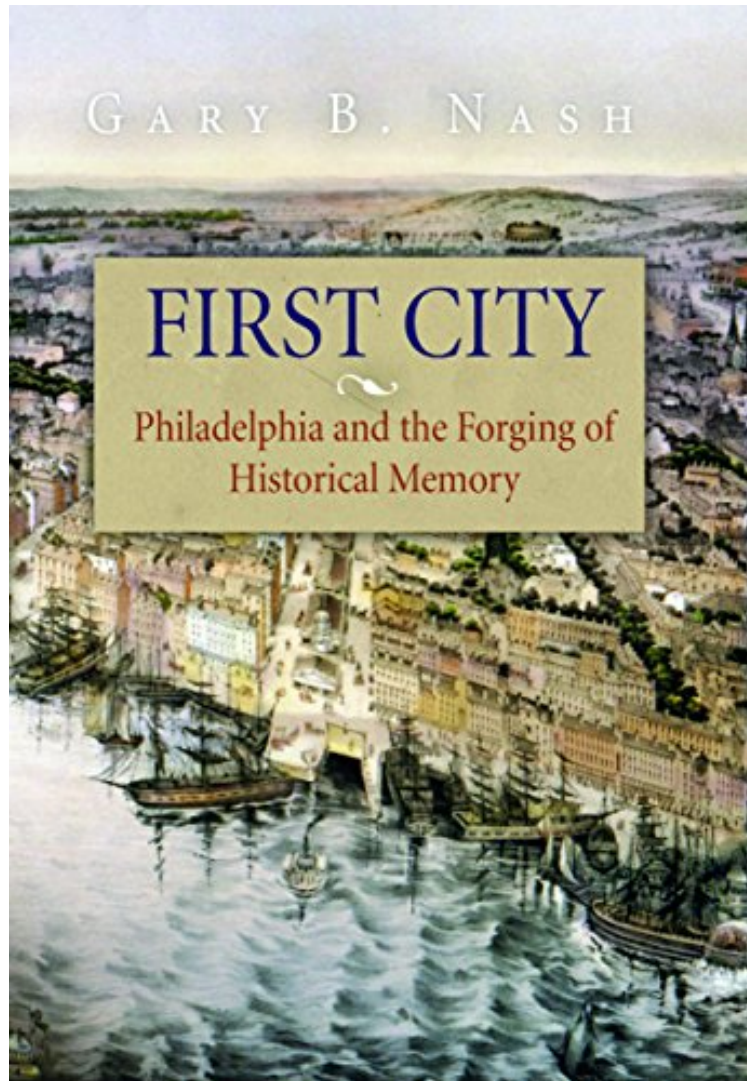


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First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory (Early American Studies)

Gary B. Nash

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Gary B. Nash : First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory (Early American Studies) before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised First City: Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory (Early American Studies):

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Five Stars By H. Lapp Another wonderful reference by the great colonial Philadelphia expert, Gary Nash. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. First City By Kim Burdick Gary Nash has been a controversial historian ever since I was a kid. Good to know some things never change. I

have a particular interest in cultural transmission and how people remember the past, so parts of Gary Nash's books please me very much. On the other hand--for anyone who has carefully studied the lives of John Dickinson, Billy Lee, and a few other figures of the Revolutionary era, there are some assumptions made in this book that will make you yell, "NO!!! This is incredibly sloppy scholarship..." For example, Nash emphasizes that John Dickinson had slaves. He fails to mention that John Dickinson was the first Founding father to free his slaves. So, yes and no... good book... bad book... a little of both.... I would rather read Sarah Vowell. Kim Burdick Stanton, DE20 of 24 people found the following review helpful. Academic History at its Most Annoying By philosophus This book has been the catalyst for my resolution - even for a history buff like myself - to give up academic history and stick to historical biography. There, at least, as Benjamin Disraeli said, you get "life without the theory." Now, there is much to appreciate in this book: as a native Philadelphian greatly interested in the rich history of his city, I learned a great deal about life in 18th and 19th century Philadelphia, especially about the inter-racial, inter-religious and class conflicts that have usually been papered over in older accounts. There are also some great anecdotes peppered through the book. Nevertheless, I found the style and tone annoying for two reasons: (1) The jargon: The author loves to throw around a lot of post-modern/Marxist jargon and clichés about "contesting narratives" and "alternative discourses" and "writing history from the bottom up." Now, again, I have no real ideological quarrel here: I have as dim a view of capitalism, for instance, as the author appears to have; I also think that the history of women, African-Americans and immigrants is not only important but interesting and needs to be told. And there are certainly "contested narratives" of the past depending on your gender, class or race (the "Holy Trinity" of current academic jargon). It is, however, the mechanical and uncreative application of these categories that makes the book - as well as so much other academic history - so mind-numbing to read. Related to his - indeed, the prime thesis of the book - is his very fashionable "meta-history" of Philadelphia, which tries to show how history is "constructed" by "power relations" and not given pure and unadulterated. And this again, to be sure, is true as far as it goes and is an important awareness to cultivate. But, in the end, it seems to substitute for the doing of actual history itself (even the history "from the bottom up" that the author wants so much to do) and becomes a precious little exercise in absorptive self-awareness that, in the end, tells us little beyond the trite truism that "the winners write the history books." It's time for history to leave this truism behind and move on. (2) But even more annoying than the jargon is the moral posturing - something all too typical of academic history these days. It's posturing because the author is pretending to make controversy where there is none. Surely, by now, despite the Lynn Cheney's of the world, writing history "from the bottom up" is not going to deny any academic historian today the comfy privileges of tenure. But, the author - like a tiresome bore at a dinner party who takes every opportunity loudly to remind everyone there how "socially aware" he is - constantly fulminates about how women, blacks, and immigrants were - and are - marginalized by those white bourgeois suffed-shirts who write the history. Again, I too think that this was and is pretty reprehensible; but the author cudgels this point into the reader time and time again, as if he were afraid that, by page 260, the reader hadn't gotten the point yet. Apparently, the author, for all his populist pretensions, doesn't think that the average reader is intelligent enough to "get it" after, say, page 5. It's too bad: this could've been a good book. The history of the city of Philadelphia demands something better.

With its rich foundation stories, Philadelphia may be the most important city in America's collective memory. By the middle of the eighteenth century William Penn's "greene countrie town" was, after London, the largest city in the British Empire. The two most important documents in the history of the United States, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, were drafted and signed in Philadelphia. The city served off and on as the official capital of the young country until 1800, and was also the site of the first American university, hospital, medical college, bank, paper mill, zoo, sugar refinery, public school, and government mint. In *First City*, acclaimed historian Gary B. Nash examines the complex process of memory making in this most historic of American cities. Though history is necessarily written from the evidence we have of the past, as Nash shows, rarely is that evidence preserved without intent, nor is it equally representative. Full of surprising anecdotes, *First City* reveals how Philadelphians from members of elite cultural institutions, such as historical societies and museums, to relatively anonymous groups, such as women, racial and religious minorities, and laboring people have participated in the very partisan activity of transmitting historical memory from one generation to the next.

"A remarkable book." *Public Historian* "A wonderful volume, filled with stories of historical discovery, describing the preservation of Philadelphia's past for the benefit of all. . . . *First City* is a first-rate piece of historical interpretation that will be a great contribution to America's cultural history." *Journal of the Early Republic* "A synthetic history of what is arguably the nation's most historically conscious city. . . . It represents well the tensions and opportunities that await writers seeking to push the craft of history to a new level of self-awareness and creativity." *American Historical*
From the Publisher Gary B. Nash is Professor of History at University of California, Los Angeles, and author of many books, including *The Unknown American Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America* and *History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past*. About the Author Gary B. Nash is Professor of History at the University of California, Los Angeles, and author of many books, including *The Unknown American*

Revolution: The Unruly Birth of Democracy and the Struggle to Create America and History on Trial: Culture Wars and the Teaching of the Past.