

**Justicia ex Machina:
The Myth of the Machine/Progressive Binary
in San Francisco Politics**

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the dramas of ancient Greece, playwrights, particularly Euripides, would sometimes employ at the climax of the action a device known to us now by the Latin term *deus ex machina*, or “God from a machine.” A god was lowered to the stage by a mechanical apparatus and, by his judgments or commands, solved the problems of the human characters. The phrase is now used in literary criticism for a forced and implausible device—a telltale birthmark, an unexpected inheritance, the discovery of a lost will or letter—by which a hard-pressed author acts to resolve a plot.²

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² M. H. ABRAMS, A GLOSSARY OF LITERARY TERMS (Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 5th Ed., 1988) (1957). The German playwright Bertolt Brecht parodies the abuse of such devices in the madcap conclusion of his 1928 play, *Threepenny Opera*.

The title of this article may be translated as “justice from the machine.” The article’s purpose is to explore the recent political history of San Francisco by focusing on the individual politicians, communities, movements, and media which have given its government the “look” it has today. For decades, the main paradigm used to frame the candidates and the issues has been binary: every issue was seen as being a battle between the political “machine,” which ruled the city with an iron hand, and the “progressives,” loosely defined as anyone in opposition to the “machine.” I will contend that, while a machine certainly may have existed from the 1960s roughly until the turn of the 21st century and its remnants may still exert power today, its membership, methods, and goals changed radically over the years, and contrary to current “progressive” rhetoric, it does not wield nearly the influence it did in the past. Additionally, I will explore whether the use by the “progressives” of the progressive/machine binary is harmful to actually progressive policymaking, the goals of which always should be justice and political truth.

I will begin with a summary of why, contrary to much national popular opinion, San Francisco matters politically on the regional, state, and national levels. After introducing the unique structures that make San Francisco unique among California’s municipalities, I will give a fairly detailed history of the personalities and factions that have made headlines since the 1960s, exploring the “machine vs. progressive” rubric. Further, in discussing the role the city’s print media plays not only in reporting the city’s politics but in helping to shape it, I will attempt a bit of prognostication and give some unsolicited advice regarding how a progressive political agenda, which could be model for other American cities, could be implemented here.

II. SAN FRANCISCO’S RELEVANCE

It is an article of faith that California, and especially the San Francisco Bay area, is a world apart from the rest of the United States when it comes to politics. Although often derided as “the land of fruits and nuts,”³ California has been on the forefront of numerous political movements since becoming a

³ See Curt Gentry, *THE LAST DAYS OF THE LATE, GREAT STATE OF CALIFORNIA* 355 (Comstock Editions, 7th ed, 1977) (1968). The book gives an amusing and informative look at California’s importance in general to the United States and the world by imagining what would happen if the portion west of the San Andreas Fault (i.e., where most of the people live) fell into the sea. It also gives great insight into what California was like in the 1960s, up to and including the election of Ronald Reagan to the governorship in 1966.

state in 1850.⁴ From the populist initiative process to medical marijuana, California has pioneered sociopolitical experiments often ridiculed, and then copied, elsewhere in the country. The Bay Area is often seen as the center of this tendency: whereas other cities content themselves with keeping the sidewalks clean, San Francisco boycotts Burma, or Berkeley proposes allowing only “fair trade” coffee houses. While at first Bay Area cities were long castigated for being “People’s Republics,” other progressive cities and towns throughout America, from Santa Monica and Austin to Ann Arbor and Cambridge, have recently begun to look beyond their borders, to understand that what happens in the rest of the world has an impact locally, and that local action can make a difference.

As a result of the 2002 elections, the Republican Party gained seats in both houses of Congress. House Minority Leader Richard Gephardt resigned his position, in part to run for President in 2004, but also because his leadership failed to galvanize support at the polls to return the Democrats to a majority. Replacing him as leader was Representative Nancy Pelosi, who as the first woman to hold such a high post in the House of Representatives, was greeted with almost universal scorn by the established media. Representing California House District 8, which covers most of liberal San Francisco, she was portrayed as irrelevant in this post-Reagan age of George W. Bush. If the country had become so conservative, the conventional wisdom went, what hope of effecting any sort of agenda did a “leftist” like Pelosi have?

I believe the noise surrounding Pelosi’s elevation to the minority leadership to be inaccurate in several ways. First, by the standards of many San Francisco progressives, Pelosi falls somewhere only slightly to the left of centrist U.S. Senator (and former San Francisco Mayor) Dianne Feinstein; Pelosi’s support of the conversion of the Presidio military base into the nation’s first for-profit national park, for example, led many progressives here to believe she had sold out. Second, Pelosi has represented the city in Congress for over fifteen years, having been the handpicked successor of her immediate predecessors, the late longtime Representatives Phillip Burton and his wife Sala. She is a Washington insider who rose gradually through the ranks by the usual mainstream means. Third, the accusation that, as a “San Francisco Democrat,” she is *per se* irrelevant ignores the important political changes California has undergone in the past ten years.

After sixteen years of mostly disastrous Republican administrations, Californians elected centrist Democrat Gray Davis governor in 1998, and

⁴ In its Gold-Rush-fevered haste, the state even skipped the usual step of being a U.S. territory, applying for statehood almost immediately after being ceded at the end of the Mexican-American War.

against a tide of Republican victories nationwide, re-elected him in 2002. While Davis is few people's idea of a progressive governor, he is a far cry from his conservative Republican predecessor, Pete Wilson. Also in 2002, California became the only state to elect Democrats to every single one of its top administrative offices, from lieutenant governor to superintendent of schools; two of these politicians, Attorney General Bill Lockyer and Secretary of State Kevin Shelley, are from the Bay Area.⁵ The state also continues to be represented in the U.S. Senate by two Bay Area Democratic women, Feinstein and Barbara Boxer. In 1992, when they were elected as part of the vaunted "Year of the Woman," there were only two women in the U.S. Senate; today there are fourteen, and since then, Maine and Washington became the second and third states in U.S. history to have their Senate delegations consist of two women. Of the sixty-three women currently serving in the House, eighteen are Californians, and of those, six are from the Bay Area. Keeping in mind California's historic role as a predictor of political trends, and the key role San Francisco and the Bay Area play in California politics, neither the city nor the region should ever be written off as irrelevant when it comes to national politics.

III. SAN FRANCISCO'S GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE

The main political subdivision in California is the county. Fifty-seven of the state's fifty-eight counties are governed by five-member, elected boards of supervisors. These boards pass laws affecting most public policy within the county not administered by the state or federal governments. In addition, smaller municipal districts and corporations are created within a county's boundaries, usually to augment or replace some aspect of the county government's responsibility.

The most common of these incorporated entities is the city, which is usually governed by a city council, and sometimes a mayor, who may be a member of the city council, or who may be elected separately as a sort of executive. Most city councils in the state have five members, but there are

⁵ Lockyer and Shelley provide an interesting study in the different routes to political power: Lockyer came from a working class background in the East Bay area, and has worked slowly and steadily over decades to become arguably the second most powerful political figure in California. Shelley is the son of a 1960s-era San Francisco mayor, and while he has solid Democratic credentials, certainly had a head start in rising from San Francisco supervisor, to assemblyman, to secretary of state.

exceptions. For example, Los Angeles, which with 3,694,820 people is California's largest city, has fifteen city councilmembers, elected by district.⁶

San Francisco has the only combined city-county government in the state. The borders of the city and those of the county are identical. Some of San Francisco's agencies and officers are more characteristic of a city (such as the Police Department), while others that are more typical of a county (such as the District Attorney and the Sheriff's Department). Similarly, San Francisco has no city council; instead its legislative branch is called the Board of Supervisors, which has eleven members. The mayor is elected separately, and is the head of the executive branch, with responsibility for the various city departments. Like the President of the United States, the mayor has the power to veto the Board's legislation; like Congress, the Board may override the mayor's veto with eight votes.

IV. SAN FRANCISCO'S RECENT ELECTORAL HISTORY

As the goal of this article is to trace the contemporary development of San Francisco's political power structure, it is necessary to summarize the city's recent political history. A good place to start is the 1960s, if for no other reason than that period was one of great upheaval in the city, the region, and the world. It is impossible to show a firm line and assert "modern San Francisco history begins here," but it is necessary to start somewhere.

As most people know, the Bay Area in the '60s was a major focal point for the era's sociopolitical ferment. The Free Speech Movement began at U.C. Berkeley; the Haight-Ashbury district was ground zero for the Summer of Love; and San Francisco State was one of the first universities to introduce, after much controversy and as a result of student protest, academic departments devoted to ethnic and gender studies. The region was a center of protest against the Vietnam War. And, the city's lesbian and gay population had begun to organize and assert a new identity even before New York's Stonewall riots of 1969.

What many people, especially those from outside the city, fail to realize is how oddly conservative San Francisco is, and especially *was*, coming into the '60s. While many lesbian and gay people felt a sense of tolerance here which they had not felt "back home," District Attorney Pat Brown (who would later become governor, as would his son Jerry) made raiding gay bars

⁶ It is interesting to note, however, that Los Angeles County (also California's largest, with 9,519,338 people, and consisting of almost 90 separate incorporated cities besides Los Angeles, as well as much unincorporated territory) has the same five-member Board of Supervisors structure as the state's smallest county, Alpine, with its 1,208 souls.

a hallmark of his administration in the late 1950s.⁷ Although a young African-American activist named Willie Brown made his name protesting racial redlining in the city and was the first black elected to the Assembly (in 1964), most black people in San Francisco, who had flocked to the area during and after World War II, were as restricted to certain neighborhoods, such as Bayview-Hunters Point and the Western Addition, as they had been in the older cities of the east.

The most powerful elite at the dawn of the modern era was an informal coalition of Irish, Italian, and Anglo Americans who had governed the city for decades. As in New York and other eastern cities, the police department was overwhelmingly Irish, and residents of districts such as the Mission, the Sunset, and the Richmond identified strongly with the Irish Catholic parishes in which they were raised.⁸ The city elected its first Irish mayor, Frank McCoppin, in 1867, and its first Italian mayor, Angelo Rossi, in 1931.⁹

The Italians (residing originally in North Beach, where, after the 1906 earthquake and fire, A.P. Giannini founded what would become the Bank of America), also often identified with the local Catholic parishes, especially SS Peters & Paul on Washington Square. Another of San Francisco's most famous political families who emerged from this community is the Aliotos, who have produced one mayor and one supervisor.

As indicated, as a result of the dislocations caused by World War II, new populations migrated to the Bay Area. While the region has been a cultural amalgam at least since the Gold Rush of the 1850s, it took another century for the diverse demographic structure we recognize and celebrate today to take shape. San Francisco was a major launching point for the armed forces being sent to the war in the Pacific, and the Bay Area's shipbuilding and other military industries provided major employment opportunities for blacks, Latinos, and Asians that had been denied them both here and in the rest of the United States.

Two groups who were tremendously affected by the war were women, and gays and lesbians. The "Rosie the Riveter" years are legendary for welcoming women into the workforce. However, not only did women fill the jobs previously only open to men; women were required during the war

⁷ See John D'Emilio, *SEXUAL POLITICS, SEXUAL COMMUNITIES: THE MAKING OF A HOMOSEXUAL MINORITY IN THE UNITED STATES, 1940-1970* 182 (The University of Chicago Press, 1983)

⁸ Warren Hinckle, columnist for the Independent and the Examiner, still harks back to these days frequently in his writing.

⁹ Anyone interested in the minutiae of street names, not to mention the multitude of other places San Franciscans have come from, would enjoy a look at the list of San Francisco's *alcaldes* and mayors at <http://www.zpub.com/sf50/hgmay.html>.

years to be the heads of households and conduct much of the “war at home” which was such a psychological component of that conflict. For many homosexual women and men, enlisting or flocking to wartime industry jobs provided a historically unprecedented opportunity to escape the small towns and conservative families that had been that had been the main obstacle to their first explorations of sexual freedom.¹⁰

It must be said that these demographic changes and their political ramifications did not happen overnight, and again, that San Francisco was a fairly ethnically diverse place before the war. The city’s and the region’s Asian and Mexican populations especially, were extensively settled here for as long as or longer than the Anglo population. However, it took two decades and then some after the war’s end for all of these groups to assert political identity on a citywide basis.

As much as it may seem to, San Francisco does not and never has existed as a political island. The civil rights struggles that began in the South in the 1950s rippled across the country and showed oppressed groups of every kind what could be accomplished. As the home to so many members of these groups, San Francisco could not help but be greatly influenced by, and eventually take part in, these movements. And as grassroots organizing began to transform the way people thought about politics through the 1960s, it began to be obvious that one of the main loci for political power, both to effect local change, and as an essential stepping-stone to state and national action, was at San Francisco City Hall.

So, what was City Hall (and by this, I mean San Francisco’s official government, from the mayor and the Board of Supervisors to the school board, the police department, and the various citizens’ commissions) like in the 1960s? The Board of Supervisors had been an all-white, almost all-male institution for at least a century. Every mayor since the American conquest had been a white man. Every chief of police, every sheriff, and an overwhelming majority of the school board and the commissions were not only white, but overwhelmingly of northern European descent, Italian-Americans being the only exception.

In the mid-1960s, what became known as the “Burton” or “Brown-Burton machine” emerged. Former Supervisor Angela Alioto describes its birth in this way:

[Phillip] Burton was first elected to the California State Assembly in the 1950s, and it was there that he began his efforts to build a machine based in San Francisco. In

¹⁰ See D’Emilio, *supra*, at 23.

addition to his brother John, whom he was grooming for office, he found a protégé in Willie Brown, John's college friend. In 1964, Phil Burton ran successfully for Congress. The same year, his brother John won a special election for Phil's vacant seat in the Assembly. Brown was also elected to the Assembly that year.

Through these successes, the Burton machine began to consolidate power in San Francisco and Sacramento, as well as at the state Democratic Party level. In 1973, John Burton became state Democratic Party chairman. By early 1974, Phil Burton, through those loyal to him, was steadily gaining control of the California Democratic Party. This power had spread even further by the end of the year, when John Burton ran for and was elected to Congress, and when several other Burton protégés across California were elected to state office and to Congress.¹¹

Mayor John Shelley was the last of the "old guard," pre-machine Irish-American mayors (with the possibly anomalous exception of former Police Chief Frank Jordan, who was elected mayor in 1991), holding office for one term between 1964 and 1968. If Shelley may be considered the last of the city's "old guard" mayors, then his successor, Joseph L. Alioto, must be considered a transitional figure who, although he was conservative in many ways, oversaw and often did not hinder many of the more progressive changes San Francisco underwent during his two terms. A member of an extensive clan that, like many Italian families of the area, got its start as fishermen at San Francisco's famous wharf, Alioto was a successful antitrust attorney who was influential in the city's politics for years before he was elected mayor in 1967. In another example of politics running in the family, his daughter Angela was a member of the Board of Supervisors from 1989 to 1997, ran for mayor twice, in 1991 and 1995, and is running again in 2003.

If the 1960s were the period in which San Francisco and the Bay Area made waves socially and culturally, the '70s were the time when the ramifications of those changes became ingrained in the local political scene. Phillip Burton's machine was the main funnel through which those changes became established.

The municipal elections of 1977 fulfilled the political promise of 1960s idealism, culminating in the election of a Board of Supervisors that, for the first time, more accurately reflected the city's demographics. The principal method by which that year's profound changes were achieved was by district

¹¹ ANGELA ALIOTO, *STRAIGHT TO THE HEART: POLITICAL CANTOS* 49 (Russian Hill Press, 1997)

elections. In most large California cities, and in all counties, councilmembers and supervisors are elected from wards or districts in which the city or county is divided. Thus, citizens from all over the city or county are sure to have someone who lives relatively close by representing them on the council or board.

Until 1977, San Franciscans elected their supervisors on an at-large basis. All candidates for supervisor appeared on one citywide ballot, and the top vote getters were elected to the Board. It is much more expensive to run a citywide race than it is to run in a small district where a candidate can spend time and money really getting to know a constituency. The effect of the at-large system, therefore, was the best financed candidates with the best connections tended to be elected.

This concern drove local progressive groups to push to replace at-large supervisorial elections with ones held by district. In 1975, the voters adopted this change, and the 1977 election was the first held under the new system. Among those elected that year were Harvey Milk, the first openly gay member of any U.S. governmental body, representing the Castro district, and Dan White, a conservative ex-policeman representing what was then a predominantly white, lower-middle-class district on the southern side of the city. Another supervisor who had already been a member of the Board for several years was Dianne Feinstein, who under the district system represented the affluent Marina, Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights neighborhoods.

Also elected in 1975, when district elections were adopted, was Mayor George Moscone. An ally of the Burtons and Willie Brown, Moscone was also the first mayor whom the progressive groups truly felt was “one of them.” Each of these four figures (Milk, White, Feinstein, and Moscone) was to play a major role in the city’s politics as the ‘70s drew to a close, but only one would remain as the 1980s began.

It became clear very quickly how the Board split on most issues. Dan White believed he was the voice for “San Francisco as it used to be.” He imagined a time before what he saw as the troublemaking of the ‘60s, when the city was neater, more orderly, and more businesslike. Harvey Milk, on the other hand, reveled in the new spirit that heralded his and Mayor Moscone’s elections. For many San Franciscans, Milk embodied the new political wave, and never hesitated, with Moscone’s support, to introduce legislation to reflect that excitement, such as a pioneering gay civil rights ordinance.

Dianne Feinstein, as President of the Board, portrayed herself as steering a middle course between White’s fearful conservatism and Milk’s and

Moscone's ebullience. Ambitious to become mayor, she knew that most San Franciscans thought of themselves as a little bit of both, and that if she could play both sides against the middle, she could act as the centrist she believed would have the best chance to advance to higher political office. As we have seen, this strategy has paid off again and again for Feinstein, except for her 1990 loss to Pete Wilson for governor,¹² she has not lost an election since losing to Moscone in the 1975 mayoral race.

In any event, by late 1978 it was clear that Dan White's conservative agenda was not succeeding, at least in part because of White's own political ineptitude and emotional instability. In November, White resigned from the Board of Supervisors. He soon changed his mind, and tried to convince the mayor not to accept his resignation. Moscone refused, and on the night of December 27, 1978, Dan White sneaked into City Hall, and shot and killed both Mayor Moscone and Supervisor Milk.

The assassinations of Moscone and Milk had profound effects on San Francisco politics, effects that are still being felt almost twenty-five years later. The first casualty, from a political standpoint, was district elections. It was put out that smaller constituencies tended to elect "extreme" individuals like White (and Milk), and that at-large elections had the effect of creating a more moderate Board.

From a wider perspective, the city's Left was cleft both by the assassinations and by the nationwide sociopolitical conservatism having its first great success with former California Governor Ronald Reagan's election to the presidency in 1980. The Brown-Burton machine, whose power might have looked much different in the 1980s had it evolved into a "Moscone-Milk" coalition, evolved instead into a more traditional "machine," merging with the more conservative, "old school" forces of the Democratic Party personified by Mayor Feinstein, who, as President of the Board, had succeeded Moscone. As this "machine" consolidated power through the '80s and '90s, "it" became more intertwined with the large corporations, such as Pacific Gas & Electric. With corporate sponsors like that now financing their campaigns, these politicians—Democrats but rarely democrats—froze out alternative voices from both the left and the right. (Yes, there is a San Francisco Republican Party.)

¹² In the 1990 race, Wilson successfully portrayed Feinstein as more leftist on issues like crime and the environment than she actually was, or is. He used that strategy again in 1994, defeating then California Treasurer Kathleen Brown. This was during an era when Democratic female candidates were routinely portrayed as soft on crime, regardless of their actual positions. This strategy was employed mostly by the Republican men they were challenging; it worked for Wilson and countless others. Thus, Feinstein's loss in this case likely had more to do with her gender and her opponent's effective political offense.

Soon, a group of loosely connected local political voices, remnants and heirs to the more leftist side of the split described above, began to complain of the one voice with which San Francisco always seemed to speak. Led initially by Harry Britt (the supervisor appointed, ironically, by Feinstein to succeed Harvey Milk), these dissenters were later joined by Angela Alioto, Tom Ammiano, and others. These activists questioned why politicians such as Willie Brown, Dianne Feinstein, Nancy Pelosi, and State Senator John Burton who, as leaders of a Democratic Party that supposedly had as its *raison d'être* opposition to corporate domination over public life, always seemed to stand, especially in the Reagan-Bush '80s, with the establishment to which it once had seemed to offer an alternative.

This division between what I will call the “machine” and the “progressives” has been the dominant binary portrayed in representations of San Francisco politics ever since. While I will offer alternatives to this either/or viewpoint in the next section, it is useful to keep to its terms to understand the eventful elections of the last half-dozen years. References to “machine” refer to the team of the late Phillip Burton, his brother John (currently serving his last term in the state Senate), current Mayor Willie Brown, and those politicians who were, and are, seen as their allies. The “progressives” are those politicians and activists who have made opposing the “machine” the hook on which they have hung their political hats.

By the mid-1990s, the “progressives” seemed to be in almost complete eclipse, existing as a sort of raging, ineffectual shadow government consisting mostly of Supervisors Angela Alioto (who faced a term-limited exit from the board in 1997) and Tom Ammiano (elected in 1994), and the ever-angry San Francisco Bay Guardian newspaper. Art Agnos had been elected as a progressive to succeed Feinstein in 1988, but spending decisions caused by the region's dismal economy at the beginning of the 1990s, combined with his ultimately ineffectual style, cost Agnos progressive support, as well as a second term. Though neither Agnos nor Frank Jordan, his successor, were members of the Burton “machine,” the extremely influential Democratic County Central Committee (or DCCC), a majority of the Board of Supervisors, and important individual office-holders such as the City Attorney and the Assessor-Recorder, were seen to be controlled by it.

Ironically, the event that led to the first sign since the late '70s (apart from Agnos's false promise) that change was in the air was the election as mayor of the politician, who more than any other in late 20th century California politics, typified the word “machine.” Willie Lewis Brown Jr., the African-American son of a poor, rural Texas family, had ruled the state Assembly for over a dozen years as Speaker. He finally left Sacramento in 1995, forced to retire because Californians had enacted term limits on the

Legislature in 1990. Brown has been accused of evincing an “imperial” style: richly dressed, attending every social event, well-connected, and willing to do whatever it took to maintain and use the formidable power he had gathered during all those years in the state capitol.

In the 1995 mayoral election, Brown had little trouble unseating the lackluster and conventionally conservative Jordan,¹³ and embarked on making himself as controversial a mayor as he had been a parliamentarian. The difference was that instead of having a small, insular world of Assemblymembers and lobbyists to cajole, obligate, and offend, Brown had a large city of involved, contentious activists, many of whom were, for the first time in his career, honestly and unashamedly to the left of “Da Mayor.” Those who were not to Brown’s left often were just as annoyed by the Mayor’s “arrogant” style—it is important to remember the difficulties that Brown would face, as the first black mayor in a city that has just as deep a racial divide as any other in the U.S.—from the very real conservative elements in San Francisco.

As Brown began to irk more and more people across the political spectrum during his first term, the progressives saw their chance. Now that Angela Alioto had left the Board, the progressive standard-bearer was Supervisor Tom Ammiano, who was hailed as the heir to Harvey Milk and Harry Britt, and not just for his politics—Ammiano’s similarly cheerful and quirky gayness inspired some and put off others. He spent 1995 through 1999 as the most prominent gadfly to the Mayor and the “machine” majority on the Board.

In 1999, Brown ran for reelection. By this time, he had managed to offend almost everyone, and a long slate of candidates had lined up to try to replace him. Among these, former Mayor Jordan and the self-financed former political consultant Clint Reilly captured the most attention. However, the question on most observers’ minds at the time was, would Ammiano run?

For a time, it seemed he would not. The Bay Guardian ran piece after piece about there being no true progressive in the race. Both Jordan and Reilly based their campaigns on being outside the endless “machine/anti-machine” duality. However, in some ways, with a solid “machine” majority on the Board seeming to reflect the electorate’s mood, it seemed as if the time was not yet ripe for an Ammiano candidacy.

¹³ In one of the strangest political career suicides ever committed, Jordan appeared naked in a shower with a couple of Los Angeles disc jockeys. This attempt at a humorous publicity stunt may not have lost him the election, but it certainly did not help.

Then, mere weeks before the November election, Ammiano announced his write-in candidacy for mayor. The city was in an uproar. The other candidates complained that they had spent months campaigning, and that it was wrong for Ammiano to come in at the last moment. However, because Ammiano hadn't done the groundwork thought necessary to actually win, most speculated that he had little chance to seriously challenge Brown, Reilly, and Jordan.

Election night came, and Ammiano shocked just about everyone by coming in a close second to Brown. His victory, the most successful write-in campaign in local history, forced a runoff election in December. Though Ammiano lost the runoff, the success of his grassroots campaign style emboldened the city's progressives; that November, almost under the radar, a ballot initiative returning district elections to San Francisco also passed.

The supervisorial elections the following year showed that this change had an effect greater, perhaps, than even an Ammiano victory would have had. The major media, puzzling over what to make of the new election calculus, covered supervisorial candidates who never would have stood a chance of having their voices heard. Suddenly, everyone was interested in whom the citizens of Bayview-Hunters Point, the Tenderloin, or the Mission would choose as "their" supervisors. The incumbents on the Board, who either had been elected at large or had been appointed by Brown, fought for their political lives, and seemed like pallid nonentities when compared to the sometimes crazy, often wildly inappropriate, but always authentic candidates who emerged from almost every district.

The media used the ongoing "machine" vs. "progressive" binary to label many of these new candidates; this tactic showed the binary to be out of date, if indeed, it had ever been the overwhelming force it had always been supposed to be. It seemed that in each district (except the wealthy 2nd, in which the Brown-appointed incumbent, Gavin Newsom, had an immediate lock), there was an obvious "machine" candidate backed by Brown, and several candidates from which "progressives" could choose. Organizations and the news media cast 2000's supervisorial election as a vote for or against Willie Brown; however, the diverse range of legitimate candidacies made possible by district-based campaigns made the election actually about the people and neighborhoods of San Francisco getting full representation for the first time in many years.

The primary election was encouraging to "progressives," but rarely completely decisive. In most districts, neither the "machine" nor "anti-machine" candidate garnered enough votes to win outright. However, at the December runoff, while the rest of the country remained shocked by some

Florida chicanery not within this article's scope, people who believed that the election truly was about decisive progress versus the status quo came into their full glory. I vividly remember reading the returns on the Bay Guardian's website, which quoted an activist's whoop: "*We've got a veto-proof majority!*" [Italics added.] True or not, the feeling was that the eight "progressive" supervisors elected would act as one to render the Brown-Burton "machine" impotent. In truth, the one thing that the new supervisors had in common was their background as neighborhood activists, as opposed to downtown political insiders. However different the priorities of the voters of the largely working-class districts, who elected Sophie Maxwell and Gerardo Sandoval, may have been from those of largely wealthy districts, who elected Aaron Peskin and Jake McGoldrick, the new Board's seeming united front against the "machine" lent a monolithic euphoria to that election night. For many San Franciscans, this not only took the sting out of George W. Bush's outrageous elevation to the presidency, but it seemed to signal a potential unequaled since the era of George Moscone and Harvey Milk.

V. THE MYTH OF THE MACHINE/PROGRESSIVE BINARY

It is perhaps necessary, though only a few years after the fact, to describe what San Francisco went through, electoral politics aside, in the second half of the 1990s. The phenomenon now relegated to the history books as the *dot-com boom* affected this city more than any other on Earth. The atmosphere of limitless possibilities of wealth intoxicated groups for whom such materialistic aims had seemed unreachable or irrelevant: the overnight millionaire nerd, usually from somewhere else, with the expensive black eyeglass frames, the scooter, and the cell phone became the cliché symbol of the Bay Area. There arose great resentment of the dot-com image, with its live-work lofts south of Market Street and in the Mission, its "new meritocratic," libertarian greediness, its unearned IPO, and the rise in the cost of living it forced on everyone not a part of the narrow, somewhat illusory industry. This resentment drove the voter revolts of 1999 and 2000 at least as much as how one felt about Willie Brown or Tom Ammiano. Anger at what was being done to San Francisco painted almost all incumbent supervisors with a broad "machine" brush, and painted their replacements as the ones to make amends.

This idea of an undifferentiated mass of heroes and villains is problematic for several reasons. First, it minimizes the often very different backgrounds of both groups. Two examples illustrate the actual diversity glossed over by the "machine/anti-machine" binary. Mark Leno, appointed to the Board by Brown, at first seemed to vote with the "machine," as Brown

intended him to do. As Leno gained experience and power, however, he began to vote and introduce legislation generally at odds with what was seen as “machine” positions: he championed transgendered city employees’ rights, and, as one of his last acts, introduced 2002’s successful Proposition S, directing the city to pursue cultivation of medical marijuana. One reason Leno politics changed might lie in the return of district elections. Having been appointed during the period when supervisors were elected at large, Leno had to run for re-election from a specific district. He ran in District 8, which includes the Castro, Noe Valley, and Diamond Heights districts. It holds little surprise that the issues on which Leno made his name were issues held especially dear by the city’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered communities.

San Francisco has been known for decades as the gay city *par excellence*. In no other city in the world do gay men, lesbians, bisexuals, and the transgendered have such concentrated political clout. That the 13th Assembly district’s two top Democratic choices in 2002 were gay men, so that the district was the first to elect a gay man to the Legislature, simply highlights this fact. Two of the city’s most powerful Democratic organizations are based on sexual orientation: the Alice B. Toklas Democratic Club, which tends to support “machine” candidates and causes, and the Harvey Milk Democratic Club, which tends to be more “progressive.” The widespread, and in my opinion erroneous, splitting of all candidates into “machine” and “anti-machine” is most easily spotted by which each of these clubs endorses, and while such oversimplification is unfortunate, queer San Franciscans are lucky to have such a range of choices.

In contrast to Leno, ex-Supervisor Leland Yee came to the Board as an independent, and for the first couple of years of his tenure could be counted on to vote with the progressives on many issues. While he always had the conservative streak appropriate to his roots in the city’s Chinese community, Yee did not follow the “machine’s” party line. Once Yee saw that district elections meant his best chance of remaining on the Board lay in moving to, and reflecting the political views, of a district with a large Chinese community, he moved from Noe Valley to the Sunset District which has the largest percentage of Asians in the city.¹⁴ He was re-elected from that district, and his just-ended term saw a definite swing to the right, so that his vote could usually be counted on to reflect those views seen as “machine.”

In 2002 the voters chose both Yee and Leno to represent the two Assembly districts into which San Francisco is split. In the March primary,

¹⁴ Rachel Gordon, *Hot Race Warms Up Sunset*, S.F. CHRON., Dec. 5, 2002. (available at <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/12/05/BA144889.DTL>).

Leno defeated former Board president Harry Britt¹⁵. It remains to be seen whether Leno will shift back to his previous moderate politics now that he represents an Assembly district more diverse than his old supervisorial district. Yee, it seems, will face few difficulties in adapting to the center-left majority in the Assembly. What both politicians' malleability proves, however, is that few, if any, of the officials who find success in our governmental system can be counted on to stick to one ideology—if they can shift to get elected without appearing too hypocritical, they can and will do so.

In the last two years of Leno and Yee's terms, they were both painted with the same "unprogressive" brush by activists and progressive publications such as the Bay Guardian. Since to maintain the fiction of a single "progressive" movement in the city requires a unity of vision that allows for little gray area, the proponents of that movement must classify each politician as "for" or "against," or "progressive" or "machine." As shown in the cases of Leno and Yee, the classification is factually incorrect. If such mislabeling served an agenda with progressive political values, these activists might be excused for engaging in the time-honored practice of blurring the facts in the pursuit of higher goals.

However, it seems to me that the very practice of "if you're not for us, you're against us" is deeply antithetical to progressive ideals, one of which has always been the implementation of fair representation of the full spectrum of human identities in decision-making. This way of seeing power as something to be seized by any desperate mischaracterization necessary, rather than as something to be shared by the entire community for the benefit of all, is my major objection to the "machine" vs. "progressive" dichotomy. Leaving aside for a moment whether there even exists a "Brown-Burton machine" in the monolithically powerful form envisioned by, for example, Angela Alioto,¹⁶ is the replacement of the old machine with a new one the truly progressive solution? No matter how noble the policy goals of a new majority, is it really "progressive" to polarize every issue by distorting the often complicated nuances? The definition of progressivism should include the notion that all people's voices deserve to be heard.

It is my contention that rather than being easily categorized as "machine" or "progressive," San Francisco politicians and the causes they champion must be seen as representing a diverse range of interests. A few recent examples of the wide range of decisions that do not fit the binary must include Angela Alioto's surprising endorsement of State Senator John

¹⁵ Britt also has been a faculty member of New College of California, publisher of this article.

¹⁶ Alioto, *supra* note 11, ch. 3.

Burton's daughter Kimiko Burton for public defender against Jeff Adachi in the March 2002 election; the 2003 elevation of Green Party member Matt Gonzalez to the Board of Supervisors presidency; the unsuccessful effort in November 2002 by the environmental Left and the business and property-interest Right to defeat Proposition A, which will repair and maintain the city's water storage and delivery system; and the successful candidacies in 2002 of difficult to categorize City Attorney Dennis Herrera, Assessor-Recorder Mabel Teng, and Supervisor Fiona Ma¹⁷; Senator Burton's work to defeat Hastings Law School's proposed Tenderloin parking garage; and the upcoming split on the Left between mayoral candidates Alioto and Ammiano.

Similarly, after some blamed Kimiko Burton's loss to Adachi on Mayor Brown's unpopularity, it is rumored that Senator Burton "has all but stopped talking to Willie Brown."¹⁸ If the two are no longer friends, can a "Brown-Burton" machine be said to exist? And, if the supposed "progressive bloc" elected to the Board of Supervisors differs on so many issues (the Board presidency, contested by "progressives" Gonzalez, Peskin, and Maxwell, is just one example; another has been the construction of a "big box" store on Bayshore Boulevard, in Maxwell's district), can there be said to be one "progressive" viewpoint?

VI. ALL THE NEWS THAT GIVES US FITS—IN PRINT!

In what appears to be such a political place as San Francisco, it must be remembered that only a small portion of its citizens participate actively in politics. Indeed, in the 2002 general election, the usual dismal percentage of those eligible even voted, and only a small percentage of this number attend community meetings, work to support particular candidates or propositions, or run for office themselves. The rest of the regular or occasional voters rely on only a few sources of information to decide how they will cast their ballots. One major source is the endorsements of the many individuals and political groups active locally, regionally, and even nationally.¹⁹ Campaigns spend tremendous resources getting these endorsements included in the sample ballots and in the blizzard of bulk mailings and television commercials each registered voter takes in before an election.

¹⁷ Rachel Gordon, *Election Betrays Shift in S.F. Politics* A26, S.F. CHRON. (Dec. 12, 2002).

¹⁸ Matier & Ross, S.F. CHRON., Mar. 10, 2003, available at <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2003/03/10/BA108703.DTL>.

¹⁹ For example, in 1999, most registered voters in San Francisco received at least one recorded telephone message from then-President Clinton urging them to re-elect Mayor Brown.

Another major source of political information is the local news media. This source differs from the endorsements game in several important ways. First, the coverage happens year-round, not just leading up to an election. Second, most media outlets make at least a show of covering the issues objectively. Third, people tend to choose the news source that will most closely reflect their own political biases—rarely will a Mission District tenant activist seek out the San Francisco Business Times’ opinion on tenancies-in-common. As an employee in the commercial real estate industry until 2001, I was forbidden from including the Bay Guardian among the newspapers displayed in the property management office in which I worked.

All of San Francisco’s news media cover local politics to one extent or another, but it is the local newspaper scene that I choose to focus on here. Television, radio, online sources such as *sfpolitics.com*, and glossy magazines such as *San Francisco* and *7x7* each carry some political content. But the newspapers, with their more frequent and in-depth coverage, in my opinion, are more influential in helping both to frame the debate and to convince voters how to vote. With this in mind, an introduction to each of the city’s major newspapers,²⁰ and to the ways they do what they do, seems in order.

As in most major older American cities before the 1960s, there were at least a half-dozen daily newspapers competing for San Franciscans’ attention. With changing economics and suburban growth, only two, the *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*, survived into the 1970s. Until the late 1990s, the *Chronicle* was privately owned and operated by the descendants of its founders, the DeYoung family. The company also owned the local NBC affiliate television station, KRON, and published books. The *Examiner* was part of the national Hearst chain; indeed, famously wealthy and eccentric William Randolph Hearst began his career as a newspaper magnate by running the *Examiner* starting around the turn of the 20th century. The *Chronicle* and the *Examiner*, while ostensibly in competition, operated under a joint operating agreement (JOA) for several decades, under which the *Examiner* existed as a decidedly “junior” paper, published in the afternoon, with much smaller circulation than the *Chronicle*. The two papers’ offices were next door to each other on Fifth Street, and, as part of the JOA, combined to publish a joint Sunday edition every week.

²⁰ All Bay Area daily papers, from the Santa Rosa Press Democrat to the San Jose Mercury News, carry some San Francisco political content; as San Franciscans themselves read these papers much more infrequently, they are beyond the scope of this article.

Filling the gap left by the failure of the city's other dailies in the '60s, several weekly or semi-weekly free, alternative papers have emerged. Most neighborhoods have small papers, as do the various racial, ethnic, and gay communities. The three largest, which are not tied to any geographic or sociocultural group, but which could not be more different from each other, are the *Bay Guardian*, *SF Weekly*, and the *Independent*.

Bruce Bruggmann, a '60s-era activist who is still the paper's publisher and guiding force, founded the San Francisco Bay Guardian in 1969. From its start, the Guardian has attacked the establishment from the left, framing the debate as an endless war between the machine and progressive camps. In this war, it practices what it calls "advocacy journalism." Actual advocacy journalism, the time-honored practice of reporting events and then advocating a certain moral stance in response to them, was what all newspapers did before the advent of supposed "objective journalism," as currently practiced by most mainstream media. Of course, most newspapers are no more "objective," if such a thing is possible, than the practitioners of advocacy journalism; they are simply better at hiding their particular agendas. Instead of actual advocacy journalism, what the Guardian often does is worse than *faux*-objective journalism. When it cannot find sources that both agree with its political view and meet usual journalistic standards, the Guardian often resorts to strident repetition, innuendo, and the same omission of facts of which it accuses the mainstream media.

SF Weekly was another independent weekly until it was purchased by the national New Times chain several years ago. The Weekly comments in one editorial voice on politics, with perspectives that range from conventionally progressive, to moderately mainstream, to stridently libertarian. During the dot-com boom, for example, it both championed better public transit and called for an end to rent control. The Guardian and the Weekly are in direct competition, both come out on Wednesday, and neither ever misses a chance to slam the other's content and style.

An odd bird is the San Francisco Independent, published weekly (most of the time) and delivered free to every doorstep in the city. Published by the Fang family, the Independent got its start as a neighborhood paper in the Lake Merced/Outer Sunset area of the city. It champions the moderate to conservative views of the old Anglo-Irish establishment, the people who, for the most part, believe San Francisco was a better place before the upheaval of the '60s and '70s. The Fangs, as the most successful Asian American newspaper publishers in history, also conflate what they see as the dominant political ethos of the city's Chinese community (including "traditional family values," property ownership, and respect for authority) with the conservative white structure mentioned above.

A paper earthquake rocked the status quo in 1999, when the owners of the Chronicle decided to get out of the newspaper business. In a long, drawn-out series of maneuverings, Hearst ended up buying the Chronicle and selling the Examiner to the Fangs, who turned it into a morning, tabloid-style paper along the lines of the New York Post. The Examiner no longer publishes on the weekends, and in the first months of 2003, fired most of its staff and became free of charge; basically, it had become a daily version of the Independent, and seemed to be on its way to extinction. I believe its screaming, full-page, reactionary headlines have had a subliminal, fear-inspiring impact on San Franciscans already weary of the changes wrought by the dot-com boom and bust, and by national and world events since George W. Bush's acquisition of the presidency and the attacks of September 11, 2001. If the results of the November 2002 election mark a rightward shift in the city's politics, the Examiner must share some of the responsibility.

The new journalistic status quo consists of one major daily paper, the Chronicle, which takes few chances in rocking the city's political boat,²¹ but, at least in its presentation of facts, does not often actually lie. The Examiner, which with eight full-time staffers as of this writing, has become a joke propped up by Hearst as a part of the agreement under which it was sold, and whose daily appearance in newsstands across the city gives a much expanded forum for the shrill, conservative viewpoint ignored by most San Franciscans when it had been solely the Independent's province. The Weekly, still read by many for its often decent writing and wide range of topics, is still finding its place in the post-dot-com era, still continuing to suffer from that era's cynical, "new meritocratic" tone. The Bay Guardian, which was the main organ through which the voter revolts of 1999 and 2000 were propagated, still seeks to actively and unapologetically influence city politics...and it probably does.

With this summary, I am by necessity, but with regret, only mentioning in passing the many smaller, niche papers that enliven the city's journalistic universe. It is said that San Francisco is a lousy newspaper town; that if only we had a daily as good as the New York or Los Angeles Times, our citizenry would be so much better informed. While I bemoan the Chronicle's day-to-day meagerness as much as anyone (because, like the two Times, it is the

²¹ A remarkable exception to this pattern occurred in 2002, when the Chronicle ran a series of articles about the Raker Act, a 1913 federal law mandating that San Francisco run its utilities as a public agency. To an extent that has inspired ridicule from all other media, the Bay Guardian has trumpeted the Raker Act as the legal basis for removing PG&E from the city. The appearance after all these years of a series of articles in the Chronicle repeating the Guardian's main contentions was surprising, to say the least.

paper that “everybody reads”), I disagree that the city is a lousy newspaper town. What San Francisco has is a tremendous diversity of journalistic voices: every neighborhood from tony Nob Hill to the working-class Mission, and every demographic group, has a paper with its own truth to tell. Each of these papers has an effect on how some San Franciscans think about local politics, and that diversity should be celebrated as an end in itself.

VII. THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK?

In its October 9, 2002, issue the Bay Guardian featured a series of articles entitled “The Empire Strikes Back,” about how the downtown-allied Brown-Burton “machine” was attempting in the November 2002 election to reverse the gains the “progressive coalition” had made in 1999 and 2000. While the Guardian holds every election to be crucial for San Francisco’s future, it seemed plausible, this time around, that it had a point. As Chronicle columnist Rob Morse pointed out,²² within the 245-page voter information pamphlet was “every issue San Franciscans care about.”

Before examining that election, a review of some events leading to it would be useful. Following up on the success of the 2000 election, in which a “progressive” majority was elected to the Board of Supervisors, a far-reaching proposition was put on the 2001 ballot. Proposition F would have municipalized San Francisco’s power-delivery system, removing it from PG&E’s ownership and operation, and placing it in the hands of an elected municipal utilities board. The measure lost, just barely, but its surprising success put large business interests on notice that the resentment caused by that summer’s rolling blackouts almost had fueled a truly radical change in one of San Francisco’s major institutions.

In the March 2002 primary election, another progressive measure which may have far-reaching effects on who will hold office in the city passed: San Francisco became one of the few American jurisdictions to institute instant-runoff voting (“IRV”). This system allows voters to mark their first three choices among candidates; if no candidate wins a majority of first-choice votes, the second-choice votes are tallied, until a winner emerges. Because it allows more than an “either/or” choice at the ballot box, IRV is seen as far more representational of the voters’ will, and may enable lesser-funded and more progressive candidates to have a better chance at election. Combined with the district elections passed in 1999, this innovation will likely render money and connections less important than issues in winning elections.

²² Robert Morse, S.F. CHRON, Oct. 21, 2002, available at <http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2002/10/21/MN159435.DTL>.

There is every indication that some interests are working to overturn both district elections and IRV. As of this writing, San Francisco's voting machines had not been converted to handle IRV, and the better-funded politicians, like Gavin Newsom, have expressed some interest in trying to return the city to at-large supervisorial elections.

There is no documentation that any one group had an "a-ha" moment that spawned several key initiatives on the November 2002 ballot. Gavin Newsom introduced Proposition N, dubbed "Care Not Cash," which slashed general assistance payments for the city's poorest residents. Prop. R ("Home Ownership For Everyone," or HOPE) would have allowed upper-middle class renters of a certain income to purchase their apartment units, removing them from the price-controlled rental housing market. These deeply unprogressive measures played on people's weariness with the "quality of life" issues that are an unavoidable by-product of having a large homeless population, and with the near impossibility of buying a home in San Francisco. By manipulating voter resentment of a perceived status quo (i.e., homelessness, and expensive home prices), the backers of the two propositions adopted strategies the "progressives" had used so effectively heretofore to propel Tom Ammiano's 1999 candidacy, and to pass district elections and instant-runoff voting.

November's election was seen as a serious defeat for the "progressives": Prop. D, the latest attempt to oust PG&E and municipalize San Francisco's power system, failed, as did Prop. L, which would have increased taxes on real estate transfers exceeding \$1 million. Prop. N passed easily, while Tom Ammiano's attempt to ameliorate N's effects, Prop. O, failed. However, the picture is more complicated than "machine won, progressives lost." Prop. R failed, which was a huge victory for the city's renters. Prop. A, a bond measure to upgrade the city's water storage and delivery system, passed. Environmental groups such as the Sierra Club opposed this measure, but its principal and best-funded opposition came from property and business interests. As the Bay Guardian wrote in support of A,²³ it is unrealistic to believe that the Hetch Hetchy reservoir and aqueduct system, as egregious an environmental disaster as it was at its creation, can cease to be San Francisco's and the Bay Area's water source any time soon, thus the responsible move was to fix it. Other progressive measures, such as Prop. S, which mandated city study into growing medical marijuana, and Prop. J, making the Board of Supervisors a full-time job with commensurate pay,

²³ See *Yes on A and E*, S.F. BAY GUARDIAN, Oct. 30, 2002, available at http://www.sfgate.com/37/05/news_ed_a_and_e.html.

also passed.²⁴ These progressive victories show November 2002 to have been not only more complicated than the media portrayed it;²⁵ it showed the “machine-progressive” rubric to be seriously flawed.

VIII. WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

In his seminal book about San Francisco politics during the last quarter of the 20th century, progressive political scientist Richard DeLeon presents impressive evidence that rather than one “progressive” viewpoint reflecting San Franciscans’ concerns and exerting influence at City Hall, there are three: *liberalism*, driving those who “support government redistributive programs and active intervention in the economy to promote social equity and individual opportunity;”²⁶ *environmentalism*, which “seek[s] to enhance the quality of life through government regulation of the private sector and limits on economic growth;”²⁷ and *populism*, characterized by “neighborhood activists and preservationists who seek to protect turf-based communal traditions, property-use values, and cultural identities from incursions by corporate businesses and governmental bureaucracies.”²⁸ DeLeon proposes that San Francisco’s stock “progressive” viewpoint (as presented, for example, by the Bay Guardian) tries to incorporate all three dimensions without perceiving any ideological contradictions. I contend that the mass of election statistics he compiles in Appendix B of his book²⁹ shows that, while “progressives” might band together to fight particular issues in which their priorities intersect (such as 1986’s Proposition M, the huge political victory against high-rise construction), many other issues, whether they reach the ballot box or not, contain inherent issues upon which people who call themselves “progressive” must disagree.

I believe that the upcoming mayoral campaign will bring this three-part split into focus. The four main candidates as of this writing are Supervisors Tom Ammiano and Gavin Newsom, former Supervisor Angela Alioto, and former Supervisor and current Treasurer Susan Leal. Until the second half of 2002, it seemed unlikely that Newsom, although the heir apparent to Mayor

²⁴ Even Prop. N’s victory, as the anti-N forces pointed out before the election, will actually affect a comparatively small, though terribly disadvantaged, number of San Franciscans. Its main effect, of course, has been to bolster Newsom’s mayoral candidacy.

²⁵ It is probable that, from a progressive point of view, that the Republican gains in national politics at that same election made the local results seem worse than they were.

²⁶ RICHARD DELEON, *LEFT COAST CITY: PROGRESSIVE POLITICS IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1975-1991* 33 (1992).

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.*, at 179.

Brown and the preferred candidate of downtown's business interests, had a better chance than the other candidates. However, November's perceived "progressive failure" in general, and the success of Newsom's "Care Not Cash" initiative particularly, made the media, both pro and con, anoint him as the man to beat. For the same reason, as Newsom's star has been in the ascendant since the election, Ammiano's has been waning. Alioto's third attempt at the mayor's office will draw away much of the progressive labor forces who might have been attracted to Ammiano *vis à vis* Newsom's ties to corporate interests, while Leal, because of her background and efforts in the Latino and queer communities is likely to draw votes away both from Ammiano and, to a lesser extent, Newsom. She is also seen as a moderate leftist—not as tied to what is perceived as the remnants of the "machine" as Newsom, but not as far left as either Ammiano or Alioto.

While I do not believe that a Newsom mayoralty is inevitable,³⁰ two main issues for progressives of all stripes to be concerned about may emerge this year, issues which would normally be the province of political science wonks, and which would serve to obscure the real policy issues with which the candidates should concern themselves. Newsom should face a strenuous fight if he follows up on his stated intent to do away with or modify district elections, and the opposition exploiting current difficulties in establishing instant-runoff voting (which have gotten nothing but negative publicity in the city's mainstream press³¹) must be met with a strong commitment for this more democratic form of election. Both of these innovations are among San Franciscans' best hopes for diverse, progressive voices being elected to public office, and their abolition would go a long way to returning power to the moneyed interests whose hold on City Hall was loosened, if not completely broken, both in the late 1970s and again in the late 1990s.

This article has focused strongly on the celebrity personalities who regularly make headlines in San Francisco's political reportage. While fascination with this ongoing drama was this article's impetus, I recognize that this emphasis on the people who run for mayor and supervisor distorts the real ways in which progressive activists of all interests and levels of commitment can and do effect political change, serve communities, neighborhoods and individuals in need, and take part in the community life of the city. The focus also feeds into the larger-than-life, "machine" vs.

³⁰ As in any San Francisco election, an upset is quite possible, especially if instant-runoff voting is not instituted by November, and Leal and Newsom oppose one another in a runoff following November's general election.

³¹ See John Wildermuth, *Elections chief frets over Nov. 4*, Mar. 18, 2003, John Wildermuth, *Instant runoff election system defended in S.F.*, Mar. 20, 2003, and Ken Garcia, *Instant Runoffs are Proving Problematic*, Apr. 4, 2003, all S.F. CHRON., available at <http://sfgate.com>.

“progressive” binary that this article seeks to debunk. I believe it is essential to understand the motives of our elected officials, to understand why they make the headlines and when, and, sometimes, to be inspired by their leadership. The old political saw that the two things it is better not to see made are sausage and democracy suggests both are the products of an ugly but unavoidable manufacturing process. I suggest that, rather than seeing justice via political means as an unattractive, ends-based exercise necessitating dishonest pigeonholing and suppression of inconvenient facts (even when done with the best of intentions), progressive justice should best be understood as an ongoing phenomenon done by, for, and among real people. Rather than being black-or-white, good-or-evil, or “machine” or “progressive,” real people come in endless shades of gray, and real justice can never occur when the political process, and those who report on it, do not recognize and reflect the myriad, essential elements of human diversity.

