



Seven Fires: The Urban Infernos that Reshaped America

Peter Hoffer

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This resonant and fascinating book by a renowned historian examines how seven fires shaped the larger course of American history. The Boston fire of 1760 set the stage for the American Revolution. The Pittsburgh fire of 1845 opened the way to larger scale industrial plants. Out of the ashes of the Chicago fire of 1871 came the modern skyscraper, the Haymarket Riots, and the Pullman Strike. The Baltimore fire of 1904 showed how a city's downtown, utterly destroyed, could re-invent itself after a catastrophe. The Detroit fire of 1967 forced politicians to concede what people of Detroit already knew—that racism and racially-based deprivation were not changed by the civil rights movement. The Oakland Hills tragedy demolished a landscape of private privilege and imperiled the dream of leisure living in natural settings. Apart from their domestic and global political implications, the fires of 9/11 have prodded a complacent nation to admit to itself that twentyfirst century emergency services, and the urban lifestyles they protected, have to be thoroughly rethought. Told through gripping narrative chronicles of the catastrophic events, memorable portraits of historic figures, and incisive, thought-provoking analysis, *Seven Fires* reveals a nation and a people at its best and worst and illustrates how disasters teach lessons that, if we grasp them, can help us better our society.

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