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Sticks, Stones and Words: Protest Over Art and Culture in American Cities

Why do people fight over art and culture? Why do they clash over books in the library, movies in the local theatre, songs on the radio, or sculptures in a public park? Why does the nation's expressive life – the words, images and sounds of artists – create such controversy and contention? *Sticks, Stones and Words: Protest Over Art and Culture in American Cities* investigates more than 800 cases of cultural conflict in the 1990s, applying empirical evidence and social theory to examine important and neglected questions, including: Why are some cities more contentious than others when it comes to fighting over art and cultural expression? Can we identify distinctive “profiles of contention” that characterize the intensity, focus and tactics of protest in different cities? Are local fights over art, entertainment and the media manifestations of a larger national “culture war?”

Drawing on the work of sociologists and political theorists, Tepper argues that there is a structure underlying cultural conflict. In particular, the social context of a place – the degree of demographic change, the presence or absence of certain institutions, and the profile of public opinion – influences the amount, degree and intensity of disputes over cultural expression. *Sticks, Stones and Words* provides a multi-level look at cultural conflict – from a national birds-eye view to in-depth analysis of cities such as Atlanta, Dallas, San Jose, San Francisco, and Cincinnati. The book concludes with interviews with parents and activists throughout the U.S. who are concerned about the moral and cultural decline of American entertainment. Tepper argues that protest over art and culture is an important part of American democracy. Through such protests, citizens confront confounding social change by articulating and clarifying notions of community, including what symbols and expression are permitted and which are not, and whose vision of community will ultimately endure.