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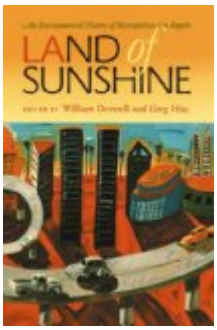

William Deverell, Greg Hise, eds.. *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles.* Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005. viii + 350 pp. $34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8229-4254-2.

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Any edited volume treads a fine metaphorical line between tapestry and crazy quilt. In the case of Los Angeles itself--its histories, topographies, cultures, micro-climates, and the profound pastiche of its urban form--the crazy quilt *is* the tapestry. So it is also with the current volume, an enlightening mix of research and writing about the historical relationship between people and their environment in Los Angeles.

William Deverell and Greg Hise have deliberately lined up a wide array of perspectives on and interests in the natural environment of the L.A. region. The book contributes to the scholarly discussion of urban sustainability, teasing out its patterned challenges and nascent potentials from a highly localized and predominantly historical viewpoint. The editors wholeheartedly orient themselves toward the burgeoning study of metropolitan nature: "how people transform nature in particular sites and how what is created in particular locales is generative for local and broader culture" (p. 4). They do this by enlisting the disciplinary contributions of geography, landscape architecture, biology, economics, anthropology, public policy, and literary non-fiction, as well as multiple branches of history: the social ecology of L.A. is getting the royal treatment.

The upshot of such a catholic approach is the opportunity to burrow beneath what are quickly becoming cliches in the canon of Southern California environmentalism. For instance, anthropologist L. Mark Raab calls into question the notion that native Californians lived in docile, spiritual harmony with the natural world until the arrival of Spanish settlers. He instead suggests that coastal natives faced their own crisis of resource intensification about a thousand years ago, and were long engaged in a dynamic struggle to balance food supplies with population demands. Similarly, when biologist Paula M. Schiffman details the destruction of the prairie ecosystem that accompanied European settlement, she also points out that the native Tongva people actively manipulated the environment through burning and selective seeding. This characterization of the native population as early resource managers trades an outdated romanticism for a historical realism that is both rehabilitative and instructive.

Other examples come through the examination of regional governance arrangements, from the adjudication of nineteenth-century land claims to the creation of twentieth-century flood control systems. While the annexation of California to the United States in 1846 clearly left Mexican rancho dons in a somewhat compromised position, economists Karen Clay and Werner Troesken make the strong case that the vast majority of land claims were legitimized under the Land Act of 1851, in a process that was lengthy and expensive for the federal government as much as anyone. Geographer Blake Gumprecht and historian Jared Orsi take up separate threads of the story of how the region's rivers came to be manipulated and channelized, but both take on the basic fallacy of flood control engineers as omniscient, omnipotent technocrats who singularly changed the face of the region's hydrology. Gumprecht details the thin historical memory and rapacious appetite for real estate returns that drove riverfront development patterns and subsequent demands for fail-safe flood control. Orsi finds primary fault with the engineers, but suggests that their comprehensive systems were every bit as chaotic and vulnerable as the set of environmental issues they supposedly solved.

Current policy dilemmas, as well as cultural and planning practices, are shown to have deep roots in the history of the region as well as the history of its immigrants. Public outcry over toxic and extractive industries has a long and colorful record in Los Angeles, as opposed to being a phenomenon of the late twentieth century. Chapters by Daniel Johnson, Paul Sabin, and Christopher G. Boone, on historical policies surrounding pollution, oil production, and environmental justice, respectively, suggest that since its inception, the city of Los Angeles has been embroiled in a messy balancing act between the benefits of economic growth and the burdens of environmental degradation. Another hot topic in recent planning practice with deep L.A. roots is the public-private partnership. Historian Tom Sitton uses the case of the Haynes Foundation to illustrate the mid-twentieth century role of the private sector in Los Angeles environmental planning. And geographers Unna Lassiter and Jennifer Wolch closely examine the attitudes of urban Chicana and Latina women towards animals to link the evolution of current fauna norms to their historical antecedents in other cultures and places.

Perhaps most enlivening are the volume's more artistic contributions, both graphic and literary, which serve to frame and conversationalize the book. Three folios open each of the three sections, titled "Analysis of Place," "Land Use and Governance," and "Nature and Culture." William McClung provides some of the first promotional photographs of early Los Angeles, highlighting the Edenic boosterism that so defined the city's growth. Landscape architect Terry Harkness mounts a series of site plans to mark the region's march from open landscape to dry farming to citrus orchards to suburban sprawl. And Michael Dawson examines the development of Southern California fine art photography as the interface between the realms of nature and culture.

Finally, two pieces of literary non-fiction provide a kind of street level sensibility. Pulitzer Prize winner John McPhee needs little introduction; his piece "Los Angeles Against the Mountains," included here, is a terrific example of the unique Southern California, city-versus-nature genre that later found a more alarmist prophet in Mike Davis. And Jennifer Price, who offers "Thirteen Ways of Seeing Nature in LA," takes up most directly and experientially the challenge of studying, thinking about, communicating and creating metropolitan nature.

Although the contributing authors are marked by significant differences in voice, research philosophies, topical interests, and writing styles, the result could not be better suited to a young, vibrant region that steadfastly defies centralized themes and obedient categories. What emerges is a thoughtful, nuanced consideration of

the relationship between people and the natural environment in Los Angeles as it has evolved over time. Charting this historical landscape in a deliberately non-linear fashion succeeds in providing an intellectually honest foundation for the question, Where do we go from here?

After the complexity wrought by sixteen far-reaching chapters, it would be unreasonable to expect any kind of a pat answer to this question. Exemplars and possible directions are more in order than a silver-bullet wrap up. In the epilogue, Robert Gottlieb proffers two stories of urban sustainability in Los Angeles: the movement towards watershed management and the creation of localized community food systems. In so doing, he concretizes the theme that implicitly ties these contributors together as students of metropolitan nature, the notion that urban populations interpret and enact their relationship to the natural world, in Los Angeles and elsewhere. How they do so is partially constrained by the structure of history, as explored in *Land of Sunshine*, and partially informed by how they continually choose to interact with the natural and social environment, choices that inevitably reduce to citizen activism and regional governance.