



Max Felker-Kantor. *Policing Los Angeles: Race, Resistance, and the Rise of the LAPD.* Justice, Power, and Politics Series. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2018. 392 pp. \$34.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4696-4683-1.

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After the Watts uprising of August 1965, black and ethnic Mexican community activists attributed the unrest to broad dissatisfaction with aggressive and racially biased policing practices. Max Felker-Kantor's *Policing Los Angeles* is dedicated to asking why, "after Watts exposed the racism at the heart of the police power, decades of pressure from an active anti-police abuse movement, and under the twenty-year rule of a liberal administration," the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) became more dominant in Los Angeles politics, culminating in an even larger unrest in 1992 after the acquittal of officers caught beating Rodney King on videotape (p. 3).

Felker-Kantor casts needed attention on the influence of two groups: liberal officials in the coalition of Mayor Tom Bradley (elected 1973), who pledged to restrain the worst abuses of police while maintaining the posture of a war on crime, and the LAPD itself, whose leaders shrewdly recognized that calls for reform represented opportunities to entrench the police department as primary defenders of an orderly society. Reformers and police leaders either co-opted or suppressed the voices of activists in African American, ethnic Mexican, and Central American immigrant communities who pointed out that the exercise of po-

lice power proceeded from a vision of order that maintained their subordination.

Felker-Kantor begins by establishing the hostile relationship of the LAPD to black and brown communities under the leadership of Chief William Parker (1950-66), the chief's view of civil rights and fair housing and employment protests as dangerous subversion, and the systemic abuses that incited the Watts rebellion. Community activists who worked to expose abuse and demand change were continually thwarted by the institutionalized power of the police chief and department. Under the city's charter, a civilian Board of Police Commissioners was essentially powerless; all investigations of officer conduct were conducted within the LAPD and all disciplinary authority was held by the chief. Abetted by the narrow focus of the McCone Commission on the rioting itself (rather than on the systemic relationship between the police and disadvantaged communities), Parker and his successors capitalized on imagery of destruction in Watts. By aggressively policing minority neighborhoods, the LAPD produced a geography of arrests that statistically supported Parker's view of minority communities as disorderly and dangerous, bolstered applications for federal grants to buy military-grade equip-

ment and rehearse paramilitary tactics, and headed off demands for civilian oversight.

Middle chapters of the book proceed from the 1973 election of Tom Bradley. The city's first (and to date only) black mayor, Bradley, a twenty-one-year veteran of the LAPD, won office building a coalition of white, Jewish, black, and Latino/a voters around a plausible claim to be the candidate who could fight crime *and* reform the LAPD. This, for both author and reader, is where the story gets interesting. Community relations reforms began in the late 1960s under Parker's successors Tom Reddin and Ed Davis. Crucially, while liberal city council members intended to increase positive contact and reduce misunderstanding between individual officers and civilians, LAPD community programs intensified the involvement of the LAPD in minority communities and became instruments of surveillance and identification of potentially criminal youth. These programs also served the LAPD as a shield against demands by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), and numerous local groups and coalitions for meaningful civilian oversight and discipline of abusive officers (Felker-Kantor provides a rich narrative of the growth and cross-pollination of these organizations that defies brief summarization here).

The "liberal law and order" regime pursued under Bradley's mayoralty was organized through a Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice Planning (MOCJP), which "wove the police into the liberal state" in ways that proved significant as the city became more ethnically diverse but economically polarized by cycles of deindustrialization and conversion to a financial and service economy (p. 87). As MOCJP secured grant money for social service and educational agencies to partner with law enforcement, it adopted the prerogatives of the police to sort and classify youth in terms of potential criminality. Identifying hard cases for detention while diverting redeemable youth to social

work increased youth incarceration and rationalized the differential treatment of white youth and youth of color. Most glaringly, the Los Angeles Unified School District, which disproportionately served low-income youth of color, transferred disciplinary policy from educators to a police force that grew to more than four hundred officers by 1977.

The liberal expansion of social services, surveillance, and identification enabled the parallel expansion of repressive police power, culminating in the formation of CRASH (Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums) units in 1973. CRASH married the paramilitary techniques of Parkerist policing with the advanced surveillance and record keeping of the liberal social service state. Ostensibly created to fight street gangs, CRASH units indiscriminately swept up youth under the presumptions that certain neighborhoods were gang-infested and that youth in those neighborhoods were effectively pre-offenders, creating a caste of black and brown youth whose records of contact with police would justify their treatment as threats to society. Felker-Kantor effectively argues that this infrastructure was in place well before the crack cocaine epidemic of the 1980s, though that crisis spurred the expansion of CRASH policing and the ubiquitous police hassles leading to the rebellion of 1992.

The attention paid in *Policing Los Angeles* to liberal law and order is particularly valuable to current discussions of mass incarceration, the school-to-prison pipeline, and the militarization of police, national patterns the LAPD pioneered between 1965 and 1992. Felker-Kantor raises pointed (and possibly uncomfortable) questions for his readers. How deeply have police forces woven their interests into the fabric of urban society? Are ruptures in that fabric amenable to the kinds of patching liberal reformers have proposed? And, if not, how can the alternative visions of social order put forward by activists be implemented?

Felker-Kantor also demonstrates impressive archival breadth. Part of the police power he describes is control of information against public scrutiny. As he points out in his introduction, he was unable to use official LAPD records because the department refused his Public Records Act requests (these requests were included in a successful request by the ACLU to open LAPD records, which may be of tremendous use to future historians of policing, racism, and urban politics). He therefore assembled archival materials from multiple smaller collections, showing, in his words, “the extent to which the police power had expanded into every facet of social and political life” (p. 17).

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