

# Tour Greater Boston's social justice sites with the help of a new book

A new release, “A People’s Guide to Greater Boston,” tracks 400 years of history in the city through the lens of social and environmental justice. The collection is made up of 165 location-based entries that delve into the details of local movements related to labor, race, abolition, queer rights, and more.

It’s a “radically democratic view” of the city, said coauthor Joseph Nevins.

“We want people to appreciate that the history of Boston is much more than the Freedom Trail and the Revolutionary War,” he said. “The very title of the book suggests that it is indeed the *people’s* guide and reflects the desires, hopes, and struggles of people on all sides of the power structure.”

The book dives into some lesser-known tidbits that take place in Boston and 12 suburbs, including Waltham, Newburyport, and Salem.

Topics include the life of Malcolm X, who once lived in Nubian Square, the 1840s abolitionist protests in Lynn, and the 1912 Lawrence workers’ movement led by Latinx immigrants. Another entry mentions William Lloyd Garrison, the founder of the famed abolitionist newspaper “The Liberator.” Readers will also learn about Antoine Thurel, who set himself on fire on the steps of the State House in 1987 to protest religious persecution in his native Haiti, the 1903 Immigrant Raid Site, and the Great Molasses Flood Site, among other stories.

Nevins points out that different moments of historical significance have sometimes taken place at the same spots. The first location of Helen Keller’s South Boston school, the Perkins School for the Blind, for example, later served as the site of an influential Vietnam War protest.

“Regardless of whether people in these different protests and movements knew about it, they are connected,” said Nevins.

The publication also lays out six self-guided tours — complete with



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walking and public transportation directions. One dives into the lavish lives of Boston’s ultra-rich; another focuses on Sacco and Vanzetti, the Italian immigrant anarchists whose execution in Massachusetts set off a string of global protests.

Shortly after “A People’s Guide to Los Angeles” became a success in 2012, author Lauren Pulido reached out to Nevins with news that the book would be expanded

into a series. Nevins, a professor of geography at Vassar College, jumped on the opportunity to write the Boston edition. He and coauthors Suren Moodliar, editor of the journal *Socialism and Democracy*, and Eleni Macrakakis, a Vassar graduate and urban planner, began working on the 328-page guide in 2014.

Almost 90 entries were left out of the completed manuscript for the sake of

space. These sections will eventually be published online, said Nevins.

“It’s not a comprehensive story,” said Nevins. “It’s rather a suggestive portrait — for the people.”

The book is available electronically at [ucpress.edu](http://ucpress.edu), Amazon, and elsewhere. Print copies go on sale July 7, through various sellers or by contacting Peter Perez at [pperez@ucpress.edu](mailto:pperez@ucpress.edu).

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JOSEPH NEVINS,  
coauthor of “A People’s  
Guide to Greater Boston”



SPENCER GRANT

South Boston Heights Academy students arrived with a police escort at South Boston High School in 1974.