



## The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900

*By Philip J. Ethington*



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This history of San Francisco from 1850 through 1900 identifies the active participation of citizens in communication, persuasion, and mobilization as the public city: the site of American political and social change. Challenging decades of scholarship that treats urban politics as the expression of social-group experience and power, the author develops the opposite thesis that social-group identities of race, class, ethnicity, and gender were politically constructed in the public sphere in the process of mobilization and journalistic discourse,



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**The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900** By Philip J. Ethington Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #5420391 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Cambridge University Press
- Published on: 1994-10-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.98" h x 1.26" w x 5.98" l, 1.72 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 480 pages

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### **Editorial Review**

#### **Review**

"An impressive work based upon extensive research in qualitative and quantitative sources, the book successfully engages a variety of complex interpretative issues at a high level of sophistication. The author's forcefully presented arguments and his provocative conclusions will stimulate discussion and debate. The Public City is required reading for every historian interested in urban history, California history, and the history of American politics in the nineteenth century." Pacific Historical Review

"This ambitious work deserves close attention from urban historians, political historians, and political scientists....[T]he questions it asks, the wealth of information it presents on a crucial period for urban political development, and the ways in which it reframes the urban political contest opens the way for a renewed debate on urban politics that has been mired too long in bosses versus reformers and the social-group paradigm of political development. Ethington is to be congratulated for his achievements here." Maureen A. Flanagan, Michigan State University, on the Internet

"The book is well grounded in the sources, including election data, and it is especially suggestive in integrating developments in the realms of gender and news media into the overall analysis. The author writes clearly ... the book is an essential addition for all upper-division undergraduate and graduate collections in American, western, and urban history." D.F. Choice

"Practically every page presents some new insight or challenges some accepted interpretation....this is required reading for everyone interested in American politics in the latter half of the nineteenth century." Robert W. Cherny, American Historical Review

"Philip Ethington has given us an important and provocative study of the changing political culture of early San Francisco and, more generally, of nineteenth-century urban America....'The Public City' is a book that needs to be reckoned with. It makes an important argument for the primacy of political culture. It highlights the discursive role of institutions such as the press in linking and shaping state/civil society relations. It effortlessly blends qualitative and quantitative approaches. And it deepens our understanding of early San Francisco political history. These are no small achievements." Steven Erie, Nevada Historical Society Quarterly

"An impressive work based upon extensive research...the book successfully engages a variety of complex interpretative issues at a high level of sophistication....his provocative conclusions will stimulate discussion and debate." William Issel, Pacific Historic Review

#### **From the Back Cover**

The history of San Francisco from 1850 through 1900 identifies the active participation of citizens in communication, persuasion, and mobilization as the "public city", the site of American political and social change. Nineteenth-century Americans relied on the Roman and Enlightenment models of the "public sphere" as a forum for debate and self-government. Drawing on speeches, pamphlets, newspapers, and census and electoral data, the book reinterprets the city's turbulent history. Challenging decades of scholarship that treats urban politics as the expression of social-group experience and power, the author develops the opposite thesis that social-group identities of race, class, ethnicity, and gender were politically constructed in the public sphere in the process of mobilization and journalistic discourse. New methods of

political mobilization unleashed by the Civil War resulted in the death of republican liberalism and birth of pluralist liberalism, and in the transformation from a political conception of society to a social conception of politics in the years from 1850 to 1900.

About the Author

**Philip J. Ethington** is Associate Professor of History at the University of Southern California.

## **Users Review**

**From reader reviews:**

**Doris Williams:**

As people who live in the modest era should be revise about what going on or information even knowledge to make these people keep up with the era and that is always change and move forward. Some of you maybe will probably update themselves by reading books. It is a good choice for you personally but the problems coming to you actually is you don't know which one you should start with. This *The Public City: The Political Construction of Urban Life in San Francisco, 1850-1900* is our recommendation to make you keep up with the world. Why, because book serves what you want and wish in this era.

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