

of “particular and parochial meaning” advanced by current leaders in the name of fighting a war against terrorism (p. 17). Michael Nevin Willard strikes a similarly political note in his helpful survey of recent scholarship about Los Angeles, communicating his concern that current politicians “would return us to the ‘American’ identity that overshadowed [Carey] McWilliams’ insights in order to dismiss current multiculturalism as unpatriotic” (p. 336). This explicitly liberal political perspective orients many of the essays and sustains the mission of American studies to affect as much as study American culture.

Overall, *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* captures the vitality and variety of Los Angeles studies specifically and American studies generally. If the different disciplinary approaches sometimes make for a disjointed and disorienting reading experience, they do convey the complexity of Los Angeles and the breadth of the field. What remains largely neglected or simplified in the authors’ treatment of the social, cultural, and spatial meanings of Los Angeles are the lives of those with power and privilege. The authors’ preference for the experiences and spaces of ethno-racial minorities is a welcomed alternative to a top-down portrait, yet in focusing so little on the cultures of those who continue to control money and resources, those cultures become mere caricatures. Furthermore, the full implications of Los Angeles’ intercultural, mestizo character are underdeveloped and unexplained. With that said, this collection provides a lively sample of the latest scholarship that critics and fans of Los Angeles alike will enjoy.

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LONG BEACH ARCHITECTURE: *The Unexpected Metropolis*. By Cara Mullio and Jennifer M. Volland. (Santa Monica, California: Hennessey + Ingalls, 2004. 276 pp. \$39.95.) Reviewed by Sean Smith.

Until relatively recently, the history of Los Angeles and Southern California was largely the domain of amateur historians, local historical societies, and enthusiastic boosters. These histories, rooted in exceptionalist arguments, tended to be celebratory or to reinforce popular myths about Southern California. But for the past decade and a half, historians and other scholars have been actively reexamining the history of Los Angeles and Southern California.

In 1996, the publication of *Rethinking Los Angeles*, edited by Michael Dear, H. Eric Shockman, and Greg Hise, and *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Allen Scott and Edward Soja, marked for many the beginning of a “discernable L.A. School of urban studies.”<sup>1</sup> These books, along with more

<sup>1</sup> Michael Nevin Willard, “Nuestra Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004): 810.

recent scholarship, explored Los Angeles as a stage where race, gender, class, and culture meet, creating unique identities and an engaging and complex history. As Michael Willard writes in his 2004 review essay, "Nuestra Los Angeles," in the special Los Angeles issue of the *American Quarterly*, this new scholarship "considers culture as emanating from and engaged with social structure, showing the importance of establishing networks and engagements with place through culture to enable the affirmation of diverse identities."<sup>ii</sup> This approach offers new ways of historicizing and reinterpreting the histories of Los Angeles and Southern California. Although Los Angeles has been the center of this work's scholarly attention, scholars are beginning to apply a similar analytical framework to the regions surrounding the city.

While Southern California cities like Lakewood, neighborhoods in Orange County, and even communities like Southgate have garnered attention from historians in recent years, an examination of Los Angeles' often-overshadowed sister city, Long Beach, is missing from the historiography of Southern California. The fifth-largest city in California, Long Beach, when mentioned at all, is treated as a footnote or historical aside. Cara Mullio and Jennifer M. Volland's *Long Beach Architecture: The Unexpected Metropolis*, attempts to correct this oversight. Mullio and Volland contend that for too long, Long Beach and other "second cities" (here they name Tacoma, WA; Oakland, CA; and Brooklyn, NY) "have been relegated to a scorned existence, lying on the margins and unable to emerge as their own entities" (pp. 14–15). Breaking the typical "second city" mold with its unique architecture and other "various contributions," Long Beach, the authors argue, has forged its own identity worthy of study.

Unfortunately, this ambitious project falls short of its intended goals. Missing from the book is any historical analysis or argument. In fact, the authors seem to ignore the analytical framework provided by recent studies of Southern California architecture, such as William McClung's well-received *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles*. Nor do the authors engage in what George Sánchez calls the "exciting proliferation of cultural studies perspectives that have come to characterize the field of American Studies [and history]."<sup>iii</sup> Instead, in the short introductory text (forty-one pages broken into ten small chapters), the authors offer a typical chronological history of the city, including a brief glimpse of Long Beach's Native American prehistory and its Spanish and Mexican roots; then they move into a longer description of the important men and architects who put their stamp on the city in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

In some instances there are glaring omissions in the authors' discussion of architecture and its historical context in the city. For example, the California bungalow, a prominent feature in older Long Beach neighborhoods, receives scant attention. Readers learn merely that the city took an overall approach to design that made "the city . . . a leader in styles of Swiss Chalet, Bungalow, Aeroplane and Spanish" (p. 27). Equally short shrift is given to the city's diverse post-war suburban developments, which are eschewed in favor of a discussion of neighboring Lakewood.

Mullio and Volland are at their best in the last three sections of the introduction,

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid., 834.

<sup>iii</sup> George J. Sanchez and Raúl Homero Villa, "Los Angeles Studies and the Future of Urban Culture," *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004): 505.

where they explore the city of Long Beach's penchant for razing historic buildings and its "permissive zoning [laws] and development without regard to the surrounding environs" (p. 43). Beginning in the 1970s, Long Beach residents organized against the city's hasty redevelopment plans, and, in many cases, newly formed residents groups and preservationist societies were born. These groups, the authors write, have kept Long Beach from following the "fate of Miami Beach, or even Santa Monica, sacrificing unobstructed views in the name of profitability and pleasure for a select few" (p. 43). These sections promise to explore a very important aspect of the city's history, but instead of an in-depth analysis of city planning and neighborhood activism, we get an "us-against-them" narrative that never offers the historical background for these controversies; nor do the authors sufficiently explain why this controversy makes Long Beach unique or significant to the history of urban development and planning in Southern California.

The rest of the book is dedicated to a visually compelling and vividly illustrated catalog of the city's significant architecture. The one hundred projects highlighted include historic buildings both extant and razed, the works of pioneering architects who experimented in Long Beach, as well as more recent buildings, such as the Long Beach Aquarium of the Pacific and a proposed redesign of the Gerald Desmond Bridge. Here the authors do a fine job of documenting key architectural sites, offering a useful guide to the public history of Long Beach and future preservation projects. The authors include both residential and commercial architecture in their catalog of varied buildings, but more often than not the residential buildings that are highlighted are far from the modest bungalows and suburban developments that make up the built environment of the city. If architecture defines a community, its aspirations, its hopes and dreams, should not the most modest of buildings also be important to the understanding of a city and its past?

The descriptions that accompany the colorful and glossy illustrations offer little analysis of the buildings or property. What is offered reads like the celebratory city booster or historical society-sponsored pamphlets, which the authors denigrate in their preface as "limited and narrow-scoped information focusing on a particular architect or a specific period" (p. 4). From these brief descriptions, the reader learns, for example, that the Cheney/Delaney house is one of "only a few examples of pure Streamline Moderne architecture, and is an exceptional representation of this design aesthetic. Constructed in 1937 by an unknown architect, this house stands apart from its more traditional neighbors showing a progressive modernism that heralds the future" (p. 158). The rest of this blurb lists materials used in the construction of the house and porthole-like windows. Architectural detail, rather than historical context, informs the text. While the authors open their work with a claim to present a more complete analysis of Long Beach history than can be found elsewhere, they end up replicating the very booster mentality of glossy coffee table books they criticize.

Despite its shortcomings, the book offers a valuable look at the visual record of the city. But for those historians, students, or readers interested in urban growth or the suburbanization of Los Angeles' satellite regions, the book offers little that is new.

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