

## The 1906 San Francisco Earthquake and Fire Online Exhibit



Busy Market Street of the city of the Golden Gate, San Francisco, California  
BANC PIC 1981.038--STER

### Room One: San Francisco in the New Century

#### The City's Grand Geography

Similar to today, San Francisco at the turn of the century was divided into a number of neighborhoods. Single, unskilled men living in boarding houses dominated the area south of Market Street. The Mission district was home to skilled workers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and home owners. The Western Addition on the west side of Van Ness Avenue was where one found the middle class and some members of the upper-middle class, though the stronghold of the latter group was Nob Hill and Pacific Heights. Chinatown, like the SoMa district, was heavily male, though it was in many ways an autonomous area that was segregated both residentially and occupationally. To the east of Chinatown, North Beach was home to a large Italian population composed of the working class, businessmen, and professionals. The waterfront was San Francisco's vice district, and downtown was where one found merchants and other professionals living in apartments and hotels.

The novel *McTeague* (1899) by Frank Norris, captures the atmosphere of just one section of the city, Polk Street, which was just a few blocks east of the Western Addition and just downhill from Nob Hill. Resonating with Norris' fictional description of Polk Street, the scene along San Francisco's Market Street shows a city overflowing with activity. People ride in streetcars, horse-drawn carriages or weave through the streets on foot. The street-level chaos is echoed along storefronts and overhead as advertisements plaster every building while flying banners, denoting a public holiday, swoop and streak between buildings.