

San Francisco Year Zero: Political Upheaval, Punk Rock and a Third-Place Baseball Team

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An earthquake didn't hit San Francisco in 1978, but by all other accounts it was an earth-shaking year. The city was wracked by political assassination, the arrival of punk rock, and an unlikely resurgence from the Giants baseball squad. Lincoln A. Mitchell's wide-ranging *San Francisco Year Zero* chronicles that pivotal year, examining how it shaped San Francisco to become the city it is today.

Mitchell's is a roughly chronological overview, moving from the Grateful Dead's New Year's concert through to the Giants's galvanizing summer success and the shocking murders of Mayor George Moscone and Harvey Milk in November. Commentary on pivotal figures—including Vida Blue, the flamboyant pitcher who brought the Giants back to relevance; Jello Biafra, the outrageous front man for the Dead Kennedys punk band; and Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple religious leader who played a major role in local politics before staging one of the most shocking mass suicides of the century—fills in the gaps.

Utilizing interviews with notable politicians and social critics, the text paints a picture of San Francisco in the throes of transition. Progressive and centrist forces clash at city hall, and Dianne Feinstein is San Francisco's first woman mayor by year's end. A new influx of minority and LGBTQ+ residents reshaped the city's demographics; the working class was threatened by the city's transformation into a corporate juggernaut. Perspective regarding changing neighborhoods and government decisions that altered the city's course comes in, too.

This freewheeling narrative captures the chaos of 1978 well, with a decade's worth of highs and lows packed into one memorable calendar year. Individual events don't cohere into a single thesis—one would be hard-pressed to tie in the Giants's season with the paradigm-shaking changes covered elsewhere—but *San Francisco Year Zero* is still a rollicking look at a very unique year in a very unique city.

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