Hidden San Francisco

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A Guide to Lost Landscapes, Unsung Heroes, and Radical Histories

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OPENERS

The approach of this book embodies a commitment to history from below, to history as lived, to documenting our time, alongside critical, in-depth, sometimes controversial histories. The histories we present here will deepen your understanding of where you are and how the City got this way, and hopefully, help you see your own participation in the City's life—whether as a resident or a visitor—in a new light. In the following pages you will find a complicated and contrarian historical understanding, a dissenter's history of San Francisco framed by the belief that history is a creative act in the present.

We don't believe history is only made by politicians, business owners, and celebrities more than it is by the unsung and often ignored streetcar conductors, secretaries, ironworkers, organizers, dockworkers, musicians, cabbies, and all the people that really shaped San Francisco through the years. Most of us don't tend to think of history as something we are actively engaged in, but that doesn't make it any less so. We make history together every day, both by acting in the world and by interpreting and arguing over a contested past. As you walk or bicycle through the streets of San Francisco, you are contributing to the City's history. Stop and talk to someone, take a photo and share it online, spend some time in a park or plaza and watch the life of the City unfold before your eyes. Show up at a concert, a poetry reading, an art show, a political protest, and you too are indelibly etched into San Francisco's history. Who knows how your presence will alter your own life or someone else's, or maybe even the trajectory of the City itself?

This book peels back the layers of San Francisco history to discover memories, echoes, and ghosts of the City's storied past, often hiding in plain view. The pre-urban landscape, dramatically reconfigured by decades of

digging, plowing, flattening, and filling, continues to undulate beneath the streets and buildings of twenty-first-century San Francisco. From farming to industry to towering offices, city neighborhoods have been reinvented and reinhabited again and again. Behind old walls and gleaming glass facades lurk former industries, secret music and poetry venues, forgotten terrorist bombings, and much more.

Philosophically, this book, and the project it has grown out of—*Shaping San Francisco*—are rooted in the so-called "new history" that prominently hit popular consciousness in the wake of the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. This type of history telling starts with a resounding rejection of the older consensus histories that have prevailed since the founding of the United States: sagas that foreground wealth and power and the "important" people (overwhelmingly white men) who controlled it, and our approach casts doubt on the notion of there being a "grand narrative" that tells one Truth about history. Rather than one glorifying story featuring history's apparent "winners," we join with others to look at the lives of millions of people—women and men of all ages, races, and sexualities—who may not have made the social register, but whose activity is the real muscle and bone of the world we live in. *Hidden San Francisco* prefers to seek out multiple points of view to help us make sense of the many experiences and ways of knowing that are as historically relevant as the stories of generals, executives, and mayors. The roots of this sensibility extend back further, well into the 1930s when the French "Annales" school was founded by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre and then carried on after WWII by Fernand Braudel. They emphasized the long flow of history by closely analyzing the everyday lives of people embedded in social structures, seeking to understand the dynamics between common behaviors and attitudes and the maintenance of systems of power and reproduction. They were the first to integrate geography, history, and sociology into a comprehensive analytic synthesis, seeking to provide a more complicated and nuanced understanding of how history is made, and how it is remembered. Thus, this book is a guide to San Francisco from a different point of view. Cable cars, hippies, and the Golden Gate Bridge are here too—but through their lesser-known and more complicated undersides.

Perhaps more importantly, this book confronts an amnesiac culture, a society that prefers to forget—or even worse, to never know in the first place! In San Francisco, we stand on land once claimed by Mexico from the

Spanish, who claimed it from the original inhabitants. It's preferable to think that this land was transferred thereafter to the United States in an honorable and fair way, rather than the real story of venal manipulation and brutal forcible annexation. We have been told we have to believe that the settlers who arrived in the new State of California found a paradise that was largely depopulated and open—a completely false idea in an area that had one of the densest preconquest populations in North America before the arrival of European microbes. And the genocidal campaigns carried out in the first 25 years of California's U.S. history make a very dark and unforgivably barbaric foundation for the oft-told tales of Gold Rush fortunes and entrepreneurial geniuses who supposedly "built" the state.

History doesn't automatically grab everyone's interest. Especially here, we live in a culture obsessed with the new, with now, with the always beckoning possibilities of a glittering future. Some people use the expression "You're history!" as an epithet, to declare the irrelevance of a person or an idea. In this book we pierce Americans' propagandistic relationship with history (from which San Franciscans are far from exempt). San Francisco is very much an American city, which means we wrap ourselves in a self-righteous certainty that ours is the best of all possible countries, with the best of all possible political and economic systems. San Francisco also describes itself as a bastion of liberalism and tolerant open-mindedness, the "left coast" of a country that is distinctly to its right politically. This history has its bits of truth throughout, but what is glossed over, left out, and deliberately hidden tells a very different story and can be found in the pages of this book.

At the time this book is to be published, the City is undergoing a breathtaking demographic change (some describe it as a massive ethnic and class cleansing as soaring rents and a vicious wave of evictions drive lower-income residents out). Dense residential high-rises are popping up where gasworks and foundries once stood along the edge of the original bay shoreline. Those forgotten early industries comprised the City's original "tech boom," fueling the mining and agricultural fortunes that forever altered the state's storied mountains and valleys. Today, private "Google buses" (actually separate, dedicated luxury bus lines for each of more than a half dozen large tech firms like Facebook, Apple, Yahoo, Electronic Arts, Google, Genentech, and others) roll every couple of minutes during morning and evening rush hours through neighborhoods where

working-class Irish, Germans, Italians, and Scandinavians built sturdy and elegant Victorians that housed multigenerational families. To rent or buy an apartment in these spruced-up, much-loved buildings now requires more than a six-figure salary, but many of them still house longtime San Franciscans who benefit from the rent control and eviction defense resources that have been established through decades-long, arduous political efforts.

We ourselves have struggled to stay in San Francisco during this tidal wave of displacement, forced out and nearly evicted from our homes. We barely hang on, but our work to produce the histories herein is an ongoing rebuke to the out-of-control forces that are destroying the City that was, imposing a sterile and homogenized urbanity drained of precisely the peoples and energies that gave it its vital soul. But it's a fragile new order and one that longtime San Franciscans know will subside eventually. This book and the histories we've worked so hard to collect are a vital seed bank to help germinate the complicated, contested, and passionate San Francisco that is still here despite everything, and will never be fully defeated.

Labor and Ecology

Our view of local history starts with intersecting labor and ecology, categories that provide revealing windows into how the City came to be the way it is. People don't work in a vacuum; they work in a context of nature and the environment we've collectively created over generations. Historians rarely look at these fields together. Labor historians tend to focus on the history of unions, with occasional looks at broader public movements, labor parties, etc., but never connect the workers' movement with the natural environment. On the other hand, the burgeoning field of environmental writing focuses largely on earth sciences, climate change, and species/habitat loss. Even if willing to examine the political history of ecologically inspired activism, it is the rare environmental scribe who connects ecology to the work done in society at large. To properly understand the history of this place, we have to know what kinds of work have been done, how these tasks were organized and carried out, by whom, under whose direction, and to what end. Mostly these questions have been absent from twentieth-century workers' politics and definitely from the environmental movement (with a few exceptions among environmental justice activists in recent years).

San Francisco—the place—precedes all this industriousness. What was here when modern life suddenly burst over the hills, dunes, shorelines, and waterways of the bay? Who was living here and how did *their* activity shape the environment that greeted the Spanish? How did patterns of work and economic activity shape the landscape, and in turn shape the lived experience of the residents of this sudden city? As the decades accelerated and the City was rocked by earthquakes (1868, 1906, 1989, along with thousands of smaller ones) and burned by massive fires, how did the evolving relationship with hills, water, and transportation shape San Francisco, its possibilities, its ability to sustain a complex urban life?

From its frenzied 1849 origins in the Gold Rush, the city of San Francisco has been built up from scarcely a hamlet into a world city. The City's history coincides helpfully with the emergence of photography, providing a remarkable visual record of how human effort flattened and "improved" the dunes and swamps into a ground suitable for an industrializing city to grow. To feed the growing city, agribusiness emerged early to remake the delta and the inland valleys into major croplands, altering forever the ecological composition that preceded their arrival. Over a century and a half, the thriving and tempestuous rivers of California were dammed, channeled, and diverted into one of the world's most impressive—and inconceivably bizarre—plumbing systems. San Francisco residents provided the planning, coordination, and capital to orchestrate an elaborate regional economy with itself at the profitable center. Monopolists repeatedly sought to dominate transportation, fresh water, mining, forestry, and agriculture.

Neither the city government nor most San Franciscans benefited from this well-organized imperial control of the region. Workers repeatedly confronted concentrated economic power to extract a "fair share" though rarely to alter the trajectory of plunder and exploitation followed by the wealthy. White workers organized racially exclusive unions to challenge their conditions again and again, in nearly every industry and occupation. On at least two occasions in city history, self-styled "workers' parties" took power and temporarily broke the Democrat-and-Republican political duopoly, only to fall apart in a few years. Even the subterranean waters, long forgotten after being entombed in cement culverts, occasionally break out and flood the streets, proving that the decades of reshaping the peninsula haven't fully suppressed the original landscape underneath the pavement.

Genocide and Slavery

Genocide and slavery are two more closely aligned categories that we must understand together to grasp the social dynamics that gave rise to the City by the Bay. In the twenty-first century, both concepts seem very far removed from our lives, but in fact the traces of these double horrors are not so easily expunged. From the beginning of Spanish settlement on the San Francisco peninsula, the colonists depended on Indian labor to build the mission, farm the fields and harvest crops, tend the livestock, and fish and ensnare large birds. Ostensibly the Indians, called "neophytes" by the Spanish friars, were willingly contributing their labor in exchange for the great benefit of becoming Christians and subjects of the Spanish crown. In fact, if they chose to exit this grueling regime, they were chased down by armed soldiers and forcibly returned. It wasn't until 1829, years after Mexico had gained its independence from Spain, that Indian slavery was formally abolished. By the time the missions were fully secularized in the 1830s, it is estimated that the original population of California had already fallen by two-thirds due to a combination of disease, starvation, and colonial violence.

Slavery was a key element of early California history, long swept under the rug by historians determined to put a positive spin on a dark history. After Indians were officially emancipated, their role in sustaining the Californio/Mexican cattle economy was barely altered. The Mexicans were dependent on their labor and thus not committed to their wholesale slaughter as the Americans were from approximately 1846 to the early 1870s. But Americans, too, found that Indian slave labor was an indispensable need. Officially a "free state" after being admitted to the Union in 1850, the new state legislature passed laws authorizing the indenturing of Indian children without their parents' consent, as well as any Indians deemed "vagrant," legalizing Indian slavery in the state. Up to 25 percent of Northern Californian households held an Indian child in slavery in the 1850s (Madley: 2016). California was also obliged to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, which made it complicit in the capture and return of many enslaved Africans who traveled to the state with their southern "owners" and may have escaped while here. It was Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation that finally ended both the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act and formal Indian slavery in the state (but not the genocidal slaughter that carried on into the following decade). The booming agricultural and

mining economy of California would have had difficulty sustaining itself without the coerced labor of indigenous workers, followed by indentured Chinese labor.

The enormous output of the state would have been stuck in isolated California were it not for the violently oppressed workers who sailed the high seas. Forgotten and glossed over was the status of sailors on the great fleet of ships that serviced San Francisco Harbor during the nineteenth century. Subjected to extremely sadistic and cruel violence by ship officers, sailors were deprived of basic rights. As late as 1897, the U.S. Supreme Court held that sailors were exempt from the Thirteenth Amendment's prohibition against involuntary servitude (Pickelhaupt: 1996). California, like so much of the capitalist world economy, made its famous leap into modernity in no small part thanks to enslaved and coerced labor of Indians, Chinese, and sailors!

War and Antiwar

War boosted the Bay Area many times. From the American seizure of California in the unprovoked Mexican-American War of 1846–48, to the horrendous genocidal campaigns against the native peoples of California and the western United States, San Francisco has been the beneficiary and the home of war promoters.

When the Civil War broke out, most shipping to and from California was curtailed, which in turn led to a new boom in manufacturing locally. When the Comstock Lode's multimillion-dollar silver deposits were discovered in western Nevada, San Francisco benefited even more than it had from the original Gold Rush. But by the end of the 1870s, a general depression had the country in its grip, and the Comstock Lode had petered out. The Union Iron Works moved from its early location near 1st and Mission to Potrero Point, where a state-of-the-art industrial behemoth was built to make iron and all the tools and machinery required for the ongoing industrial revolution. But the owner, Irving Scott, saw that he needed a steadier demand for what his high-technology facility could produce. After a world tour when he visited shipyards in Europe and Asia, he returned to San Francisco with the determination to convince the U.S. government to become his main client.

Soon, the Union Iron Works gained enormous federal contracts to produce warships, ultimately building most of what became the "Great

White Fleet" (the same one President Teddy Roosevelt sent around the world in 1909 to "speak softly and carry a big stick"). Already the Presidio and Fort Mason at Black Point were longtime military bases, as was Alcatraz Island. Mare Island in Vallejo had been the main naval installation on the bay with privately owned "graving" docks at Hunters Point also serving the needs of both private and U.S. Navy ships. When the Union Iron Works went bankrupt in 1901, Bethlehem Steel took over the facilities and ran them through both world wars until the 1960s.

The war profiteers were met by dissent each time. This place is also an epicenter for resistance to war. Mark Twain and others formed the Anti-Imperialist League of the United States to combat the U.S. annexation of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War of 1898–1904. Anarchists and labor radicals, Irish and South Asians, all resisted imperialism and WWI in the Bay Area. Conscientious objectors resisted WWII and Korea, and of course the resistance to the Vietnam War in the Bay Area is well known. The Cold War found its dissenters in San Francisco in the 1950s and famously in 1960 at the HUAC hearings in City Hall. By the 1980s, the nuclear freeze movement had gone national, and war resisters were protesting nuclear weapons and nuclear power, many of the activists living in San Francisco. Efforts to return the USS *Missouri* and "homeport" it in San Francisco in the mid-1980s were stopped by a dynamic citizens' movement, including the "Peace Navy." Activists argued that the ship was being turned into a "first-strike" vessel, meant to carry nuclear-tipped cruise missiles that could not be detected under then-existing arms agreements and technologies, and thus would violate treaty agreements with the Soviet Union. Hundreds blockaded streets and offices in downtown San Francisco during the 1980s to thwart the Reagan administration's illegal wars in Central America and to protest the growing threat of nuclear war. In 1991, hundreds of thousands marched through city streets against George H. W. Bush's planned attack on Iraq over Kuwait. In 2003, 20,000 people shut down the City's key traffic intersections and over a dozen key offices in a day of action against the second Iraq War.

The role of federal military spending in sustaining the premier industrial facilities in the San Francisco Bay Area cannot be overstated. A half dozen key military bases, endless contracts to local industrialists, and a huge workforce employed directly in the military and indirectly working for the many suppliers in the area—taken together this represented a significant portion of the local economy for over a century. The much-touted

high-tech sector can trace its existence to military funding, originally for advanced communications theories and technologies, and later to the Arpanet, which eventually became the Internet. Today the military bases are almost all gone, but the public money sustaining local high-tech defense firms, research institutions, NSA and other spies, among them Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory, is still quite enormous. The ostensibly private tech industry that was spawned by all this defense spending has also met its dissenters in San Francisco's streets.

Modernism vs. Romanticism

Almost everyone harbors at least a bit of romantic nostalgia for the City that was—especially if they never lived in it themselves! As a young urban center, less than 200 years old, San Francisco tends to emphasize and glorify anything it can romantically claim as its history. In almost the same breath, San Francisco's long history of poets, writers, and iconoclastic journalists have repeatedly cast a sharp eye on the machinations of money and power here. Singers and musicians, many in San Francisco, wrote the soundtrack of the late twentieth century, a heady mix of heart, hedonism, and howling opposition to the dominant society. Monopolists and militarists, politicians and businessmen, have all been stripped bare by muckraking investigations and bawdy ridicule. This civic reflex comes into conflict with the untrammeled pursuit of the modern that San Francisco is also well known for. San Francisco is practically a laboratory of modern life from its origins in land seizure and enclosure to the massive exploitation of nature and cheap labor, to the efforts to stabilize and maintain a world based on gross inequality, a collapsing environment, and hair-trigger threats of war, based on a new foundation of "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff: 2019).

San Francisco quixotically saved its iconic cable cars in 1947 and a decade later presciently fought off a bunch of freeways. But it also has the hideously designed—by Bechtel Corporation—modernist BART train system and grandiose plans to bring the future into the heart of the City with the long-planned California High Speed Rail system. Historically preserved and protected buildings are all over town amid the dull brutalism of new modernist palaces for the nouveau riche of the twenty-first century.

During the 1970s high-rise revolt, San Franciscans resisted "Manhattanization" of the City. Now skyscrapers crowd the monotonously

expanding skyline, while resistance to height limits has shriveled in the face of a highly profitable and increasingly vertical "new urbanism." Downtown has more than doubled its acreage since the late 1960s when activists stopped U.S. Steel from building a 50-story monster in the bay just north of the Bay Bridge. From the top of Rincon Hill all the way to the Washington Street boundary on the north, from the bayshore to 5th Street, the whole South of Market has been annexed into a downtown/convention center office and residential high-rise zone. Just south in the former railyards of Mission Bay, a "city within the City" has popped up in the past 25 years, characterized by a sprawling expanse of glass-clad offices and condominiums around the 42-acre UCSF Medical campus. The full length of Market Street is undergoing an unprecedented transformation from old department stores, neighborhood shops, early twentieth-century offices, theaters, and apartments, into a shiny procession of new malls, high-rises, and luxury condominium developments. Victorian and Edwardian buildings are being rehabilitated into luxury dwellings all over town, preserving the old facades while modernizing the interiors. With its pseudo-historic streetcar line and Potemkin Victorians, San Francisco has been carefully coiffed and manicured to reinforce the local economy's dependence on tourism.

San Francisco is a global city repeatedly regaled as a trendsetter, a city at the edge of the continent where countless thousands have come to discard old identities and resurface with imagined pasts and uncharted futures. Innovators have been welcomed by a bohemian culture suspicious of fixed truths, ossified class boundaries, and imported traditions. Music, literature, poetry, technology, art, cooperation, and collective invention have all flourished in San Francisco. The same cultural dynamism has also provided a rich foundation from which huge corporations have grown to straddle the globe, while their owners have exercised an enduring control over the City's growth and development.

San Francisco holds a vital place at the heart of modern world history. The City's own saga is barely 200 years old, and yet those years straddle the U.S. imperial push across North America and into the Pacific, the industrial revolution and the emergence of class war, mass immigration and racism, technological breakthroughs from railroads to photography, agriculture to chemicals, machines to microchips, and more. It's also an epicenter for resistance to war, home to the beginnings of the antinuclear movement in the 1950s, the neighbor-driven campaign to Stop the Freeways in the 1960s, the unparalleled success of the Save the Bay movement in

preserving and cleaning up the San Francisco Bay since 1963, and for changing how we live among ourselves by shattering norms of racial, sexual, and gender stereotypes. The City's immigrant ethnic groups continue to organize and resist the deep historical racism that has dominated elite policy-making here.

San Francisco manages to be both a beacon to malcontents and nonconformists and one of the most tightly run oligarchic municipalities in the country. The distribution of power and influence results from an endless tussle between competing interests, factions, organizations, and movements as they ebb and flow across time. Moments of contestation and conflict saturate our past whether we know it or not, as our predecessors made decisions that continue to reverberate down the years. A definitive portrait of how we got here is elusive, but by revisiting locations and histories across the ever-changing landscape, we can uncover continuities and contradictions, and present our version of how the City arrived at this moment. Like any history worth its name, it's not meant to be the last word but a contribution to our ongoing shared efforts to understand *how the hell it turned out like this!*