H-Net Reviews
in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Sarah S. Elkind. *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy: Business, Power, and the Environment in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. xii + 267 pp. $45.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8078-3489-3.

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Published on H-Environment (December, 2011)
Commissioned by David T. Benac

Retreat from Progressive Reform

Sarah S. Elkind has written an intriguing study that analyzes the powerful influence that business groups wielded over environmental policymaking in twentieth-century Los Angeles. Through five case studies dating roughly from 1920 to 1950, Elkind investigates how local business groups secured disproportionate influence in local politics and ultimately over federal policy. In so doing, these groups heralded a transition from the "guarded confidence in centralized government" of the Progressive Era and the New Deal to the "guarded confidence in the private sector and the antigovernment politics" that emerged from WWII to the present (pp. 7-8).

Each of Elkind's detailed studies tackles a particular environmental issue that played out over decades; hence, by necessity, the studies overlap chronologically. Chapter 1 traces how Los Angeles's leading business groups fought shoreline oil drilling and commercial development before World War II and then organized after the war to protect beaches as public recreational resources. The Shoreline Planning Association (SPA), which represented the interests of chambers of commerce and realtors that would benefit from increased tourism, worked closely with state and local officials and thereby established itself as the dominant representative of the public interest in the fight to expand public beach ownership in Los Angeles County. Unlike the scenarios in the more controversial case studies that follow, the political legitimacy of the SPA was not challenged, but the public beach campaign was nonetheless illustrative of the power structure of Los Angeles. In the second chapter, Elkind demonstrates how in the wake of Los Angeles's first major smog events in 1943, the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce (LAACC) established itself as the voice of the people–eclipsing other anti-smog organizations along the way–and provided information and policy recommendations for Los Angeles city and county officials. In this way, the pro-business LAACC was able to protect industry from complaints that might have led to regulation of emissions, even while other citizen groups called for stricter controls.

Chapter 3 examines the controversy over the construction of the Whittier Narrows Dam, a protracted struggle also investigated by Jared Orsi in *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles* (2004). Elkind qualifies this case study by explaining that, unlike the situations in the beach and smog chapters, chambers of commerce supported both sides, depending on the local costs and benefits of the dam. Yet this chapter also arguably makes the best case in the book for local power becoming transcribed into federal policy. Supported by Long Beach, the dam would protect much of the Los Angeles Basin and Long Beach Harbor from flooding, but at the cost of displacing the residents of the city of El Monte. Because Congress required local endorsement before authorizing the Army Corps of Engineers to proceed with the project, the dam struggle drove the corps into closer collaboration with powerful interests in Long Beach. Thus, while federal flood control reinforced local patterns of political influence, those same patterns helped determine federal policy.

The final two chapters, concerning the public power debate at Hoover Dam and the rejection of federal watershed-based planning, demonstrate how the "powerful political tropes" of fear of centralization and the appeal of local control worked to restrict federal authority (p. 114). Chapter 4 examines how Southern California Edison led a campaign against Hoover Dam because of the provision that the federal dam was required to generate public hydroelectric power. In combination with the objections of Arizona, Utah, and Nevada over the distribution of Colorado River water, Southern California Edison's attacks on public power forced dam sup-

porters to yield on the power issue to save the project. The compromise–by which Southern California Edison would split the power with the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power–was hailed not as a defeat of the public power movement, but rather as the epitome of public-private cooperation. Elkind's scope broadens further in chapter 5, which focuses on the President's Water Resources Policy Commission (PWRPC), created by Harry Truman in 1950. The commission supported river basin planning and the reorganization of the numerous institutions that managed the nation's rivers, but resistance to the recommendations of the PWRPC came from business groups and newspapers that feared interference with local projects and the loss of local political authority. Americans at mid-century, Elkind argues, were willing to forego more efficient government to preserve local influence, and–in the context of Cold War fears–the federal government itself now appeared to be a greater threat to democracy than corporate influence in politics.

Elkind's arguments are largely convincing, although the chapters are uneven in the extent to which they directly tie local business influence to federal policymaking. The earlier chapters tend to focus more on specific business-oriented groups and regional concerns, while the later chapters tend to emphasize national policy issues more, while giving less attention to the local business groups. But it would be unrealistic to expect a uniform approach to each case study, and Elkind takes great care to explain exactly how the various studies differ from, and complement, each other.

How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy makes an important contribution to the scholarship of American political culture during the middle decades of the twentieth century, as it investigates from a fresh perspective the decline of Progressive reform and the rise of modern pro-business conservatism. As one example, Elkind argues that the defeat of public power development at Hoover Dam is representative of "the nation's shift from commonwealth to corporate liberalism" (p. 182). Attempts to locate the causes and chronology of this shift have occupied several generations of scholars since the 1950s, a historiography that Elkind briefly reviews in the introductory chapter. The transition has been placed as early as the Progressive Era itself and as late as the eclipse of the New Deal, so it is perhaps not surprising that Elkind's case studies provide examples of this realignment from the 1920s to the 1950s. The groundbreaking contribution in this book is therefore not in a new argument about chronology, but rather about causation. Through the lens of Los Angeles, Elkind demonstrates how business groups gained their influence in local politics and how federal collaboration with local governments provided avenues for business to parlay that influence onto the national stage.

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Citation: Philip Garone. Review of Elkind, Sarah S., *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy: Business, Power, and the Environment in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles.* H-Environment, H-Net Reviews. December, 2011.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=33895

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