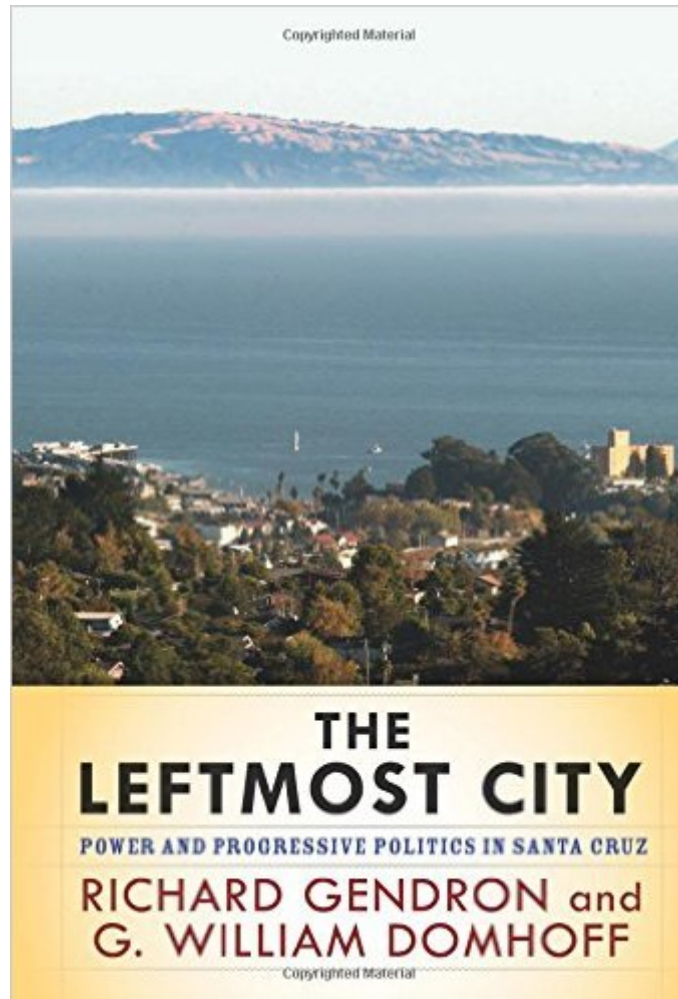


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The Leftmost City: Power And Progressive Politics In Santa Cruz



Synopsis

Almost all US cities are controlled by real estate and development interests, but Santa Cruz, California, is a deviant case. An unusual coalition of socialist-feminists, environmentalists, social-welfare liberals, and neighborhood activists has stopped every growth project proposed by landowners and developers since 1969, and controlled the city council since 1981. Even after a 1989 earthquake forced the city to rebuild its entire downtown, the progressive elected officials prevailed over developers and landowners. Drawing on hundreds of primary documents, as well as original, previously unpublished interviews, *The Leftmost City* utilizes an extended case study of Santa Cruz to critique three major theories of urban power: Marxism, public-choice theory, and regime theory. Santa Cruz is presented within the context of other progressive attempts to shape city government, and the authors' findings support growth-coalition theory, which stresses the conflict between real estate interests and neighborhoods as the fundamental axis of urban politics. The authors conclude their analysis by applying insights gleaned from Santa Cruz to progressive movements nationwide, offering a template for progressive coalitions to effectively organize to achieve political power.

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Customer Reviews

A cautionary note for budding "progressives" trying to understand urban issues: I read the authors' website on political views that informed this book and can say that this is a book from the NIMBY (not-in-my-backyard) neighborhood activist perspective rather than a sustainability perspective. The

authors assume opposing urban growth in order to further "quality of life" is in and of itself always "progressive." This camp increasingly finds itself at odds with groups such as the Sierra Club, Greenpeace, advocates for affordable housing, and indeed the entire modern sustainability movement. At the same time, this camp finds itself increasingly akin to the east coast conservatives who try to limit development in upper-class suburbs. They tend to celebrate small towns and suburbs, which no doubt will appeal to a certain part of the population. It has been established beyond a doubt that denser developments, supported by walking and public transit, are sustainable. This is realized in cities such as Vancouver, BC and Portland, OR, and of course all of Western Europe, which have increased urban densities in centers and near transit, allowed smaller lot homes to be built throughout urban areas, practiced balanced growth management, protected open space and farmland, and increased transit, walking and cycling. A key part of the successful approach is that it is regional in nature. This contrasts to the "neighborhood activism" paradigm the authors advocate, where all intensification of land use is seen as greed by "real estate developers and their buddies" that damages "quality of life;" the only people seen as deserving of land value increases are the owners of (single-family) homes. Hence the author cites opposing downtown development as a "left wing" approach.

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