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Erotic City: Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco

Josh Sides

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Since the 1960s, San Francisco has been America's capital of sexual libertinism and a potent symbol in its culture wars. In this highly original book, Josh Sides explains how this happened, unearthing long-forgotten stories of the city's sexual revolutionaries, as well as the legions of longtime San Franciscans who tried to protect their vision of a moral metropolis. Erotic dancers, prostitutes, birth control advocates, pornographers, free lovers, and gay libbers transformed San Francisco's political landscape and its neighborhoods in ways seldom appreciated. But as sex radicals became more visible in the public spaces of the city, many San Franciscans reacted violently. The assassinations of Mayor George Moscone and Supervisor Harvey Milk were but the most brazen acts in a city caught up in a battle over morality. Ultimately, Sides argues, one cannot understand the evolution of postwar American cities without recognizing the profound role that sex has played. More broadly, one cannot understand modern American politics without taking into account the postwar transformation of San Francisco and other cities into both real and imagined repositories of unfettered sexual desire.

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