



Places of Invention

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The companion book to an upcoming museum exhibition of the same name, *Places of Invention* seeks to answer timely questions about the nature of invention and innovation: What is it about some places that sparks invention and innovation? Is it simply being at the right place at the right time, or is it more than that? How does “place”—whether physical, social, or cultural—support, constrain, and shape innovation? Why does invention flourish in one spot but struggle in another, even very similar location? In short: Why there? Why then?

Places of Invention frames current and historic conversation on the relationship between place and creativity, citing extensive scholarship in the area and two decades of investigation and study from the National Museum of American History’s Lemelson Center for the Study of Invention and Innovation. The book is built around six place case studies: Hartford, CT, late 1800s; Hollywood, CA, 1930s; Medical Alley, MN, 1950s; Bronx, NY, 1970s; Silicon Valley, CA, 1970s–1980s; and Fort Collins, CO, 2010s. Interspersed with these case studies are dispatches from three “learning labs” detailing Smithsonian Affiliate museums’ work using *Places of Invention* as a model for documenting local invention and innovation.

Written by exhibition curators, each part of the book focuses on the central thesis that invention is everywhere and fueled by unique combinations of creative people, ready resources, and inspiring surroundings. Like the locations it explores, *Places of Invention* shows how the history of invention can be a transformative lens for understanding local history and cultivating creativity on scales of place ranging from the personal to the national and beyond.

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