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The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972 [Book Review]

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of student resilience to a deeper interrogation of its historical, structural ingredients.

Willamette University

REBECCA J. DOBKINS

The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950–1972. By Christopher Lowen Agee. (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2014. 382 pp. \$45 cloth, \$36 digital)

Most studies about the transformation of urban governance during the twentieth century begin by examining how societal changes such as deindustrialization and suburbanization forced city leaders to pursue downtown-based redevelopment policies in anticipation of a rising postindustrial economy. Christopher Lowen Agee departs from this familiar focus on political economy by highlighting law enforcement as the critical realm for understanding the evolution of contemporary urban liberalism. It is a refreshing reorientation and Agee executes the move with erudition in his penetrating analysis of policing in San Francisco between 1950 and 1972.

Following decades of machine rule in San Francisco, a reform coalition headed by downtown elites surfaced at the end of World War II determined to root out graft in the police department, which had come to be seen as a drag on economic growth. Professionalized policing would be achieved through technocratic governance by experts in city hall. At the same time, reformers balanced their zeal for centralized power by allowing police officers to retain broad discretion to enforce traditional behavioral standards in a city still dominated by white, heterosexual families. But sweeping demographic and cultural changes during the postwar era soon ignited a challenge to managerial reform under the banner of cosmopolitan liberalism.

Agee documents how the influx into San Francisco of white-collar professionals, artists, gay men, lesbians, and people of color yielded demands for an end to discretionary policing directed at groups whose lifestyles deviated from mainstream family values and whose communities were subjected to frequent harassment, excessive force, and neglect. The struggles to advance cultural, racial, and sexual pluralism within the police department are illuminated in a series of engaging case studies involving beatniks in bohemian North Beach, gay bar owners and bartenders in and around downtown, black gangs in segregated and isolated Hunters Point, and hippies in the counter-cultural Haight-Ashbury neighborhood. Agee

explains how the emerging cosmopolitan liberal coalition consisted of two groups—one advocating top-down regulations to constrain discriminatory police discretion and another favoring cooperation with police officers through police-community relations units in neighborhood stations. Together, they contended that security, civil liberties, cultural vitality, and economic development were not only compatible, but reinforcing.

Cosmopolitan liberalism eventually won over powerful politicians, most notably Mayor Joseph Alioto (1968–1976), who endorsed popular participation in policymaking and practice, provided that his version of deliberative democracy remained lodged within the mayor’s office. Agee also reveals how even many police officers came to recognize that cosmopolitan liberalism worked to their advantage: “the rank and file lost their unquestioned autonomous discretion over the city’s morals and the use of force, but achieved a political voice and regained legitimacy for discretion through cooperation” (p. 250).

San Francisco’s turn toward inclusiveness and pluralism offered an alternative to the law-and-order conservatism that prevailed in most other American cities during the tumultuous 1960s and 1970s, an approach that emphasized tough law enforcement that was anything but sensitive to marginalized residents. And yet, Agee is careful to point out that San Francisco’s embracing of cultural pluralism *enabled* its police department to more effectively reduce violent crime at a time when crime rates elsewhere were soaring, and thus to promote vigorous growth. The author concludes that cosmopolitan liberalism became the dominant ideology within police departments throughout the U.S. by the 1980s and paved the way for innovations such as hot-spots policing, order maintenance policing, and community policing. In short, this is a fascinating account of the pivotal role of cosmopolitan liberals in “the development of postwar law enforcement and the central place of police politics in the transformation of liberalism itself” (p. 254).

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