Brahinsky

When I Rise Up

How the Big Five Shaped San Francisco



When I Rise Up: How the Big Five Shaped San Francisco traces the story of Black women's leadership and political organizing in Bayview Hunters Point, a neighborhood in the southeastern corner of San Francisco. Written in a narrative style that reflects the powerful storytelling of the protagonists, the book reframes the story of the city, showing how the political, geographic, and racial margins are central, and how the production of geography—actually changing the shape of the city—can be central to what it means to belong. The Big Five reshaped the neighborhood in the post–World War II period and have continued to live in local lore as a symbol of grassroots community power. Their work touched many arenas, from health care to education to cultural production and housing. The efforts of the group, which included far more than five people, transformed Hunters Point Hill, which still features streets and homes named for Big Five advocates and allies. Their lifelong activism, which the author describes as emplacement work, became a building block of the very idea of San Francisco as a site of progressive worldbuilding, even as they and their community faced persistent conditions that threatened their own ability to remain and thrive in the city.

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