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Review: The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

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Project

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project

Project Collective

[The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project Collective](#)

Project URL

<https://www.antievictionmap.com>

Project Reviewer

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Project Overview**Erin McElroy**

The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) is a data visualization, critical cartography, digital humanities, and media arts collective that documents gentrification struggles and creates tools for housing justice. As a volunteer-based collective with chapters in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles, and New York City, and with community partners worldwide, we produce counter-mapping and media work in collaboration with a number of tenant organizations, arts collectives, students, scholars, and tenants fighting eviction. While our work is multifaceted and interdisciplinary, overall, it seeks to help produce a future of housing and racial justice, one in which tenants can live in their homes without fear of real estate speculation, unaffordable rents, loss of culture and community, racist policing, and eviction. As such, we produce maps, software, media, visualizations, reports, murals, zines, books, oral histories, and analyses that can be used by the public to advocate for the right to remain housed and in community.

The AEMP is comprised of roughly 30 volunteers, all of whom come from different backgrounds: housing organizing to mural making, software development to the humanities and social sciences. We hold all-chapter meetings monthly to work on project infrastructure and internal political education, as well as numerous weekly meetings for specific projects. While several of us have academic backgrounds and publish peer-reviewed articles on the AEMP, most project members do not. Thus, our primary audience is not academic but rather community-based. Some of our academic and public scholarship work on the AEMP can be found on our website, and more is forthcoming, for instance, in our forthcoming atlas manuscript in [Counterpoints: A San Francisco Bay Area Atlas of Displacement and Resistance](#) (PM Press).

The AEMP has received funding from a number of grantors to cover our operating expenses and fund specific projects. Funders include the San Francisco Foundation, the Creative Work Fund, the SF Arts Commission, the Marin Headlands for the Arts, the Kala Arts Institute, Alternative Exposure, and more. We have also received funding from academic institutions that some of us are part of, as well as from giving talks and running fundraising campaigns. We have received awards from tenant organizations and coalitions, as well as from the American Association of Geographers, the American Studies Association, the Blum Center for Poverty, the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts, the East Bay Express, Art.net, and beyond. Our work has been featured in hundreds of news articles since our founding in 2013, and we have been invited to present our work in dozens of forums, exhibitions, colloquia, and classrooms. We have also partnered with over a dozen university classes as community partners, working with students and faculty to design and implement curricula related to counter-mapping, gentrification, oral history work, and more.

The AEMP was formed in the San Francisco Bay Area in 2013 amidst the dawn of the Tech Boom 2.0, in which technocapitalist and real estate interests coalesced in novel ways, resulting in new waves of gentrification, eviction, and racial dispossession. As housing organizers, our goal was simply to create maps and tools that we and our fellow organizers and neighbors could use to help organize against evictions. Our [first map](#) documented the location of San Francisco evictions and the evictors behind them. We also created a look-up tool so that tenants could look up an address and determine if evictions had previously taken place there, with the idea of [helping tenants boycott evictors](#). While this might sound simple enough, cities rarely, if ever, make eviction data public, and certainly not data on evictors or the parcel and business connected to them. Since creating this early work, we have continued to work on our ability to make evictor data available. Our current [Evictorbook](#) project, for instance, contains a homemade lookup tool that joins eviction data, parcel ownership data, and corporate entity data.

In addition to creating tools such as Evictorbook, the AEMP engages in oral history and media work. We launched our [Narratives of Displacement and Resistance](#) oral history project in 2015 with the aim of complicating otherwise flat renditions of gentrification. This project geolocates deep neighborhood histories, stories of gentrification, and strategies for resistance upon eviction data. We combined the launch of this narrative work with our [first mural in Clarion Alley](#) in San Francisco, which includes a Call-The-Wall feature so that passersby can also hear stories of displacement and resistance. We also transcribed some of these stories to create our first zine, [We Are Here](#), which also includes our own writing and contributions from community members and was distributed during our mural release. Since then, our narrative work has expanded in scope and scale. Our [Tenants In Common project](#) in Los Angeles includes photography to better narrate and humanize those facing displacement and homelessness. Our 247-page [Black Exodus project zine](#) was created in collaboration with a number of Black artists and organizations in San Francisco to specifically focus on Black histories of displacement

and resistance. Meanwhile, our narrative work has grown to include filmmaking, most recently with our [Tenants Rise Up film](#), an homage to tenant organizing in Oakland, San Mateo, and San Jose, which we recently livestreamed during a community event and panel discussion. This regional approach to mapping and narrating the Bay Area has also been expressed in multimedia reports, such as our interactive Alameda County Eviction Report, produced in collaboration with [Tenants Together](#). In this report, we also engaged in community power mapping, seeking to shift the frame from only mapping displacement to more explicitly mapping sites of community power.

The need for tools to connect tenants to knowledge about rights, protections, and organizing efforts during the global pandemic is more important than ever. Tools such as the AEMP's [COVID-19 Housing Protection Legislation and Housing Justice Action Map](#), for instance, provide renters and tenant organizers with crucial data tools to fight displacement globally and are created for and in partnership with organizers and community groups that represent the people they are intended to serve. This map also has been built with internationalization in mind, so it appears in the language of users' browsers, thereby making it more accessible. We are also collecting tenant stories to include in the map, in partnership with Tenants Together and [Hope](#). As part of our practice, the AEMP Covid-19 Map project team has actively committed to producing not only a product that supports emancipatory change, but also a process that represents these same values. To this end, the AEMP is now working on divesting from proprietary, unethical, invasive mapping and GIS services and systems, and adopting new infrastructure based on principles of freedom, decentralization, and adaptability. The AEMP team sees this as an opportunity to create a new model of digital infrastructure for social justice counter-mapping based on what we currently know about our own experiences and those of our partners, researcher collaborations, and volunteers. Therefore, we are now actively developing free and open source software solutions for our work and for similar projects.

Project Review

Tanya Clement

As a social justice and public interest technology project, the Anti-Eviction Mapping Project (AEMP) seeks to help the public advocate for the right to remain in housing and in community. It is driven by the research question, "What might it mean to theorize the abolition of private property, or reparations and repatriation for those dispossessed?" The AEMP's 30+ volunteers work to achieve this goal by producing easily-accessible, interdisciplinary and transmedia content.

As a digital humanities and an American studies project, AEMP seeks to document dispossession and resistance on gentrifying landscapes in a desire to interrogate notions of technology as inherently racist. The AEMP articulates a standpoint that considers long-standing legacies and entanglements in

American studies with colonization, racial capitalism, and liberalism as well as the ethical dimensions of data gathering, sharing, and analysis. In digital humanities fashion, the project also invites visitors to consider specific racial histories of technological developments (such as redlining and “landlord tech” as surveillance) as well as the long-standing endurance of anti-racist technological practices that can come from collaborative crowdsourcing, counter-mapping, shared data and experience, art and storytelling work, archiving, and digital representation.

Collaborators include digital humanities activists and scholars as well as tenant organizations, arts collectives, and tenants fighting eviction with whom the AEMP collaborates. The AEMP “Handbook” takes quite seriously the digital humanities [“Collaborators' Bill of Rights”](#) to form ethical collaborations by foregrounding the importance of “mutual aid” (306) among project peers who, “in a spirit of cooperation and equity,” are “self-managed, self-organized, self-determined, and self-governed in a humane, person-to-person way with dignity and respect” (306).

The AEMP both documents gentrification struggles, including making evictor data public and legible, and develops tools for housing justice. The website includes 16 reports and zines including items such as the *(Dis)location/Black Exodus* zine, a multi-platform publication and workshop series; the annual reports of the San Francisco-based Eviction Defense Collaborative (2014-2016); and a 2014 report of the prevalence of vacation rentals through AirBnB in San Francisco. The AEMP also includes multi-media materials — film, reports, zines, and scholarly articles — as well as tools such as the [Evictorbook](#) project, which the AEMP has developed as a lookup tool that associates eviction data, parcel ownership data, and corporate entity data. The AEMP also encourages critical data evaluation and collaborations by providing links to their COVID-19 [Housing Protection Legislation and Housing Justice Action Map](#). Both allow visitors to add data to maps such as one that shows [“Lost and Endangered Art/Community Spaces”](#) in the San Francisco Bay Area. By using and developing free and open source software solutions in their pursuit to make evictor data accessible and interactive for both scholars and the public, the AEMP actively uses technology to put theories for empowering the dispossessed into practice.

The primary audiences for the AEMP are academics and communities all over California, as well as in New York City and Brazil. A testament to their broad range and success is represented in the constituencies supported by the many agencies who have chosen to fund the project and by the impressive and deep local, national, and international [press coverage](#) the project has received since 2013. Coverage by media outlets includes *The Atlantic*, *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *The Telegraph*, NBC, CBS, and NPR.

Notably, the AEMP has a forthcoming atlas manuscript. They also link to articles in a diverse range of scholarly journals and presses in American Studies, city planning, and geography, such as *ACME*, *American Quarterly*, *Antipode*, *Berkeley Planning Journal*, and *City*. Future work might move these

writings from behind subscription firewalls. The AEMP might also expand the “take action” activities, including the above-mentioned geolocation tools where community members can report on what they see in their neighborhoods and beyond.