

A COMPANION TO LOS ANGELES

Edited by

William Deverell and Greg Hise

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A Companion to Los Angeles

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Introduction

William Deverell and Greg Hise

Over the past decade and a half, we have worked together on books and other projects focused on the history of greater Los Angeles. These collaborations, as well as the writing we've pursued individually, form a part of a recent groundswell of scholarship that has recast interpretations of nineteenth and twentieth-century Southern California. A host of mostly young scholars have written dozens of insightful, empirically rich, and challenging works which together constitute one of the most lively sub-fields of historical inquiry into North American cities and urban life.

In part as a result of that mini-explosion, historians, including non-Americanists who might never have taught, much less thought about, Los Angeles history, now do so with exuberance. Many have sought to incorporate Los Angeles into their own research. All the more impressive is the embrace of Los Angeles history by non-historians and non-historical scholarly disciplines. Architecture, urban planning, urban studies, sociology, ethnic studies, feminist studies, gender studies, art theory, landscape architecture, photography, cultural studies, literature, comparative literature, urban theory, American studies, critical legal studies, political science, and comparative economics (the list is representative rather than exhaustive) have all drawn Los Angeles history and case studies into their inquiries by way of these many new books and articles.

We designed this volume to showcase some of that work, both by way of the authors who have contributed and in the scholarly surveys each performs in their respective essays. The volume has other ambitions as well. It is the first of the long and distinguished list of Blackwell Companions devoted to a single city. We hope that it will be an important tool by which to understand the complex history of greater Los Angeles and in addition that it might serve as a model for similarly conceived projects on other cities or other regions. Most ambitiously, though, we wished for this volume to

dig deeply into the history of Los Angeles with specific aims related to chronology, continuity, and context.

Chronology and the Re-Balancing of Los Angeles History

In constructing the table of contents for this volume we sought to engage deeply with the nineteenth century as a way to bring chronological balance to the “Los Angeles flurry” of recent years. The field has tipped profoundly in the direction of the post-World War II era. In and of itself this is not especially a problem, particularly since the quality of much of these works is so high. But the relative paucity of historical inquiries taking into account the second, much less first, half of the nineteenth century has created an imbalance in interpretations of the region’s past.

Los Angeles of the nineteenth century remains largely the domain of classics written by such figures as Carey McWilliams, Robert Fogelson, Glenn Dumke, and Robert Glass Cleland. This is not to suggest that these books, interpretations, and insights have lost their importance: they are classics precisely because we read and learn from them yet. But the shelf upon which they sit – “nineteenth-century Los Angeles” – is far too thinly populated, especially when it comes to more recent imprints. We can fill that shelf with primary sources, but the monographs are lonely. Hence, we designed the volume’s approach around sustained engagement with the deep past and asked specific authors to consider chronological depth specifically as they constructed their essays (that request is honored most apparently in Philip Ethington’s roughly 15,000-year inquiry into regional regimes of power, but the long fetch of Los Angeles history is also apparent in contributions from Louise Pubols, Eric Avila, Robbert Flick, and others).

We think that this approach will assist scholars as they further tie together the historical dimensions and dynamism across the nineteenth and twentieth centuries or across the divides of the Spanish, Mexican, and American periods. If scholars were to devote comparable resources of time and talent to the nineteenth century, and if institutions were to enhance collections and access to primary documents via digital initiatives, for example, we could grapple more fully with the level and extent of the various chronological, racial, national, or other ruptures and continuities which separate or amalgamate the post-conquest era.

Continuity and Pattern in the Long History of Los Angeles

The thematic organization of this volume, which includes longer introductory essays launching four of the five sections (Matt Gainer’s photo essay, “The Border Crossed US” introduces part one), is designed to address

another vexing and related issue in the writing of Los Angeles history. All too often, discrete episodes, events, or periods are cleaved off for study – sometimes distinguished study – but not folded back into the longer history of the city and region. This can be partly, if implicitly, addressed, as we think we’ve accomplished here, by thematic analyses that move across time or even space. In this volume readers can begin to see long-term patterns emerging in, for example, land use, political structures and regimes, and even cultural expression. Such organization can help us think in more general terms about Los Angeles history *writ large*, and it can also push collective thinking of Los Angeles beyond the less-than-helpful constructions of ever-present Los Angeles exceptionalism. As a case in point, Eric Avila’s introduction to part two’s excavation of “social flashpoints” helps to explicate one of the earliest ideas and ambitions we shared in envisioning this volume. Scholarly work on episodic eruptions of racial and ethnic coercion and violence in Los Angeles is among the best of that form of historical inquiry currently in practice. We know a great deal about isolated examples – Sleepy Lagoon, the Zoot Suit attacks, Watts, and the violence of the post-Rodney King verdicts. But have we thought to connect such explosions across time? Have we wondered what a longitudinal exploration that also took account of, for example, the violence of the 1850s, or the 1871 Chinese massacre, or the forced deportations and internments of the 1930s and 1940s, might tell us *in addition* to the usual forensic, episodic treatment? As Avila notes, and as “social flashpoints” authors then take up in detailed portraits in turn, racial and ethnic violence in Los Angeles may be less a story of periodic eruption and more a story of generalized, even regularized, behavior and culture. Such refiguring, or at least rethinking, of the episodic tendencies inherent to much of Los Angeles historical scholarship, which is further pushed along by Susan Straight’s deeply personal essay closing out part one, encourages further breadth and depth to our inquiries.

Context and Audience, Past and Present

In our approach to this book, which builds upon previous experience with other Blackwell Companions (specifically those which address the history of the American West and the history of California), we wished to keep true to a central theme of these volumes. That is that it would represent a highly competent, well-informed “state of the field” assessment of the best and most important work to date on, in this case, the history of Los Angeles. All along, we kept in mind – and urged our authors to do the same – that one important audience for these volumes is graduate students at work mastering fields of study, finding their critical voices, and in search of significant thesis topics. This book speaks to those students (and their

professors) in precisely that regard; its success may be judged on the number and quality of thesis “ships” that it helps launch over time.

Graduate students are but one readership. We also kept in mind another proverbial audience, the so-called “lay public” interested, and often deeply versed in, the history of Los Angeles and Southern California more generally. This book demanded a level of scholarly sophistication in conception and execution, but that need not cut off access to (or appreciation of) the volume from non-scholars. On the contrary, in our choice of authors, topics, and formats, including the fine photo essays by artists Robbert Flick and Matt Gainer, we explicitly designed this book as, in part, a dialogue between historians and non-historians, both within the book’s pages and in its outward reach to the public.

A related point as regards audience and dialogue: we remained cognizant of the power of history in shaping contemporary life and culture in Los Angeles. While scholars may find history intrinsically fascinating, the enduring significance of historical perspective assuredly springs from its relationship with the present. Accordingly, we asked five of our contributors to offer “contemporary voice” views and visions of specific aspects of life in Los Angeles. At once musings, ruminations, and “think pieces,” these visual and textual essays help to bring the volume’s scholarly insights into sharp focus on the human and physical landscapes of early twenty-first century Los Angeles.

Together, the various and varied contributions that make up this volume constitute a lively and informed introduction to a history as fascinating as it is complex. Our preeminent hope is for the book to invite further inquiries that will offer additional insights and spark polyphonic conversations that bridge disciplines, audiences, and discourses.

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Part I

THE LONG HISTORY OF A GLOBAL CITY



Chapter One

THE BORDER CROSSED US

Matt Gainer

On May 1, 2006 more than 1 million people took to the streets of Los Angeles. They were there to protest the House of Representatives passage of HR 4437: Border Protection, Antiterrorism, and Illegal Immigration Control Act of 2005. Their actions crippled the city.

As written, HR 4437 would have criminalized people who provide illegal aliens assistance and would have stripped asylum seekers of fundamental due process protections. It also would have introduced new penalties – including a minimum five-year prison term – for church workers, school-teachers, humanitarian workers, and others who sought to aid immigrants who are in the US illegally.

The tensions surrounding the issues HR 4437 addressed had been escalating for years. By the time of the 2006 “Day Without an Immigrant” protests, groups on both sides of the debate were well organized and deeply entrenched. Those who supported the bill argued it was a necessary step for securing American borders and stabilizing the demand on resources. Opponents believed it was unfair, inhumane, and extreme in the way it dealt with immigrants and their advocates. The latter groups sought legislation that would recognize basic rights, establish a guest-worker program, keep mixed-status families together, and create paths towards citizenship, among other things.

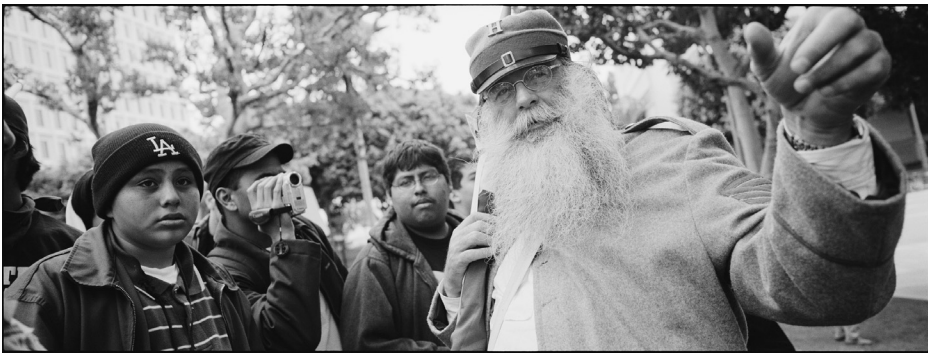


Plate 1.1 Los Angeles, 2006.



Plate 1.2 Los Angeles, May 2003.



Plate 1.3 Los Angeles, May 2003.



Plate 1.4 Los Angeles, May 2006.

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