

problematic and cast anticommunist refugees as petty, reactionary extremists stuck in the past. Hundreds of Little Saigon residents protested the display of communist symbols at the Hi-Tek video store in Westminster in 1999, waving banners that read “America and South Vietnam lost Saigon. We together must not lose Little Saigon.” While the mainstream media denounced the “crazed” behavior of the protesters, who represented a large cross section of the refugee community, Nguyen argues that the incident revealed how Vietnamese in Little Saigon were “taking full advantage of their status as Americans” to send a unified message to the Vietnamese government. Vietnamese Americans capitalized on this political victory to win another battle, the campaign for a local Vietnam War Memorial that depicted a South Vietnamese soldier and institutionalized their collective memory and identity as refugee nationalists. Overall, Nguyen has produced an important and original social, cultural, and political history of Little Saigon and the individuals who shaped a new mode of becoming American.

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NOTE

1. See, for example, Yen Le Espiritu, “The ‘We-Win-Even-When-We-Lose’ Syndrome: U.S. Press Coverage of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of the ‘Fall of Saigon,’” *American Quarterly* 58 (2006): 329–352; Mimi Thi Nguyen, *The Gift of Freedom: War, Debt, and Other Refugee Passages* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); and Eric Tang, *Unsettled: Cambodian Refugees in the New York City Hyperghetto* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2015).

Michael Johns. *San Francisco: Instant City, Promised Land*. London: Reaktion Books, 2018. 230 pages with 107 illustrations, 62 in color. \$19.80.

In this series of essays on San Francisco history and contemporary culture, Michael Johns quotes Gelett Burgess’s 1907 novel *The Heart Line: A Drama of San Francisco*: “No other city . . . has so many points of view” (16). Throughout the book, Johns describes the city’s range of views by detailing its diverse worldviews and its varied cultural atmospheres. He communicates to readers how it felt to be in San Francisco at different stages in its history. Chronicling important eras of the city’s history, each chapter conveys the feeling of a particular time through an assortment of historical narratives, excerpts from prominent writers, and vivid and immersive details.

This richly illustrated book is loaded with sixty-two eye-catching, full-color images (107 images total) and looks like a mix of a travel guide and a collection of historical essays. The two main sections include chapters describing the city’s historical eras and short essays detailing “The City Today.” A section of business and cultural listings, a chronological list of historic events in the city, and a bibliography with suggestions of books (fiction and nonfiction) and movies about the city conclude the book. One-page mini-essays are distributed throughout the book, on topics including Mission Dolores, eccentric figures like “Emperor Norton,” the Hetch Hetchy Valley, New Deal political murals, Herb Caen, and the AIDS Quilt.

Johns uses Bernard DeVoto’s words, “San Francisco is West as all Hell,” to characterize the city. He argues that San Francisco, despite its sophistication, “retains a frontier quality

that has always attracted seekers—of fortune, power, pleasure, refuge, rebellion.” The city, however, is a “particularly west-coast version of the West: not just irreverent, independent, and a bit outside the law, but progressive, innovative, and open to all kinds of people and ideas” (16–17). It is this city—one of irreverence and tolerance, extreme wealth and deep poverty, permissiveness and bohemianism—that Johns details. He fills the chapters with examples of the city’s rapidly changing spaces; its racial, political, and sexual diversity; and its ever-evolving openness to exploration.

Johns devotes the bulk of the book to seven chapters that detail the city’s history from its meteoric rise during the gold rush to the contemporary day. He identifies these eras as (1) an “Instant City” created as a product of the gold rush; (2) “A Town with Style” produced by rapid investment in urban infrastructure and the hurried migration of cosmopolitan peoples; (3) a city destroyed by the 1906 earthquake and fires that was instantly rebuilt with splendor; (4) the site of the waterfront strike of 1934, which produced a four-day general strike, one of the most radical strikes in the nation’s history; (5) the city’s cosmopolitanism, shaped by migrations and cultural developments before and after World War II; (6) the progressive and permissive culture created by “Lefties, Gays, and Hippies”; and (7) the rise of yuppies, gentrifiers, and techies in the “City of Apps.” These brief chapters detail the city’s rise through these varied epochs, though they rarely offer more than a quick glimpse at each of these moments in time.

The eight short essays on “The City Today” range from descriptions of 24th Street and the Tenderloin to a brief essay on homelessness in the city. One essay, “Street *Litterature* in Lower Nob Hill,” describes Johns’s long fascination with collecting handwritten litter from the city’s streets. These notes include to-do lists, grocery lists, notes for self-improvement, and notes between neighbors. Including images of a sampling of the notes he’s collected, Johns explains that these trivial items reveal many things about their authors and the city’s culture. Items like this help Johns convey the city’s varied flavors and feelings.

Largely, however, the book seems to be intended for popular audiences, as part of Reaction Books’ *Cityscopes* series, which provides “a unique overview of a city’s past as well as a focused eye on its present” for several cities, including San Francisco. Each of the books in the series, according to the publisher, is written by locals with “intimate knowledge of the cities” and offer “compelling historical images as well as contemporary photos” and “fascinating vignettes on the quintessential and the quirky, the old and the new.” This book delivers what the series promises.

Johns provides lively vignettes overviewing the city’s exciting and varied history. The book’s large and frequent photos engage the reader, and its design and aesthetics are bold and lovely. It could provide a basic overview of the city’s history for students studying the history of San Francisco, and it will surely fare well with a general audience. For scholars and aficionados of the city, it provides some fascinating details and anecdotes.

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