



Making San Francisco American: Cultural Frontiers in the Urban West, 1846-1906

Barbara Berglund

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The San Francisco that rose from the ashes of the 1906 earthquake and fire was a city of rigid social stratification—a city determined to contain its diverse and disorderly rough-and-tumble past some sixty years after its acquisition by the United States.

Barbara Berglund vividly describes San Francisco's rapid evolution from Mexican outpost to crown jewel of America's western empire, taking readers back to an earlier and more chaotic time when class definitions and social conventions were much more fluid. Berglund argues that the city's rapid rise from a multicultural boomtown to a racially and socially stratified metropolis reflected the careful efforts of a nascent elite to order its inhabitants through political and cultural means.

Berglund analyzes the cultural spaces that showcased the contests that would determine the social order and who defined it. The book's central chapters provide snapshots of the micro-workings of power on five key cultural frontiers: restaurants, hotels, and boardinghouses; places of amusement, ranging from the brothels of the Barbary Coast to the Pacific Museum of Anatomy and Science; Chinatown's tourist terrain; the Mechanics' Institute's annual fairs; and the 1894 California Midwinter International Exposition—the first such expo held west of Chicago and an image-building opportunity for the city's elites.

By focusing on the role of cultural frontiers in the urban west, Berglund offers a new take on western history that explores the role of market-driven cultural institutions, demonstrating that the market was as important as the state in structuring power relationships in nineteenth-century imperial America. She shows that control over meanings ascribed to race, class, and gender—especially those generated in the city's cultural spaces—was critical to the incorporation of San Francisco into the fabric of the American nation.

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