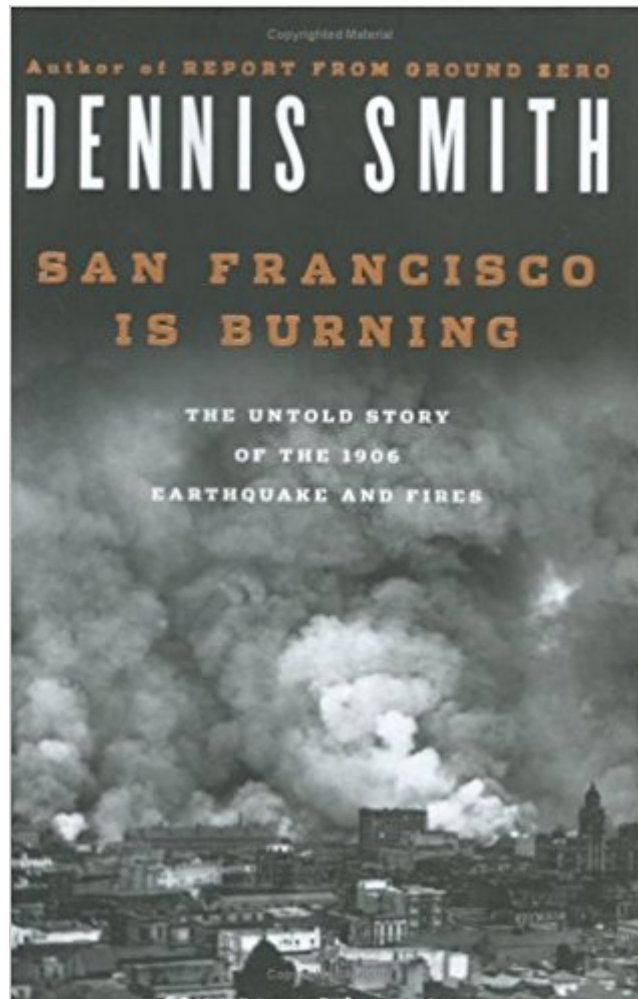


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# San Francisco Is Burning: The Untold Story Of The 1906 Earthquake And Fires



## Synopsis

At 5:12 a.m. on the morning of April 18, 1906, San Francisco was struck by one of the worst earthquakes in history, instantly killing hundreds. The ensuing fires that ravaged the city for days were responsible for the deaths of as many as 3,000 more. In all, 522 blocks and 28,188 buildings were leveled, and some 200,000 people dislocated. This watershed event in American history has never before been told with the richness of historical detail and insight that our foremost historian of fire, Dennis Smith, brings to it in *San Francisco Is Burning*. Smith cinematically recounts this terrible tragedy through the stories of the people who lived through those terrible days—from a valiant naval officer who helped save the city's piers and wharves to Eugene Schmitz, the crooked mayor, to the "debonair scoundrel" Abe Ruef, the most erudite city boss in American history. Throughout, Smith reveals many unknown details about the event, from the city's great vulnerability to fire—due to its corrupt and hasty building practices—to the widespread racism the quake unleashed and the atrocities committed by national guardsmen. Told with verve and a seasoned firefighter's knowledge, *San Francisco Is Burning* is the gripping and definitive account of one of the greatest disasters of the twentieth century.

## Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (31 customer reviews)

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## Customer Reviews

It might be highly unusual for a supposed "competitor" to review the work of a contemporary, but seeing that only one person on [has](#) bothered to review Dennis Smith's compelling new book, "*San Francisco Burning*," I thought it incumbent to offer praise where it is richly deserved. For that past

three decades -- ever since the first definitive text, Thomas/Witt's "The San Francisco Earthquake" and Gladys Hansen's unparalleled "Denial of Disaster" first appeared -- every writer on the subject of the great earthquake and fire has claimed to have the "untold" story and discovered some "breakthrough" evidence. It hasn't happened. But what Dennis Smith has achieved here is remarkable for its insight and observation. More than any other book, perhaps, Smith has identified the true heroes and villains of the 1906 earthquake. There were actually two disasters: nature's earthquake and humankind's raging inferno. Smith, a former N.Y. firefighter who wrote the marvelous "Report from Ground Zero", takes a street-level, in-the-trenches view of what occurred. He adroitly argues that the true hero was Lt. Frederick Freeman of the U.S. Navy, who led a hundred sailors on Navy Tugboats in a desperate, three day struggle to save the waterfront and the trains station, the two locations which evacuated 300,000 people in just 72 hours. Smith puts the final dagger into the two former sacred cows of the disaster: the monstrously corrupt and incompetent Mayor Eugene Schmitz, and the almost pathologically intractable Brig. General Frederic Funston.

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