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Infinite City: A San Francisco Atlas



Synopsis

What makes a place? *Infinite City*, Rebecca Solnit's brilliant reinvention of the traditional atlas, searches out the answer by examining the many layers of meaning in one place, the San Francisco Bay Area. Aided by artists, writers, cartographers, and twenty-two gorgeous color maps, each of which illuminates the city and its surroundings as experienced by different inhabitants, Solnit takes us on a tour that will forever change the way we think about place. She explores the area thematically—connecting, for example, Eadweard Muybridge's foundation of motion-picture technology with Alfred Hitchcock's filming of *Vertigo*. Across an urban grid of just seven by seven miles, she finds seemingly unlimited landmarks and treasures—butterfly habitats, queer sites, murders, World War II shipyards, blues clubs, Zen Buddhist centers. She roams the political terrain, both progressive and conservative, and details the cultural geographies of the Mission District, the culture wars of the Fillmore, the South of Market world being devoured by redevelopment, and much, much more. Breathtakingly original, this atlas of the imagination invites us to search out the layers of San Francisco that carry meaning for us—or to discover our own infinite city, be it Cleveland, Toulouse, or Shanghai.

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Customer Reviews

The beautiful "Infinite City" belongs on any list of essential San Francisco books. Rebecca Solnit and her collaborators have taken a core sample of the endless layers of San Francisco history and laid it out in twenty-two brilliantly imagined maps and eighteen essays exploring the city's history, geography, demography, biology, and myth. "Infinite City" is vast enough to encompass the Coliseum, Coronet and Alexandria theaters; the Pipevine swallowtail, Satyr anglewing, and Orange sulfur butterflies; the Yelamu, Aramai, and Urebure peoples; the "McKittrick Hotel", "Argosy Book Shop", and Ernie's; Josephine McCrackin, Carrie Stevens Walter, and Barbara Eastman; Bechtel, RoboteX, and Jeppesen; Jimbo's Bop City, Ann's 440, and the Six Gallery; Acme Export Packing, the Pacific Far East Line, and Triple A Machine Shop; and the Richmond Branch of the San Francisco Public Library. The book itself is as lovingly designed as anything McSweeney's has published, proof that until we stop needing tactile pleasures, the screen will never replace the page.

Infinite City is the only book I've ever read that truly achieves what a map should as an art form. As a student of geography and GIS, I wish I had been more educated on some of her methods and encouraged to try more or Solnit's wildly imaginative interpretations. Few things are as hard to map as history and culture, for these are nonlinear and fluid concepts. As the author states, any interpretation of our sense of place is situated by our individual experience; there are therefore an "infinite" number of maps that each of us could make of the city, and each would be artistically relevant. Infinite City does a great job of highlighting both the more popular stories/folklore of San Francisco through her maps, as well as those most of us are not brilliant enough to imagine. Solnit has a keen sense of duality and contradiction, which shows in her cartography. "Poison and palate", the interplay between toxic waste generators and gourmet food destinations and how the two are not at all unrelated. "Phrenology" of the city was another of my favorites. As I finished Infinite City, I was left scratching my head wondering 1) why geography students aren't educated to value maps in the artistic sense; and 2) why aren't there more books like Infinite City for the other great cities of the world! A fantastic read, highly recommended.

Incredible book, an interesting view of San Francisco from a historical and sociological perspective. Please note though that this book is currently being offered by a seller for over \$198. This book is being sold at the SFMOMA for \$24.95. The seller's mark up is dishonest and offensive.

This atlas by Rebecca Solnit is an interesting attempt to describe some of the diversity and contrasts in the San Francisco Bay Area. However it is seriously flawed in its execution. There are several double page maps, but they go right into the binding so the center of the map can not be seen! This is exacerbated by the the shape of tall and narrow so that the binding is extra long. There are many double pages of text in small type referring to the the maps on other pages. It would have been much better if the maps and corresponding text were integrated on the same or opposite page so they could be viewed together. So, while the book is interesting, its usefulness is limited and difficult to use as a guide.

As a native of San Francisco (NOT "Frisco" or "San Fran"...it's San Francisco OR "the city"!) this book is a revelation. I have trouble putting it down. SO many details about what happened where and when, so much richness of information and cultural background. Not just a who did what and when, but whys and cultural insight. GREAT BOOK for anyone who loves "the city"!

If you're looking for a unique book on what do to in San Francisco or some of the odd history, this book is great. I have not read through it entirely yet, but the 1st half is great and the illustrations are amazing. Very happy with this purchase. Cool design, too!

It's like reader-Mapquesting your way through San Francisco while leafing through the pages of "Infinite City." Rebecca Solnit has cleverly divided The City into wonderful stories based on people, events and history which happened in each of the many and varied districts. Whether you're an armchair traveler or lucky enough to actually be in San Francisco traipsing about you will thoroughly enjoy all the wonderfully detailed maps as well as eloquently written words which entice the reader to keep moving on to the next page and district. Hard to believe it's possible because San Francisco is so well documented but this book adds many new facts and bits of interest guaranteed to hold your attention. It's an entertaining, delightful and informative read as well as terrific reference. "Infinite City" is a new gem on my bookshelf which is located 750 miles from San Francisco. Despite the distance, as Solnit wrote, "More than anything, this is a map home."

I bought it for a friend who grew up in San Francisco and who loves exploring different books & media about S.F. He fell in Love with it I will be buying another copy for myself since it is a fascinating variety of perspectives and colorful maps with interesting information.. I Love It!!

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