (Walker 2001).

In 1850, the Navy moved upriver to Vallejo, a better landing site than San Francisco itself, and established its first base at Mare Island. There was some naval posturing during the Civil War, but the real naval buildup came around 1900 with the projection of American power in the Pacific under Teddy Roosevelt. The showpiece of this effort was, of course, parading the Great White Fleet around the world, with a notable passage through San Francisco Bay before crossing the ocean. After World War I, the Navy chose San Diego as its West Coast headquarters, much to the disappointment of the Bay Area, but despite this setback naval operations expanded around San Francisco Bay, particularly during World War II (Lotchin 1992). During the war, the bay became the Navy's biggest operations center, a kind of naval lake (see Arbona, this volume). Logistics were run out of the base at the Port of Oakland, submarine operations and repair from Mare Island, ship outfitting and repair at Hunters Point, and ammunition storage and loading at Port Chicago. The rapid growth of naval air power created a need for new Navy airfields at Treasure Island, Alameda Point, and Mountain View. The latter, Moffett Field, was named for the admiral who guided the interwar development of Navy aircraft and served chiefly for antisubmarine operations.² The Navy also took charge of Oakland airport during the war. The Bay Area continued to serve the military's purposes right through the Korean, Vietnam, and Gulf Wars, and Treasure Island served as a Navy training and education center.

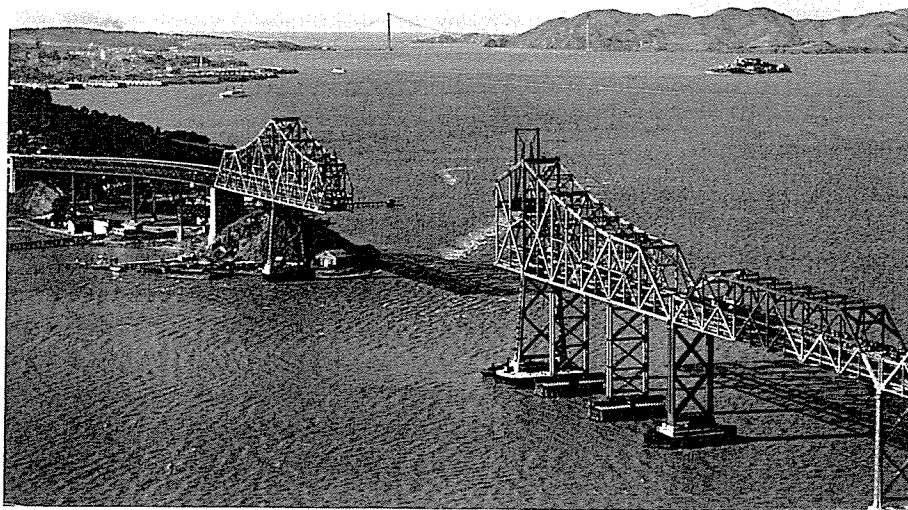


FIGURE 2.3 San Francisco–Oakland Bay Bridge under construction, 1933–1936. The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

The link of Treasure Island to US military aviation was more than a tactical matter. The Bay Area had been an early site of experimentation in aviation, starting from the Army's airfield at Crissy Field in the Presidio. Some of the first stunt flyers entertained at the 1915 fair, but more serious were such avionics pioneers as the Loughhead brothers, who founded Lockheed Aircraft in 1912 before moving it to Southern California during the war. Oakland put in one of the first modern civic airfields in the mid-1920s, with the longest runway in the world, from which Amelia Earhart and other air pioneers launched their transpacific flights. The Boeing Aeronautics School there trained hundreds of the first generation of commercial airline pilots. During World War II, Hewlett-Packard and Litton Industries made the tubes that powered radar and sonar systems for the Allies (Leslie 2000).

In the Bay Area, technology is destiny. But the technology of greatest import to the creation of Treasure Island and the geography of the bay shoreline has not been aviation or bridge building but the humble practice of earth moving. Treasure Island lay at the center of a new post-World War capacity for reworking landscapes, which has had catastrophic effects on the bay environment.

The Broken Shore

A clear link between the building of Treasure Island and the Gold Rush is the way the landscape around the edge of the bay has been reengineered to make way for the civilization that California's mineral treasure unleashed. At the time Treasure Island emerged from the shoals, no one thought twice about filling San Francisco Bay. Bay fill had been a way of life for a century, driven by the lure of making new land from mudflats (Booker 2013). San Francisco's waterfront, filled for docks, warehouses, factories, and houses, bears no resemblance to the craggy outline on early maps. Yerba Buena Cove, Mission Bay, and Islais Creek were all filled in, and the waterfront smoothed out, with most of the material coming from chopping down massive sand dunes and taking huge bites out of Telegraph Hill, Rincon Hill, and Potrero Point (Dreyfus 2008).

The technology of bay fill is simple: construct a dike, dump or pump fill behind the barrier, then compact the material. Builders love bay fill because it is cheap and flat. San Francisco is less Baghdad by the Bay than Kansas on the Mudflats. Other cities around the bay are similarly altered. Along the agricultural frontiers of the bay, the method was even simpler: build a levee around a marsh and pump out the water. The entire Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta—itsself as big as the bay—was reclaimed for farming by this method (Thompson 1959). Thousands of acres of marshes around the bay became cow pastures, and, in the far South Bay, where freshwater inflow is minimal, salt drying beds (Booker 2013).³

Most of the islands within San Francisco Bay have been dramatically reshaped by quarrying and filling. To shippers, islands were simply impediments to commerce; to quarrymen, they were sources of stone; and to the government, they were isolated sites for prisons and quarantine. Blossom Rock was blown up entirely. Alcatraz

was diced and sliced into a rocky nub. Plans were afoot after World War II to tear down Angel Island and dump it into Richardson Bay to build a New Town. Yerba Buena Island was, at least, useful for holding up the Bay Bridge, so it survived. Hills around the bay fared even worse. Telegraph Hill was mercilessly quarried, mostly to build the seawall; Rincon Hill, cut down over the years, is barely visible under the Bay Bridge landfall; half of Candlestick Hill disappeared into the city's garbage dump; and Mount San Bruno, now revered for its unique ecology, was destined to be deposited into the South Bay as Redwood Shores New Community.

In short, the Bay Area provides a perfect example of how capitalist expansion has always brought a dramatic reworking the face of the earth at its spatial frontiers (Walker and Moore 2015). The result was that the bay ended up the most altered major estuary in North America, its size reduced by almost half through filling and diking. Bay fill looks innocent enough after the fact, but the process of filling has wrecked havoc on the bay's ecology, smothering oysters and other benthos and choking the waters with sediments.

Furthermore, it means reduced areas of mudflats and wetlands where shellfish and plankton are most prolific, shorebirds feed and nest, and fish breed and grow. Add unchecked urban pollution and overfishing, and you have a recipe for a catastrophic decline in the bay's once-abundant fish and wildlife, which have been replaced over the years by a myriad of exotics (Dow 1973; Cohen and Carlton 1995).

A tangible link between California gold and Treasure Island is humble mud and gravel. After the easy pickings of the Gold Rush were exhausted, companies with deep pockets turned to hydraulic mining in the Sierra foothills, washing billions of tons of soil and gravel off the mountains and into valleys and streams. Riverbeds in the Central Valley were raised by several feet of new gravels, and the lighter materials were carried farther downstream to deposit a thick layer of mud on the floor of San Pablo Bay and beyond (Brechtin 1999; Beasley 2004). It is possible, therefore, that some of the goop that created Treasure Island came from the goldfields.

Turning goop into gold at Treasure Island required another technology of the mining era: dredging. After hydraulic mining was terminated by court order in the 1880s, miners looked downstream to the gold-laden river gravels of the Sierra rivers, from the Feather to the Tuolumne. River dredging took off around 1900 and, in the process of yielding millions of dollars of gold, destroyed hundreds of miles of riverbed and left thousands of acres of denuded gravel piles, still visible along the riverbanks of Northern California. Dredging was an environmental disaster every bit as great as hydraulicking, but much less well known (Hayes, n.d.; Beasley 2004).

Treasure Island kicked off a new and more devastating era of bay fill in the middle of the twentieth century. The Army Corps of Engineers did a bang-up job, building a three-mile-long rock wall enclosure and filling it with twenty-five million cubic yards of muck dredged from sediment accumulated on the bottom of the bay. It was not the biggest man-made island in the world, as boosters claimed, but it was big and bad enough. The Flat Earth Age of Bay Area expansion was launched.

The war brought huge new military landfills all around the bay, including the Oakland Army and Navy logistics centers at the port of Oakland and the naval air

stations at Alameda and Moffett Field. These were followed in the postwar era by massive expansions of the San Francisco and Oakland airports far out into the bay. Alongside these came gargantuan New Town developments on former marshlands and mudflats of the South Bay: Foster City on the Peninsula and Harbor Bay Isle at the south end of Alameda, next to the Oakland airport. These were suburbs destined for tens of thousands of new commuters.

The worst postwar assaults on the bay came in the form of so-called sanitary landfills. The old-fashioned garbage dump was refashioned as way for every city around the bay to buy a free ticket to new beach frontage. The sanitary landfill was developed in Fresno by an Army engineer during World War II, and it was a fitting technology for the Cold War era: "dump and cover." The new dumps were gigantic. San Francisco consumed the whole of Candlestick Cove with its refuse; San Jose smothered hundreds of acres of South Bay sloughs; and East Bay cities like Emeryville, Berkeley, and Albany nearly doubled in size as their dumpsites spread out into the bay. Worse, the sanitary landfills were anything but, and over time they have allowed a vile stew of toxic chemicals to leach out into the bay through their porous barriers.

The airports, New Towns, and sanitary landfills were all made possible by the invention of a new machine, the bulldozer, in the 1930s. Bulldozers replaced dynamite, steam shovels, and Fresno scrapers in the arsenal of earthmoving equipment, and nicely complemented the waterborne dredges as weapons of mass destruction of San Francisco Bay and its surrounding hills. Where else would the bulldozer have been invented but here in the Bay Area, construction capital of mid-century America? Indeed, bulldozers were just a Fresno scraper, invented for leveling fields in the nineteenth century, attached to a caterpillar tractor, invented in Stockton in 1901 for working on marshy Delta islands. Henry Kaiser, the great Oakland builder, bought out the first bulldozer company and made it his talisman (Foster 1989).

The logical endpoint of a century of bay fill was the Reber Plan, the boldest of many proposals to dam and fill the bay until it would have been no more than a fabric of rivers and ponds (Wollenberg 2015). But before Reber could realize his dream, times changed again, and a rebellion broke out against untrammelled bay fill. What had once been seen as potential dry land, a handy dumpsite, and an industrial highway began to be appreciated as a scenic delight and public treasure.

A massive popular backlash, led by the Save the Bay Association, brought a halt to the madness in the 1960s and put the Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC) in charge of the bay and its shoreline (Walker 2007). In the eyes of today's environmentalists, Treasure Island is less of a centerpiece of San Francisco's global ambition than an ineffable eyesore and reminder of the blunders of the past. Yet the island has escaped the curfew on bay development and the progress of returning bay flats to marshland. It now awaits a new urban makeover, if the developers have their way.

They are again looking to its homely flatness to yield a wealth of treasure just like the gold diggings and New Towns of yesteryear, but aiming to do so by selling their plans as the Brave New World of Smart Urbanism and sensitivity to climate change.

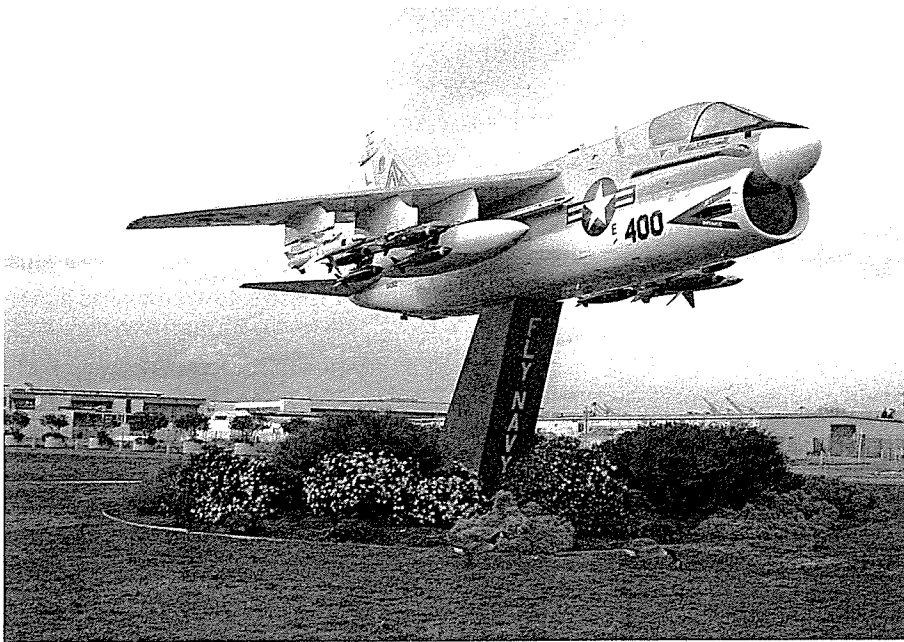


FIGURE 2.4 Douglas Skyhawk at the former Alameda Naval Air Station, 2015. Photo: Lynne Horiuchi.

The Ultimate High-Rise

What are we to make of the fantasy of developing Treasure Island as a high-rise mini-city in the twenty-first century? In one sense, it is the predictable outcome of an abandoned world's fair site, as has happened time and again in cities around the world—most recently in Beijing. San Francisco's Marina District was built on the site of the 1915 Panama Pacific International Exposition, a nice moneymaker for the family of one of the city's former Silver Kings, James Fair. If only the Navy had not gotten in the way, Treasure Island might have been developed as another Foster City of tract homes in the postwar wave of suburbanization. But times have changed, and Treasure Island is coveted for a different kind of development today, one suitable to a very different San Francisco and Bay Area.

The Bay Area is the electronics and information technology capital of the world, a place without peer in the global economy (Storper 2013; Storper et al. 2015). The business of high tech has been so good that Silicon Valley is now the economic core of the bay region, not San Francisco (Walker and Schafran 2015). But the old city has made a comeback and has become the start-up center of the electronic metropolis in the 2000s. With changing tastes in urbanity, the young and the restless who populate the offices of firms like Reddit and Twitter prefer to live in a dense, lively city rather than a flat, boring Valley of the Engineering Nerds. San Francisco is bristling with vibrant, fast-growing firms that are changing the way people live, from LinkedIn and Instagram to Airbnb and Uber. Plus, Silicon Valley giants like

Google and Facebook have opened branch plants in San Francisco and even run private bus services for workers commuting from the city to their main offices thirty miles to the south.

Three high-tech booms have hit the Bay Area since 1995, and, despite spectacular crashes in 2000 and 2008, each new upswing has boosted the San Francisco tech economy to new heights. Tech offices have been crowding into the city's central business district, driving up commercial real estate prices. Because office building was blocked from expanding to the west and north of downtown by the anti-high-rise movement of the 1970s and 1980s, San Francisco's downtown has had to push southward. New offices first leapt across Market Street in the 1980s, then on to Mission Bay (a former rail yard) and the Inner Mission in the late 1990s and early 2000s (Walker 2006). More recently, the whole downtown has been recentered in a cluster of skyscrapers along Mission Street, including a Salesforce headquarters that is the first San Francisco building to exceed one thousand feet. Along with this expansion has come new housing for the tech workforce in repurposed warehouses and condominium clusters and high-rises in the South of Market, Mission District, Mission Bay, and the whole eastern belt down to Bayview-Hunters Point.

Along with this growth has come an immense surge in land values in San Francisco and all around the Bay Area. Not only has demand for office and residential space gone up, it has been multiplied exponentially by the immense enrichment of the tech sector and everyone around it. The Bay Area has the highest average wages in the country, but that barely begins to tell the story. With every new tech bubble has come a flood of venture capital and investment capital into local companies, driving up their stock values, making their owners and executives wealthy, and fueling six-figure salaries for twenty-something tech workers (Walker 2006, 2010). The result is that San Francisco—indeed, the whole Bay Area—is the hottest real estate market in the country and among the top five in the world. Average rents and house prices run neck and neck with those in Manhattan.

Meanwhile, people with modest salaries and families with kids have been moving out of the city in droves, landing in Oakland, Daly City, the outer suburbs like Brentwood, and even as far out as the Central Valley (Schafran 2012).⁴ Given the price of land in the city, far-sighted developers naturally asked, "Why not make the leap to Treasure Island?" The idea first surfaced in the 1990s at the height of the dot-com boom, as promoters realized that the surplus Navy base could add a nice new slice of territory adjacent to San Francisco's high-priced downtown. Over time, the plan has become more ambitious and elaborate. The current developer, Treasure Island Community Development LLC (TICD), a consortium of Lennar Corporation, Wilson Meany LLC, and Kenwood Investments LLC, proposes to build a virtual new city on the island, including the whole package of residential, office, and retail space for tens of thousands of future San Franciscans.

The idea of a boomtown in the bay was, of course, too much for the politicians of San Francisco to resist. A supremely crafty political operator, Willie Brown, had been elected mayor in 1992 and was presiding over the dot-com bubble of the 1990s. Brown, who ran the state legislature for years as speaker of the assembly,

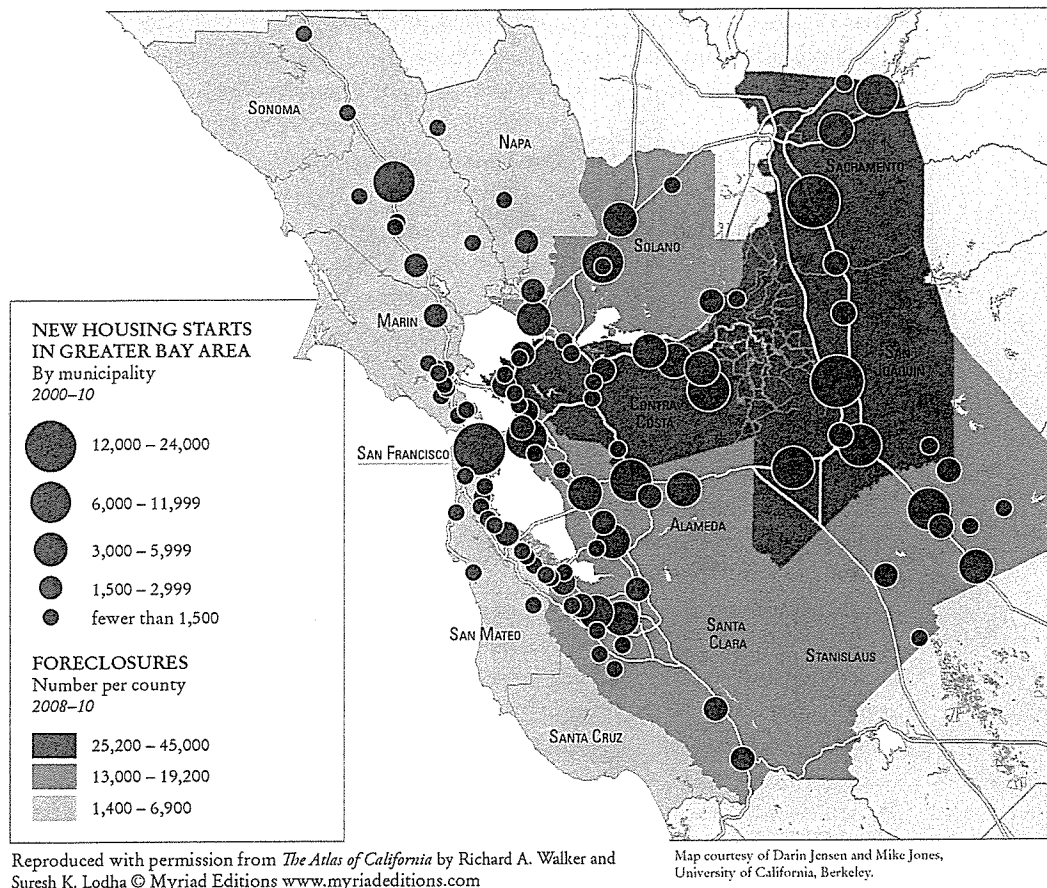


FIGURE 2.5 Bay Area housing starts, 2000–2010. Cartography: Isabelle Lewis. Walker and Lodha 2013, 64.

was nothing if not a friend to developers. He quickly turned back the tide of the anti-high-rise forces of the previous decade by booting out the planning commission, ending all regulation of loft developments, and winning approval of the Mission Bay redevelopment plan on the city's old rail yards after years of controversy. The chance to grab Treasure Island brought a gleam to Willie's eye. By a happy chance of history, the boundaries of the city and county extend halfway across the bay to include Yerba Buena and Treasure Island (much to the chagrin of Oakland).

Then the dot-com bubble burst, putting all development plans on hold. A revolt against Willie's Way peaked along with the dot-com bubble in 1999 and led to a near sweep of the board of supervisors election in 2000 by candidates from the Left (Carlsson 2004). Brown's chosen successor as mayor, Gavin Newsom, barely squeaked into office. Nevertheless, the tech economy recovered after a few years, along with commercial development and business-friendly government under Mayor Ed Lee, after Newsom went on to higher office. Unsurprisingly, the Treasure Island–Yerba Buena Island Development Project was finally approved in 2011.

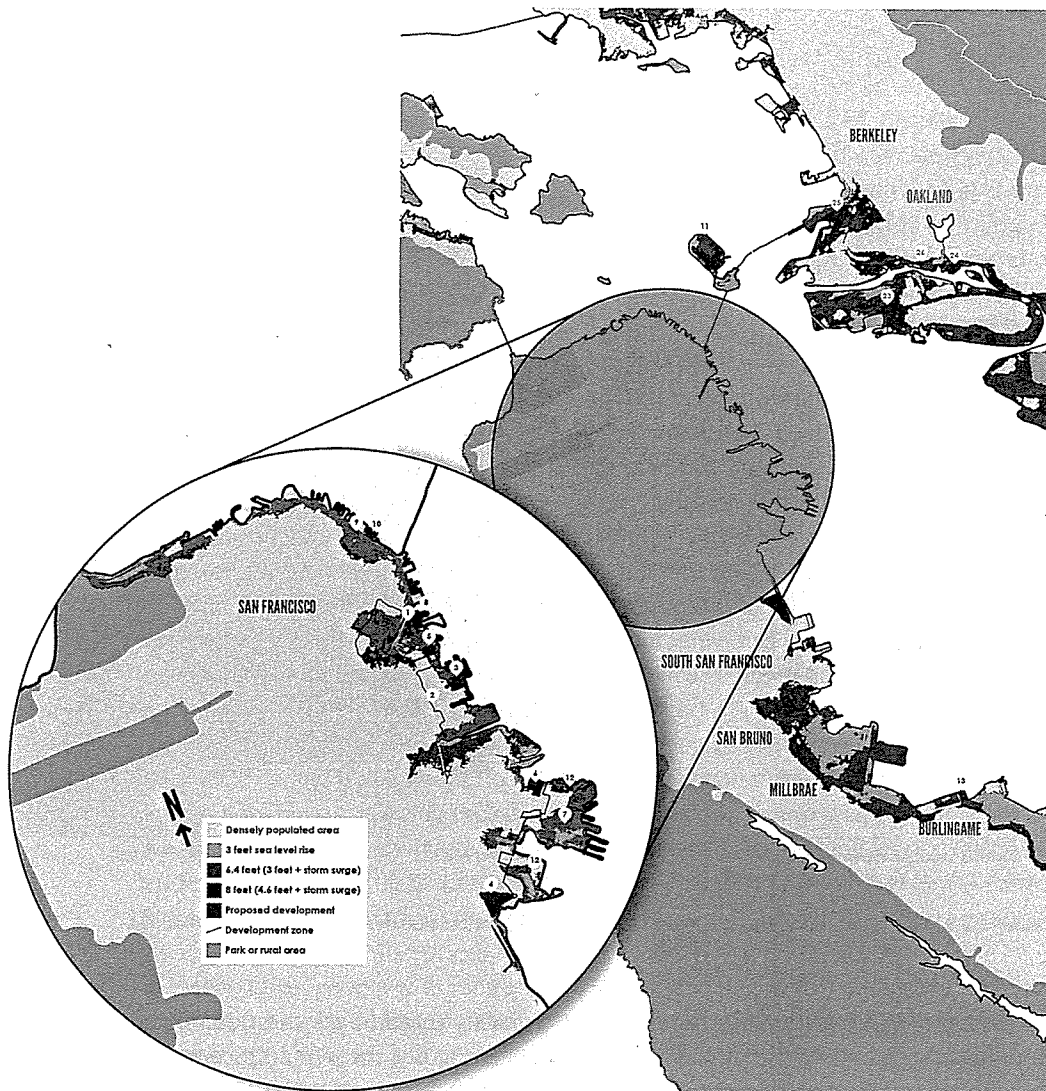


FIGURE 2.6 Sea-level rise around San Francisco Bay. Cartography: Maia Wachtel, Marcea Ennamorato, and Brittany Burson. Courtesy of *San Francisco Public Press*, special issue, summer 2015, B4.

Once upon a time, in the 1970s, many of San Francisco's elite were shocked by high-rises and fought to limit the "Manhattanization" of the city's downtown (Brugman and Sletteland 1971). A lot of folks, high and low, loved the views of the cool grey city draped over its many hills and did not share the corporate enthusiasm for skyscrapers (Walker 1998). By the 1990s, however, a new rallying cry of gentrification arose against unrestrained development, with most of the opposition coming from the city's artists, bohemians, and working people of color (Solnit 2001). That rebellion was quelled after a few years, but the problem of mass displacement by

century, which doesn't sound like much until you factor in wind and waves when the Pacific blows up the kinds of storms that drive the fifty-foot mountains of water beloved of surfers at Mavericks on the San Mateo coast. The bay is more protected, of course, but ten-foot waves might well occur in extreme circumstances. More telling will be the effects of winter high tides, which are never factored into popular estimates of sea-level rise, and which add two feet to the normal five- to six-foot high tides at the Golden Gate. Levees can be raised, of course, but when they sit on a mud base, their resiliency is always compromised, as witness the Sacramento Delta and New Orleans (Booker 2013).

One would think that this might be an obvious concern for government planners and regulators in a state like California. After all, the Golden State has long been a national leader in environmental protection and energy conservation. Energy consumption per capita is among the lowest in the United States and even measures up to European countries. A bellwether law to reduce carbon emissions, the California Global Climate Solutions Act, was passed in 2006, followed by various energy conservation measures. The Bay Area is well ahead of other parts of the nation in cultivating so-called Green Tech companies, from solar power to instrumentation, construction to electric cars (Walker and Lodha 2013; Knuth 2014).

But not so fast. It seems that climate change denial is prevalent even in California. A good example is the recent drought, a clear marker of natural variability in a Mediterranean climate zone, where long droughts are normal in the record laid down by tree rings. The problem of drought (and flood) will only get worse in a warmer world. The response of agribusiness in the Central Valley and developers in Southern California has been to insist on more of the same water-fed wonderland they have always feasted on. They think the failure of the state to deliver water in 2013 through 2015 is due to environmental protections rather than lack of rain and snow. The liberal governor, Jerry Brown, is determined to build two giant tunnels under the Delta to deliver the entire flow of the Sacramento River to them (Palomino 2013). This is both a recognition that the Delta farmlands are doomed by sea-level rise (which would put salt water into the pumps) and a catastrophe for the bay-delta estuary, which lives on the mixing of fresh and saltwater across the seasons and years. Treasure Island, if it survives sea-level rise, will sit astride an ecologically dying bay.

Even the Treasure Island plan approved by San Francisco designated one-quarter of the island as wetlands—a clear admission of the futility of guarding the whole terrain against the rising waters. Perhaps a perfect system of enclosure can be engineered, but will it be worth the cost? And, given the long list of engineering cock-ups on the new eastern span of the Bay Bridge, who would be willing to bet on those odds (Van Derbecken 2015)? These may be the glory days of Silicon Valley, but the glory days of California construction appear to be dead and gone if the new Bay Bridge is any indication. Treasure Island may attach itself to the core of global high-tech, but IT cannot do much to levitate mud.

What does the future hold for Treasure Island as cipher for San Francisco, California, and the larger world? The forces that created Treasure Island and much of the Bay Area appear to have left it behind. The Golden Gate International

high rents and unscrupulous landlords is back with a vengeance, along with serious unrest from below. The most notable sign of discontent has been the attacks on unmarked Google buses making their stealth runs through the city (Solnit 2013; Fimrite 2014).

Willie Brown's popularity has never waned among the city's elite. In 2014, his many friends in high places pulled off the remarkable coup of having the western half of the Bay Bridge named after him, just as the new eastern half of the bridge connecting Oakland and Yerba Buena Island was completed (and remained nameless). This came as a nasty shock to many people around the Bay Area less enamored of Willie. The city's swells turned out in force for the naming ceremony to bask in Willie's reflected glory, and, naturally, the festivities took place on Treasure Island.

Although San Francisco remains captive to the purveyors of development, the new Treasure Island plan will have to reckon with larger forces than Willie Brown. One of those is the powerful Bay Area environmental movement and particularly its keystone organization, Save the Bay, which will undoubtedly have trouble swallowing the idea of a high-rise heaven in the center of the bay. Save the Bay will be able to mobilize the powerful Bay Conservation and Development Commission, which has oversight of all development around the shores of the bay, to cast its flinty eye on the whole notion. The other major difficulty facing the developers is the unstoppable force of rising sea levels, a matter to which we now turn.

Down by the Bay

The ambitious mega-development plan on Treasure Island is supposed to be a model for twenty-first-century sustainable urbanism. This echoes the Bay Area's wider claim to be the green capital of the world, marrying its reputation for environmental activism to its electronic competence to give birth to a new era of Smart Buildings and Smart Cities (Knuth 2014). But the hard reality of global climate change is likely to trump the optimistic plans of the island's promoters. Sustainable urbanism may or may not sink for economic and political reasons, but natural forces are very likely to have the last word.

Adding Kansas to the United States made sense, but making it oceanfront property was not such a great idea. The north end of Treasure Island was never terribly stable to begin with, because solid rock slips away the farther one gets from Yerba Buena Island; that part of the artificial island began to sink as soon as it was finished. The rest of Treasure Island may not be sinking absolutely, but it certainly is with respect to the water in the bay as the world's glaciers, the Greenland icecap, and the northern tundras gradually melt. The question is not if but when it will be below sea level.

The grim reality of global warming is signaled by the rising seas, which pose a number of dangers around the fringes of San Francisco Bay (BCDC 2009). Conservative estimates are in the range of seven to twenty inches by the end of the

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URBAN REINVENTIONS

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Edited by

Lynne Horiuchi and Tanu Sankalia

2017



University of Hawai'i Press
Honolulu