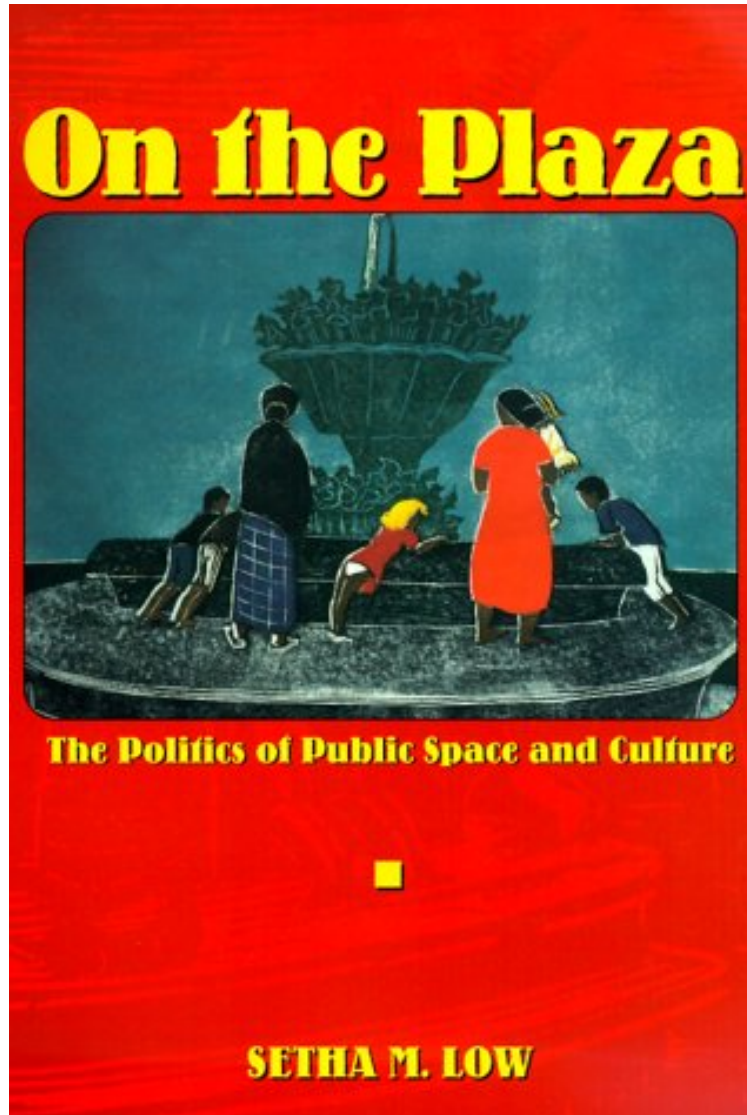


[Free] On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture

On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture

Setha M. Low

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Setha M. Low : On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five StarsBy Zeina NemehReceived in very good condition, no torn or annotated pages, rented for a good price :)0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Four StarsBy Javier M Delgadogood price, fast response8 of 8 people found the following review helpful. Interesting look at life on the Costa Rican plazaBy Daniel J. HamlowProfessor Setha M. Low's book On The Plaza-The Politics of Public Space and Culture discusses the interrelationship of public space and culture. She primarily focuses on two plazas in San Jose,

Costa Rica, the Parque Central and the Plaza de la Cultura, while also making references to other places such as Tenochtitlan in Mexico. Using ethnographic, ethnohistorical, microgeographical, and statistic sampling methods, Low argues that "these culturally and politically charged public spaces are essential to everyday civic life and the maintenance of a participatory democracy." Low describes the background of Costa Rica, going into its population, ethnic, religious, and urban proportion distribution. She explains the rise and fall of consecutive monocultural economies, such as cacao, tobacco, bananas, and coffee, its tradition of democracy, and the economic nadir in the 1980's. She then goes into the history of San Jose from colonial times to the present, including the devastating effects of the economic downturn and the trade vacuum created by NAFTA. She then explores the history of the two plazas. Parque Central dates back to 1761, and is the larger and more densely populated of the two. It became a center for merchants, grocers, lottery ticket sellers, and sundry vendors, as well as shoppers and customers. Also, the trend of regulars sitting in the same benches over time gives Parque Central an ambience of traditional social life and hence less contested space between various social groups. The Plaza de la Cultura, constructed between 1976 and 1982, was built as a contrast to the closed nature of Parque Central, as a more open space for the middle and lower classes. Central to the plaza was the National Theatre with a museum housing the country's Precolumbian gold. Despite its cultural stance, the new plaza became a haven for underage prostitutes, gangs, and drug users. Plazas also contain social and spatial boundaries as factors that symbolize differences such as nationalities, race, class, and gender between plaza populations within a capitalist system. Low again contrasted the two plazas in San Jose in the framework of social boundaries: Parque Central: mostly older men, closed space, clique-oriented, has professional prostitutes, lottery ticket, newspaper, food vendors, less foreigners, older. Plaza de la Cultura: mostly women and children, open space, not clique-oriented, prostitutes who give services for clothes, nurturing relationships, balloon, popcorn, tourist item vendors, more foreigners, younger. Another more important function of the plaza is for public protest. Low categorizes them in terms of the kinds of protest and their outcomes. Manifest protests such as strikes and demonstrations usually result in the temporary closure of the public space, followed by a reopening where the space is policed to discourage undesirables. An example of that involved the chasing out of shoeshine men from Parque Central. Latent protests involve conflicts that become apparent in terms of design and surrounding buildings and can result in discussions in various media or a plebiscite. Ritual protests, such as parades, normally involve the temporary takeover of space by a protesting group before it is relinquished to the forces nominally in charge of that space. Taken in the context of protest, Low sees public space as symbolizing political objectives by those, particularly national leaders, who created them--e.g. the Plaza de la Democracia is a legacy to Oscar Arias Sanchez's Nobel Peace Prize-winning efforts for Central American peace. Plazas that don't fulfill the objectives of their creators or are not deemed valuable are either redesigned or denied access to the public. Constituting twenty-five years of research spanning from 1972 to 1997, Setha Low's exhaustively researched book depicts the essence of the function of the plaza.

Winner, Robert B. Textor Prize for Excellence in Anticipatory Anthropology, American Anthropological Association, 2000 Honorable Mention, Honorable Mention, Victor Turner Award, Society for Humanistic Anthropology, 2001 Leeds Prize, Society of Urban, National, and Transnational/Global Anthropology, 2001 Friendly gossip, political rallies, outdoor concerts, drugs, shoeshines, and sex-for-sale almost every aspect of Latin American life has its place and time in the public plaza. In this wide-ranging, multi-disciplinary study, Setha M. Low explores the interplay of space and culture in the plaza, showing how culture acts to shape public spaces and how the physical form of the plaza encodes the social and economic relations within its city. Low centers her study on two plazas in San Jose, Costa Rica, with comparisons to public plazas in the United States, Europe, and elsewhere. She interweaves ethnography, history, literature, and personal narrative to capture the ambience and meaning of the plaza. She also uncovers the contradictory ethnohistories of the European and indigenous origins of the Latin American plaza and explains why the plaza is often a politically contested space.

"This is one of the best accounts of a place's history and meaning I have ever read. Low's book should be widely read and used in courses in architecture, urban design, planning, landscape architecture, and historic preservation, as well as Latin American studies and anthropology. What a wonderful book!" (Dolores Hayden, Professor of Architecture, Urbanism, and American Studies, Yale University) "This is one of the best accounts of a place's history and meaning I have ever read. Low's book should be widely read and used in courses in architecture, urban design, planning, landscape architecture, and historic preservation, as well as Latin American studies and anthropology. What a wonderful book!" (Dolores Hayden, Professor of Architecture, Urbanism, and American Studies, Yale University) About the Author Setha M. Low is Professor of Environmental Psychology and Anthropology and Director of the Public Space Research Group at The Graduate Center, City University of New York.