

Has San Francisco bounced back from the pandemic? Not for everyone, Black residents say

Joy Williams remembers growing up in a lively Fillmore neighborhood – blocks full of Black-owned businesses, hat stores, delicious meals and shops to get her bike tubes repaired after wear-and-tear from long rides with friends.

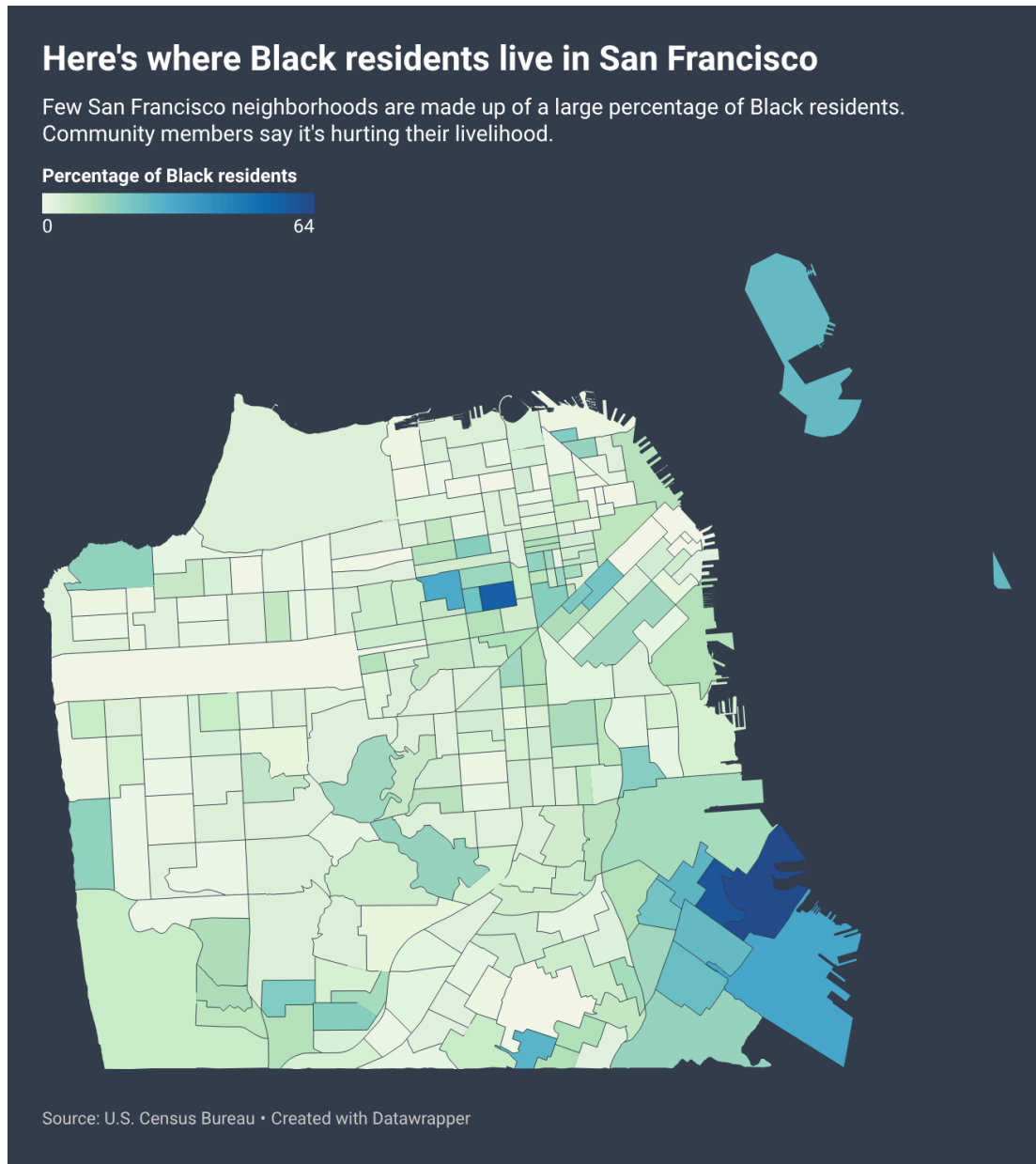
Now, the 41-year-old San Francisco native said Fillmore, once referred to as “The Harlem of the West,” is almost unrecognizable from the neighborhood she knew as a child.

While local officials like Mayor Daniel Lurie say San Francisco is a city people are [“proud to live in”](#) again after years of post-pandemic struggle, some residents like Williams say not every neighborhood is thriving – take Fillmore, for example.

“You go walk through there, and it’s just in despair,” Williams said. “That whole plaza, it looks dirty and dingy.”

Fillmore was once a thriving home and place of business for Black San Franciscans. They made up 57% of the neighborhood’s population in 1970. As of 2020, Black Fillmore residents are just 16% of the community.

The loss in Black community members isn't just a reality for Fillmore. Since the 1970s, nearly 50,000 Black residents have left San Francisco. They now account for just 5% of the city's residents – one of the smallest percentages of any major city in the U.S.



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Williams said she sees and feels the disappearance of Black culture all over the Fillmore neighborhood. Jazz clubs that used to line the streets are now shuttered storefronts. Establishments that remind her of the vibrant neighborhood of her upbringing are few and far between.

“It’s just almost sickening,” Williams said. “For 2026, certain neighborhoods are less desirable because they’ve been neglected for years. They never wanted these communities to thrive – and they’re not.”

The Fillmore area was a victim of San Francisco’s [urban renewal efforts](#) decades ago. Entire blocks were bulldozed. Black businesses and families had no choice but to leave.

“It was by design,” Williams said. “There are so many different programs and things in place to cause the Black community to leave San Francisco.”

City officials claim to be making a renewed investment in San Francisco’s Black communities. Lurie [set up a reparations fund](#) for the city’s Black residents in January.

There’s a catch, though: The fund has no funding. It’s a placeholder Lurie said will receive resources when the city isn’t in a \$600 million budget deficit.

The empty fund is just another example of San Francisco’s empty promises to the Black community, Williams said. While the city has been recovering economically from the pandemic, Williams hasn’t seen that recovery for areas like Fillmore.

“You walk through the whole Fillmore – 30 blocks this way, 30 blocks that way – and you cannot find a meat market, a fruit stand, anything,” she said.

Fillmore’s last full-service grocery store [closed last year](#), leaving the community’s residents with limited options for fresh and healthy foods. The city could have prevented that closure, Williams said.

“They say they care,” she said. “Daniel Lurie said that, but then when you go and walk the Fillmore corridor, Safeway is gone. Subway followed. Starbucks followed. Not only are those places for people to go eat. Those are people’s jobs. Those are jobs lost.

“So how can you say you’re reviving a corridor or a city or a district when that district and area is constantly losing?”

In the Bayview, another historically Black neighborhood, Carrie Carter said the story is the same. She used to be able to walk to her nearest Walgreens to pick up prescriptions or a quick snack.

In 2025, [Walgreens closed a dozen San Francisco locations](#) – including every store in the Bayview.

“I said, ‘Oh man, I’ve got to go to South San Francisco, or deal with the parking situation over in San Bruno if I want to go to Walgreens,’” said Carter, 64. “There’s no CVS.”

Tahrio Sanford, 33, said Black San Franciscans are often an afterthought when it comes to true investment and support from the city.

“I feel like we’ve always had temporary things,” said Sanford, who has always lived in the Potrero Hill neighborhood. “To continue to have temporary things and not make something permanent that we can actually have, that we know that is ours, that kind of messes it up.”

An example: the reopening of the Fillmore Heritage Center, a 50,000-square-foot building that used to be a hopping hub for jazz and dancing. It closed its doors in 2015. Since the pandemic, multiple attempts to reopen the center have failed.

Now, [the city is promising to reopen](#) the event space to local artists and entrepreneurs, but only until December. Williams said the efforts might be coming from a well-intentioned place, but temporary investments won’t make strides in a place that’s been impacted by decades of systemic harm.

“With these suits on, they want to walk through and come up with so many plans, but it’s already been planned – there’s plans 50 years ago to destroy that community,” Williams said.

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Fifty years ago, Carter said the Bayview was a place she wanted to live – and could live. That’s not the case anymore. She used to find a community on her block. Now, she finds dozens of cars owned by people she doesn’t know, and those people are rarely Black.

“I don’t care anymore,” she said. “I’m not going to try to stay. I want to go somewhere else where it might be better.”

Carter said she’s preparing to lose her home. It’s getting harder and harder to pay the mortgage she inherited.

“Another Black person leaving Bayview,” she said. “Pretty soon, it probably won’t be none of us here.”