

**The Development of Los Angeles City Government.  
An Institutional History**

edited by Hynda L. Rudd et al.

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*Reviewed by Volker Janssen\**

A decade in the making, this massive collection of focused institutional histories and historical overviews seeks to fill a serious gap in the steadily growing literature on Los Angeles: the lack of a contemporary examination of both structure and development of the city's government. Following an introduction by senior editor Tom Sitton and a prologue by Doyce B. Nunis, Jr. on the history of Los Angeles government before its incorporation in 1850, the essays are grouped into five sections. The first three include contributions on

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organization and core function, infrastructure and land use, and social welfare. The essays in the last two sections leave the departmental focus behind and put the city into spatial, demographic, economic, and local and global political context.

Readers may want to start with Tom Sitton's introduction and Raphael Sonenshein's epilogue, which offer a handy synopsis of the overarching themes in the city's governmental history: the perennial effort at reform and insulation from "special interests," but also the city's systemic conservatism; the weakness of political parties; the lack of grassroots pressures despite the popularity of direct democracy; the importance of departments over that of charismatic politicians; the importance of a business-driven growth policy; and last but not least: the long-time abhorrence of racial diversity. Between Sitton's and Sonenshein's bookend essays lies a plethora of detail: The first section on organization and core function includes James W. Ingram's description of the city's relentless efforts at perfecting its charter. In the process, he provides some fine examples for the persistent progressive quest of "structural" and "developmental" reformers for purifying city governance from undue political influences such as the Southern Pacific Railroad (pp. 8-9). Following a similar trajectory, Marc and Paul Girard tell a story of progress in the city's efforts at efficiency and economy in the public sector by modeling itself on the ideal of a private business. In contrast, Shauna Clark's essay on city finances is a history of the rise and fall of financial self-determination between the "Home Rule" charter of 1890 and Proposition 13 in 1978. Entrusted with the rather broad topic of "Justice in Los Angeles," Gordon Bakken dips into the city's experience with water rights, liability and tort, the power of the city attorney, the role of women in Los Angeles courts. While Todd Gaydowski's essay on the fire department, focuses on the importance of technological and personnel change, the history of the Los Angeles Police Department, as told by Sandra Bass and John T. Donovan, perfectly illustrates the pitfalls of the city's quest for protection from corruption and special interests. The political independence and professionalization of the police force also insulated them from the communities they patrolled, the consequences of which—Watts in 1965, South Central in 1992—we are all familiar with.

The contributions on infrastructure and land use in city