

The Streets of San Francisco: Policing and the Creation of a Cosmopolitan Liberal Politics, 1950-1972 (Historical Studies of Urban America)

Christopher Lowen Agee

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During the Sixties the nation turned its eyes to San Francisco as the city's police force clashed with movements for free speech, civil rights, and sexual liberation. These conflicts on the street forced Americans to reconsider the role of the police officer in a democracy. In *The Streets of San Francisco* Christopher Lowen Agee explores the surprising and influential ways in which San Francisco liberals answered that question, ultimately turning to the police as partners, and reshaping understandings of crime, policing, and democracy.

The Streets of San Francisco uncovers the seldom-reported, street-level interactions between police officers and San Francisco residents and finds that police discretion was the defining feature of mid-century law enforcement. Postwar police officers enjoyed great autonomy when dealing with North Beach beats, African American gang leaders, gay and lesbian bar owners, Haight-Ashbury hippies, artists who created sexually explicit works, Chinese American entrepreneurs, and a wide range of other San Franciscans. Unexpectedly, this police independence grew into a source of both concern and inspiration for the thousands of young professionals streaming into the city's growing financial district. These young professionals ultimately used the issue of police discretion to forge a new cosmopolitan liberal coalition that incorporated both marginalized San Franciscans and rank-and-file police officers. The success of this model in San Francisco resulted in the rise of cosmopolitan liberal coalitions throughout the country, and today, liberal cities across America ground themselves in similar understandings of democracy, emphasizing both broad diversity and strong policing.



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