



The Public and Its Possibilities: Triumphs and Tragedies in the American City (Urban Life, Landscape and Policy)

John D. Fairfield

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In his compelling reinterpretation of American history, *The Public and Its Possibilities*, John Fairfield argues that our unrealized civic aspirations provide the essential counterpoint to an excessive focus on private interests. Inspired by the revolutionary generation, nineteenth-century Americans struggled to build an economy and a culture to complement their republican institutions. But over the course of the twentieth century, a corporate economy and consumer culture undercut civic values, conflating consumer and citizen.

Fairfield places the city at the center of American experience, describing how a resilient demand for an urban participatory democracy has bumped up against the fog of war, the allure of the marketplace, and persistent prejudices of race, class, and gender. In chronicling and synthesizing centuries of U.S. history—including the struggles of the antislavery, labor, women's rights movements—Fairfield explores the ebb and flow of civic participation, activism, and democracy. He revisits what the public has done for civic activism, and the possibility of taking a greater role.

In this age where there has been a move towards greater participation in America's public life from its citizens, Fairfield's book—written in an accessible, jargon-free style and addressed to general readers—is especially topical.

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