



Metropolitan Philadelphia: Living with the Presence of the Past (Metropolitan Portraits)

Steven Conn

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As America's fifth largest city and fourth largest metropolitan region, Philadelphia is tied to its surrounding counties and suburban neighborhoods. It is this vital relationship, suggests Steven Conn, that will make or break greater Philadelphia.

The Philadelphia region has witnessed virtually every major political, economic, and social transformation of American life. Having once been an industrial giant, the region is now struggling to fashion a new identity in a postindustrial world. On the one hand, Center City has been transformed into a vibrant hub with its array of restaurants, shops, cultural venues, and restored public spaces. On the other, unchecked suburban sprawl has generated concerns over rising energy costs and loss of agriculture and open spaces. In the final analysis, the region will need a dynamic central city for its future, while the city will also need a healthy sustainable region for its long-term viability.

Central to the identity of a twenty-first century Metropolitan Philadelphia, Conn argues, is the deep and complicated interplay of past and present. Looking at the region through the wide lens of its culture and history, *Metropolitan Philadelphia* moves seamlessly between past and present. Displaying a specialist's knowledge of the area as well as a deep personal connection to his subject, Conn examines the shifting meaning of the region's history, the utopian impulse behind its founding, the role of the region in creating the American middle class, the regional watershed, and the way art and cultural institutions have given shape to a resident identity.

Impressionistic and beautifully written, *Metropolitan Philadelphia* will be of great interest to urbanists and at the same time accessible to the wider public intrigued in the rich history and cultural dynamics of this fascinating region. What emerges from the book is a wide-ranging understanding of what it means to say, "I'm from Philadelphia."



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