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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
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Bringing the Beach to Los Angeles: The Politics and Environment of the Southern California
Coast, 1880-1970

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in History

by

Alexander Bartholomew Jacoby

Dissertation Committee:
Professor David Igler, Chair
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2017

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Bringing Beach to Los Angeles: The Environment and Politics of the Southern California Coast,
1890-1970

By

Alexander Bartholomew Jacoby

Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, Irvine, 2017

Professor David Igler, Chair

This dissertation examines the historical development of the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay from the 1880s through the twentieth century within the context of the growth of metropolitan Los Angeles. While many see beaches and their popularity as timeless, the coast underwent dramatic transformations over much of the twentieth century. Residents and pleasure seekers embraced the once-unfamiliar landscape and shed perceptions of it as distant and dangerous. The urban shores are in fact the result of widespread cultural change and extensive physical transformations. Building the beach proved tremendously profitable for the principal agents of change, including developers, politicians, planners, and corporations. Coastal promoters and capitalist enterprises not only built recreational attractions and residential developments, but also cultivated a year-round lifestyle of coastal leisure. Residents across California eventually voted to protect the beaches and this lifestyle with environmental regulations and 1972's Coastal Zone Conservation Act, finally halting decades of rapid change.

Bridging urban, environmental, and cultural history, this study analyzes both the political economy of coastal development and changing ideas about leisure and recreation to explain the origins of this understudied landscape. This breadth required sources including government

documents, corporate records, promotional literature and ephemera, oceanographic studies, and material culture. Beaches not only mirrored urban changes in Los Angeles, reflecting the rapidly growing metropolis's desires, but also fabricated critical components of idealized regional identity. The popular vision of coastal idyll was rooted in a history of exclusions that championed the beachgoer as white and middle-class. The sands provided an important place in Southern California for public performances of identity, class, and race. Examining the growth of the beach reveals a largely unmapped feature in Los Angeles history and a pivotal force in the promotion of Southern California's coastal lifestyle of leisure.

Introduction: From Aliso to Zuma

“The water off Malibu is neither as clear nor as tropically colored as the water off La Jolla. The beaches at Malibu are neither as white nor as wide as the beach at Carmel. The hills are scrubby and barren, infested with bikers and rattlesnakes, scarred with cuts and old burns and new R.V. parks. For these and other reasons Malibu tends to astonish and disappoint those who have never before seen it, and yet its very name remains, in the imagination of people all over the world, a kind of shorthand for the easy life.”

-- Joan Didion¹

The beaches near Los Angeles might not seem particularly unique. The topography and climate resembles coastal zones across the globe in Australia, South Africa, Chile, and the Levant. Even more countries possess shoreline devoted to leisure and recreation. Further, as Joan Didion describes above, the beauty of Los Angeles' beaches pale in comparison to other stretches of California's scenic shores. The risk of mudslides and wildfires is higher in Southern California. The Pacific Ocean's waters in the Santa Monica Bay are often chilly for bathing while perilous riptides lurk beneath the waves. The wide sandy shores are home to sand fleas and sharks. Fog and cloudy marine layers often obscure sunshine. When the temperature cooperates, however, hordes of Angelenos quickly descend on the shore causing congestion, overcrowding, and pollution. The beaches deserve to be seen as a rather quotidian edge to the bustling metropolis.

Few familiar with the beach actually described it with the negativity of Didion. For residents of Los Angeles and beyond, associations with this coastal landscape typically verge on the effusive. The beach became the premier outdoor space in the region for leisure and recreation along its wide sands. Cruising to the beach by bicycle, automobile, bus, or trolley invariably led

¹ Joan Didion, “Quiet Days in Malibu,” in *The White Album* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1979), 209.

to a fun-filled day in the sun. Some adults wistfully remember playing in the surf and building sand castles amidst permanent sunshine and warmth. The sculpted physiques of tanned beach regulars were captivating. Boardwalks, pleasure piers, and amusement parks served as a social proving grounds for generations of teenagers across the region. Angelenos enthusiastically embraced the metropolis's western edge.

From Aliso to Zuma, southern California's beaches became among the most iconic and recognizable landscapes in the world during the 20th century. Once-remote coastline steadily eclipsed the cultural fame of other stretches of the Atlantic and Gulf coasts. Sunshine, sandy beaches, tanned bodies, and surfboards quickly elicited images of a well-known place and its idealized lifestyle in the minds of Americans. Coastal communities like Malibu, Santa Monica, Venice, or Redondo Beach saturated international consciousness as littoral nirvanas where residents played and worked amidst leisurely repose. In these fantasies, middle-class families and model children seemingly just appeared in suburban neighborhoods like a bounty from the Pacific Ocean. The beach embodied the ubiquitous notion of a good life of pleasure, recreation, and materialism amidst the sunny sublime in the minds of not only Angelenos, but Americans and others around the globe.

Potent symbolism did not always define Southern California's beaches. In the late 19th century, largely empty and foreboding shores merged with the ocean. Separated from downtown Los Angeles by serpentine wagon trails and later a few rail lines, the coastal zone was sparsely developed with scattered seaside bathhouses and seasonal tents on the sands. The journey to the coast often took most of the day. Visitors emulated the existing cultural norms of summer seaside holidays while dressed in conservative garb to protect fashionably pale skin. Few men ventured into the waves for surf bathing because few of them could swim. Existing descriptions

of the region's development do not adequately explain the coming dramatic transformation of Southern California's sands over less than a century. This study combines urban, cultural, and environmental history and poses the questions: How did the beach slowly come to resemble its current incarnation? How did public opinion dramatically change? What actors were behind this successful makeover and how did they successfully navigate the complex waters of California's political economy?

This dissertation argues that the production of modern Southern California's sandy edge was far from a spontaneous materialization of utopic visions. Los Angeles' famous shores actually emerged from a more nuanced and hybrid landscape produced between roughly 1880 and 1970 by popular culture, economics, daily life, and political negotiations. This landscape repeatedly transformed as a growing desire for coastal leisure bulldozed physical impediments and cultural anxieties. Tropes of sunshine, accessibility, and permanence came to define Southern California's symbolic landscape in spite of erosion, economic downturn, and a variety of infrastructural challenges. Unlike many other beaches, however, this year-round space pivoted away from vacationers' desires towards the needs of residents. Recreation took precedent over industrial, agricultural, and military uses as possible development paths. The beach became a canvas for Los Angeles' landscape of idyll, reflecting the rapidly growing metropolis's desires and dreams.

The makeover of the beach was a conscious effort by a motivated and affluent group to continuously revamp the sands to appeal to Angelenos over time. The group, composed almost entirely of white men, carefully constructed and contorted the existing landscape into a sellable strand for personal gain. Their actions were not a triumphant narrative of human conquest over nature, but of the promotion of place. These boosters, bankers, and subdividers built financial

empires with an onslaught of railroads, pleasure piers, and coastal communities. A later generation of corporations, planners, and politicians enjoyed both electoral and economic benefits from public works projects, public-private partnerships, and mass consumerism. Many of these actors genuinely believed their efforts improved coastal leisure, as attendance and popularity steadily grew, but these benefits often proved secondary to mercenary manipulations for political and monetary capital. The beach was the city's physical edge, but represented a pivotal terrain in the region's political economy.

The extensive creation of this landscape of leisure came at a steep environmental and human cost. The ramifications of this focused pursuit often came long after interested parties had cashed in, forsaking long-term planning for quick profits. Broad sandy beaches replaced sand dunes, lagoons, wetlands, and tide pools. Piers, harbors, groins, and jetties caused erosion while residential development and parking lots replaced coastal chaparral. Beach building also razed and repressed existing communities along the coast as the urbanized environment resulted in the adoption of urban attitudes. In the early 1900s, the City of Santa Monica razed a Japanese fishing village in the name of beach expansion. In the 1910s and 1920s, African Americans faced repeated discrimination at the beach as municipalities took legal action against black beach resorts and white residents resorted to intimidation and violence. Even as racial barriers declined in the postwar period, beach building augured the whims of an idealized middle-class while continuing to dismiss most Angelenos. The beach provided another place in Los Angeles for public performances of class and race. The narrative took unexpected turn in the 1970s, however, when California's diverse electorate decided to preserve the existing coastal status quo by creating a coastal regulatory agency and dramatically limiting development.

This study examines changing understandings of place. Diverse groups of visitors to the beach over many decades felt drawn to the coast despite social, economic, and cultural realities. While the experiences of their visits dramatically varied over time, they all shared a common pursuit of pleasure amid the sand and sea. Coastal visitors throughout the century stuck their feet in the tides or watched a picturesque sunset. This place is an artifact of social and historical production and the result of the spatial amalgam of the perceived, the experienced, and the imagined. As ever more Angelenos and Americans visited these beaches, the continuing social investment into the landscape accrued in importance. Looking at this place reveals a dialogue between changing customs and habits and space.

Coastal leisure in Southern California is part of a larger story of the history of vacationing and leisure in the United States.² Relaxing trips away from home was the domain of the affluent social elites during much of the 19th century. Wealthy vacationers often spent summers at fashionable resorts outside urban areas. Some less affluent Americans would only attend religious gatherings, but trips were not seen as escape from routine doldrums. During the latter part of the century, however, ever more Americans ventured to the beach, countryside, mountains, and lakes. These places offered not only aesthetic pleasure, but the potential for cultural gains and healthful rejuvenation. Some guests enjoyed the views of sublime vistas in the morning and educational lectures in the evenings. Other guests believed in medical climatology and other place-based pseudoscience, ensuring the popularity of an array of locations in the

² For a general overview of tourism studies, see John Urry, *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Societies* (London: Sage, 1990); John K Walton, *Histories of Tourism: Representation, Identity, and Conflict* (Clevedon; Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2005); Eric G. E Zuelow, *A History of Modern Tourism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

American West because of its milder climate and dry air. Southern California proved to be a particularly popular destination in the late 19th century for those with tuberculosis.³

This growth of leisure stemmed from rapid social and economic changes during the late 19th century. Americans found themselves facing a daily grind from the new rhythms of life in urban and industrial areas, but some also found they had more disposable income to spend on leisure. Small businessmen, corporate employees, and artisans overcame Victorian views of vacationing as wasteful, immodest, or self-indulgent. Like residential patterns, Cindy Aron argues that this democratization of leisure became an important cultural component of the creation of the middle class during the period.⁴ Particularly between 1870 and 1900, vacation destinations and a desire for leisure developed in tandem. Similarly, a wide array of recreational activities grew in popularity during the same period as bodybuilding, bicycles, and baseball also became hobbies and excuses for outdoor activities for millions of Americans.⁵ Sports also

³ For more on 19th century leisure and vacationing, see Cindy Sondik Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Dona Brown, *Inventing New England: Regional Tourism in the Nineteenth Century* (Smithsonian Institution, 2014); Catherine Cocks, *Doing the Town: The Rise of Urban Tourism in the United States, 1850-1915* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); John F. Kasson, *Amusing the Million: Coney Island at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978); John F. Sears, *Sacred Places: American Tourist Attractions in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1989). On California vacations, see Kevin Starr, *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). On vacationing for health, see Emily Abel, *Suffering in the Land of Sunshine: A Los Angeles Illness Narrative* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2006); John E. Baur, *The Health Seekers of Southern California, 1870-1900* (San Marino: Huntington Library Press, 1959); Linda Nash, *Inescapable Ecologies: A History of Environment, Disease, and Knowledge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Kenneth Thompson, "Insalubrious California: Perception and Reality," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 59, no. 1 (March 1, 1969): 50–64; Kenneth Thompson, "Climatotherapy in California," *California Historical Quarterly* 50, no. 2 (June 1, 1971): 111–30.

⁴ Aron, *Working at Play*, 3–7. My understandings of the middle-class and identity was also heavily informed by Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); Richard Lyman Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage, 1993); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Professor Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Kristin L. Hoganson, *Consumers' Imperium: The Global Production of American Domesticity, 1865-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007); Margaret S Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990).

⁵ While many works on sports are more concerned with constructions of race and gender, ideas about middle-class leisure can also be found. See Harold Fisher, *Recreation and the Sea* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1997); John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in*

promised rejuvenation and relaxation like trips to the beach or excursions into the waves. By the beginning of the 20th century, leisure and recreation had become accepted parts of daily life in the rapidly growing mass-consumption marketplace.

In California and across the American West, the promotion of vacationing and a leisurely life was the work of regional boosters, developers, and railroad companies. Snaking tendrils of railroad ties seemingly grew in all direction in the West during this period, presenting wide swaths of newly accessible land for development. While infrastructure growth was critical to the rise of leisure and vacationing, Americans also had to be sold on the allure of largely undeveloped places in California and elsewhere. Many historians studied the role of boosterism in creating alluring myths of place that leveraged both nostalgia and prejudice.⁶ In Los Angeles, boosters drew on romantic myths of the Mexican past and quiescent laborers, salubrious Mediterranean topography, and endless acres of citrus groves.⁷ Migrants dreamed of an Arcadian paradise and endless bounty. Publications like Charles Nordhoff's *California For Health, Pleasure, and Residence* or Charles Lummis' *Land of Sunshine* spread this imagery across the

America (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001); Clifford Putney, *Muscular Christianity: Manhood and Sports in Protestant America, 1880-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁶ For the promotion of California, see Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); K Kurutz, *California Calls You: The Art of Promoting the Golden State, 1870 to 1940* (Sausalito: Windgate Press, 2000); Earl Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Knopf, 1957); James Vance, "California and the Search for the Ideal," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 62, no. 2 (1972): 185. For more general boosterism of the American West, see Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990); David Wrobel, *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002).

⁷ Perhaps the most iconic and influential study on promoting the city has been Carey McWilliams, *Southern California: An Island on the Land* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pierce, 1946). Other works on Los Angeles boosterism that have followed include Clark Davis, "From Oasis to Metropolis: Southern California and the Changing Context of American Leisure," *Pacific Historical Review* 61, no. 3 (May 1, 1992): 357–86; Dydia DeLyster, *Ramona Memories: Tourism and the Shaping of Southern California* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); William Alexander McClung, *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Douglas Cazaux Sackman, *Orange Empire: California and the Fruits of Eden* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Tom Zimmerman, *Paradise Promoted: The Booster Campaign That Created Los Angeles, 1870-1930* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2008).

country.⁸ The coercive forces of promotion certainly sold invented visions of place for profit, but it is also hard to deny that sunshine and genuine potential for affluence also drew millions of Americans to Southern California.⁹

Leisure and tourism only grew in the aftermath of World War II, remaining intrinsically linked to constructions of class. Trips to scenic destinations continued to be a staple of the middle-class families as tourism indelibly altered the landscape of California and the American West.¹⁰ Some historians, most notably Lizabeth Cohen, argued that the midcentury American affluence created a social economy rooted in mass consumption.¹¹ The consumption of specific forms of leisure became markers of social class. Like vacationing, a lifestyle of carefree play and recreation came to define California and beyond through the 1950s.¹² During the decade, important landmarks of popular culture including Disneyland and Dodger Stadium also opened.

⁸ Charles Nordhoff, *California: For Health, Pleasure, and Residence* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1872); Charles Fletcher Lummis, *The Land of Sunshine* (F.A. Pattee, 1894). Similar booster publications also include Abram Marvin Shew, *California as a Health Resort* (Hartford: Press of The Case, Lockwood & Brainard Company, 1884); Benjamin Cummings Truman, *Semi-Tropical California: Its Climate, Healthfulness, Productiveness, and Scenery* (San Francisco: A. L. Bancroft & Co., 1874); Benjamin Truman, *Homes and Happiness in the Golden State of California ...*, 2d ed. (San Francisco: H.S. Crocker & Co., 1884).

⁹ While the influence of both forces on drawing Americans to Southern California is undeniable, the varying levels of agency recognized by scholars reflects a divide in Los Angeles historiography between “sunshine” (optimism) and “noir” (cynicism). For a sunny reading, see any of Kevin Starr’s sweeping *Americans and the California Dream* series or Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, Third Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). For a darker reading, see Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (London: Vintage, 1992); Mike Davis, *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999). Davis played an important role in formulating this idea. More recent scholarship, however, has sought to move beyond this somewhat simplistic binary.

¹⁰ On postwar tourism, see Richard K Popp, *The Holiday Makers: Magazines, Advertising, and Mass Tourism in Postwar America* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012); Hal Rothman and Hal K. Rothman, *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2000); Susan Sessions Rugh, *Are We There Yet?: The Golden Age of American Family Vacations* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008).

¹¹ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers’ Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Vintage Books, 2003).

¹² While many important studies of Los Angeles touch on recreation, but few work on the subject have been written. Lawrence Culver’s *The Frontier of Leisure* explores how the promotion of a lifestyle of recreation, beach tourism, and bungalow homes came to define Southern California through the 1950s and led to a national democratization of leisure. Culver largely overlooks Los Angeles’ urban beaches, however, instead focusing on the resort community of Santa Catalina Island. Lawrence Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure: Southern California and the Shaping of Modern America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

Historians argue these leisurely places exemplified the shifting cultural linkages between class, race, and identity in Southern California.¹³ The beach was another important consumptive landscape as culture industries exported an idealized lifestyle to markets across the country. As recreation became a year-round activity, Angelenos' trips to the shore increasingly often focused on more expensive hobbies like surfing and sailing. While leisure and recreation were no longer exclusive domains as in the previous century, places of fun in Los Angeles continued to define cultural notions of class.

Postwar Southern California's popularity went beyond music, movies, and surfboards as the city's diffused form became emblematic of rising suburbanization across the country. Los Angeles' urban contours had long defied the prototypical model of concentric rings of decreasing density common in 19th century industrial cities. Historians have paid particularly close attention to the geography and form of the metropolitan region of Los Angeles. Scholars once saw the city as an unplanned and "fragmented metropolis," cannibalizing its form and memory for the sake of breakneck growth.¹⁴ Local municipalities proved an easy target to fault for seemingly belated efforts at urban planning.¹⁵

¹³ On Disneyland, see Eric Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); John M Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture after 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Kirse Granat May, *Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture, 1955-1966* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002). On Dodger Stadium, see Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*; John H. M. Laslett, *Shameful Victory: The Los Angeles Dodgers, the Red Scare, and the Hidden History of Chavez Ravine* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015); Jerald Podair, *City of Dreams: Dodger Stadium and the Birth of Modern Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017).

¹⁴ Erasures and fragmentation in Los Angeles was first introduced in Robert Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967). The idea was refined and popularized in Norman Klein, *The History of Forgetting: Los Angeles and the Erasure of Memory* (London: Verso, 1997); Kropp, *California Vieja*; Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*.

¹⁵ While many municipalities did fail at instituting growth policies and adequate planning, efforts of residential property owners and businesses often proved more contrarian as groups opposed zoning and regulation. See Todd Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles: The All-Year Club of Southern California, 1921-1941," *Southern California Quarterly* 89, no. 4 (December 2007): 391-415; Marc A Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders: The American Real Estate Industry and Urban Land Planning* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

More recent work, however, demonstrates evidence of clear efforts at regional planning, clarifying far more complex realities through a variety of approaches. The shaping of the city's urban form often resulted from nuanced negotiations, not a single agency or actor. Scholars argue economic and political factors drove industrial corporations, real estate developers, and business groups, like the Chamber of Commerce, towards extensive coordination in planning communities.¹⁶ Governmental actors became increasingly empowered over the decades, but private capital remained an influential force through the 20th century. Other work documents how engineers and technocrats not only developed water and transportation systems, but also played an important role in planning the built environment of the city. These recent works stress engineers often had far more political awareness and savvy than early technical analyses suggested.¹⁷ Histories of specific neighborhoods and groups within the often-hegemonic force of urban expansion are the most common approach. Different ethnic communities and underprivileged groups repeatedly found themselves powerless against these complex systems

¹⁶ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); 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); Becky M. Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Lee M. A. Simpson, *Selling the City: Gender, Class, and the California Growth Machine, 1880-1940* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004). For more general information on the corporate culture in Los Angeles, see Clark Davis, *Company Men: White-Collar Life and Corporate Cultures in Los Angeles, 1892-1941* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); James Findley, "The Economic Boom of the 'Twenties in Los Angeles" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Claremont Graduate University, 1958); William B. Friedrichs, *Henry E. Huntington and the Creation of Southern California* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1992); Robert Gottlieb and Irene Wolt, *Thinking Big: The Story of the Los Angeles Times, Its Publishers, and Their Influence on Southern California* (New York: Putnam, 1977); John H. M. Laslett, *Sunshine Was Never Enough: Los Angeles Workers, 1880-2010* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

¹⁷ On fresh water in Los Angeles, see William Deverell and Tom Sitton, *Water and Los Angeles: A Tale of Three Rivers, 1900-1941* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017); Steven P. Erie and Harold David Brackman, *Beyond Chinatown: The Metropolitan Water District, Growth, and the Environment in Southern California* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006); Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: Its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001); Jared Orsi, *Hazardous Metropolis: Flooding and Urban Ecology in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). On transportation, see Jeremiah B. C. Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia: Dreams and Visions of the Modern Metropolis in Jazz Age Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

driving change in the city.¹⁸ Los Angeles was unquestionably the result of careful planning despite gangling growth from its urban core to its coastlines. Beach building involved similar regional logic as a wide variety of protagonists methodically drove changes to the popular scenery.

Los Angeles' urban form has also been particularly notable for the lack of public or green space amidst its expansive boundaries, despite its reputation for recreation. Studying the beach offers insight into the planning and sculpting of a rare public place.¹⁹ Throughout the 20th century, city planners and de facto leaders like the Chamber of Commerce repeatedly discussed plans to inject more nature in the metropolis. Despite the presence of plans, many of these environmental projects were shelved due to political, racial and economic realities. Greg Hise and Bill Deverell have described the political failure of the 1930 Olmsted Plan for Los Angeles, which would have expanded park and beach space, as symptomatic of these failed efforts to green Los Angeles.²⁰ Beaches presented a more unique situation, however, and generally defy existing statewide narrative on land use or environmental protection.²¹ While over the years

¹⁸ Daniel Hurewitz, *Bohemian Los Angeles: And the Making of Modern Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁹ Geographer Ronald Davidson has repeatedly argued the beach should be seen as a public space. See Ronald Davidson, "Coast Stories: Narratives and Identity in an Overlooked Los Angeles Public Space" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003); Ronald A. Davidson and J. Nicholas Entrikin, "The Los Angeles Coast as a Public Place," *Geographical Review* 95, no. 4 (October 1, 2005): 578–93. For a more sociological approach, see Robert B. Edgerton, *Alone Together: Social Order on an Urban Beach* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979).

²⁰ Hise and Deverell's work offers fascinating insight into a vision of a very different metropolis at a key point in regional planning. The admittedly brief book somewhat overlooks the role of the plan's proposed expansion of beach space instead focusing parks and parkways. While the book emphasizes the failure of the plan, the proposed beach expansions are largely legible today. Discussion of ocean byways and larger coastal parks have continued into the 21st century, while other parts of the Olmsted plan seem forgotten with time. See William Deverell and Greg Hise, *Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

²¹ Existing narrative about the environment and land use in 20th century California is often focuses on unpeopled and "natural" landscapes rather than the peopled, urban beaches of Los Angeles. Too often these works describe

funding was stunted, erosion caused disrepair, and beach space decreased relative to population, Southern California's beaches still received attention by political and economic interests. The potential appeal of the coastline encompassed a broad demographic, far more expansive than neighborhood or even regional parks. Perhaps more important, beaches functioned as a lynchpin in the regional leisure economy that was seen as far too valuable to abandon. Community leaders had little interest in preserving nature or expanding green space, but the benefits of the beaches shifted calculations.

The archival challenges of beach history have pushed some scholars away from existing research on leisure, planning, and place and towards a narrower subfield of inquiry into the littoral. Given the ubiquity of coasts, it is unsurprising some of the most valuable work exists outside North America. The majority of historical research into beaches and beach culture has taken place in nations surrounded sand and surf – Australia and New Zealand.²² Despite some relevant work on general beach culture, the majority of research has focused on social histories of sport and masculinity rather than the economic and political development of the beach.²³ Some

unilateral natural declension and overlook both the popular and capitalist preservation of coastal place. See William B. Fulton, *The Reluctant Metropolis: The Politics of Urban Growth in Los Angeles* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); Stephanie S. Pincetl, *Transforming California: A Political History of Land Use and Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999); Daniel Press, *Saving Open Space: The Politics of Local Preservation in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002).

²² For overviews of antipodean beach history, see Douglas Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand, and Surf* (London: F. Cass, 2001); Caroline Daley, *Leisure & Pleasure: Reshaping & Revealing the New Zealand Body, 1900-1960* (Auckland: Auckland University Press, 2003); Geoffrey Dutton, *Sun, Sea, Surf, and Sand: The Myth of the Beach* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Allan Edwards, Keith Gilbert, and James Skinner, *Some Like It Hot: The Beach as a Cultural Dimension* (Oxford: Meyer & Meyer Sport, 2003); Sue Hosking, *Something Rich and Strange: Sea Changes, Beaches and the Littoral in the Antipodes* (Kent Town: Wakefield Press, 2009); Leone Huntsman, *Sand in Our Souls: The Beach in Australian History* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 2001); Christine Metusela and Gordon Waitt, *Tourism and Australian Beach Cultures: Revealing Bodies* (Bristol; Buffalo: Channel View Publications, 2012); Suvendrini Perera, *Australia and the Insular Imagination: Beaches, Borders, Boats, and Bodies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

²³ These histories of lifeguarding, swimming, surfing, and other aquatic sports often explore the linkages between masculinity and patriotism. While Californians are often proud of their coastline, the ability to conquer the landscape has not been routinely tied to national character. Some key examples include Douglas Booth, "Healthy, Economic, Disciplined Bodies: Surfing and Surf Lifesaving in Australia and New Zealand, 1890-1950," *New Zealand Journal of History* 32, no. 1 (1998): 43–58; Barry Galton, *Gladiators of the Surf: The Australian Surf Life Saving Championships, a History* (Frenchs Forest, N.S.W.: Reed, 1984); Ann Game, Andrew Metcalfe, and

of these scholars, particularly Douglas Booth, have mistakenly argued that the beach-centric lifestyle of Australia is unique to the continent. The development of Southern California's coastline offers an explicit challenge to this claim, confirming the broader relevance of beach culture and strengthening transpacific arguments of development shaped by knowledge circuits between the regions. Studies on peopled, urban beaches now reach around the globe from South Africa to Uruguay to Israel, suggesting a wide utility of a littoral lens of analysis.²⁴ Other authors tried to understand the role of the coast within broader frameworks of literary analysis and cultural imagination, but the sheer diversity of the 372,000 miles of coastline around the globe has hindered these transnational attempts.²⁵ Alain Corbin's *The Lure of the Sea* (1994) traces the transformation of the coast in Europe during the 18th and 19th century into a place of recreation and leisure while John Gillis' *The Human Shore* (2012) attempts to impose an overarching narrative of global beach use from the premodern era to the present. Recent theoretical work has even begun to question conventional definitions of beaches to understand their societal importance by imagining virtual spaces and temporary beaches.²⁶

Demelza Marlin, *On Bondi Beach* (North Melbourne: Arcadia, 2013); Ed Jaggard, *Between the Flags: One Hundred Summers of Australian Surf Lifesaving* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2006); John Nauright, *Sport, Power and Society in New Zealand: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Sydney: Australian Society for Sports History, 1995); Murray G Phillips and Swimming Australia, *Swimming Australia: One Hundred Years* (Sydney: UNSW Press, 2008); Gordon Waite, "'Killing Waves': Surfing, Space and Gender," *Social and Cultural Geography* 9, no. 1 (2008): 75–94.

²⁴ Gustavo A. Remedi, "The Beach Front (La Rambla): Reality, Promise and Illusion of Democracy in Today's Montevideo," *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 14, no. 2 (August 2005): 131–59; Glen Thompson, "Reimagining Surf City: Surfing and the Making of the Post-Apartheid Beach in South Africa," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 28, no. 15 (2011): 2115–29; Shayna Weiss, "A Beach of Their Own: The Creation of the Gender-Segregated Beach in Tel Aviv," *Journal of Israeli History* 35, no. 1 (2016): 39–56.

²⁵ Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994); John Gillis, *The Human Shore* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012); Greg Denning, *Beach Crossings: Voyaging across Times, Cultures, and Self* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Erika Esau, *Images of the Pacific Rim: The Aesthetic Connections Between Australia and the American West, 1850-1930* (Sydney: Power Publications, 2010).

²⁶ Tim Gale, "Urban Beaches, Virtual Worlds and 'The End of Tourism,'" *Mobilities* 4, no. 1 (March 1, 2009): 119–38; Quentin Stevens and Mhairi Ambler, "Europe's City Beaches as Post-Fordist Placemaking," *Journal of Urban Design* 15, no. 4 (November 1, 2010): 515–37.

Scholars of American history traditionally overlooked the popular shore because beaches' leisurely vibe and environmental roots fell far outside traditional topics of inquiry. Maritime scholars do deal with sea and surf, but customarily ask specific questions international in scope and related to economics and material culture. Classic works on coasts, oceans, and littoral zones by Robert Albion and others largely focused on maritime exploration, commerce, and fisheries.²⁷ Recognizing the dearth of research, British coastal historian John K. Walton issued a call to maritime historians to focus more extensively on peopled shorelines and seaside resorts.²⁸ For many years, the only existing books on urban beaches came from historical societies and mass-market authors outside academia. These works broke from this social science mold and combined travel narratives, introspection, and often biased praise of the coast to market to a popular audience.²⁹ None of these works, however, unpacked the complex genesis of urban beaches across the United States.

In the last two decades, scholars influenced by environmental and cultural history have responded to Walton's suggestion and begun writing histories of developed coastlines.³⁰ Many of these histories carefully trace the evolution of the littoral as human needs shaped the shoreline. Analyses of 18th and 19th century shorelines have proved most popular, but important research into the urbanized shores of the 20th century have also grown in number and geographic

²⁷ Many of these work follow the mold of famous Harvard historian Robert Albion work including Robert Greenhalgh Albion and Jennie Barnes Pope, *Sea Lanes in Wartime: The American Experience, 1775-1942* (New York: Archon Books, 1968); Robert Greenhalgh Albion, *The Rise of New York Port, 1815-1860* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1984). Also, see work by John H. Kemble or Samuel Eliot Morison.

²⁸ John K. Walton, "Seaside Resorts and Maritime History," *International Journal of Maritime History* 9, no. 1 (1997): 125–47.

²⁹ For popular histories of the beach, see Cornelia Dean, *Against the Tide: The Battle for America's Beaches* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Fred Gray, *Designing the Seaside: Architecture, Society and Nature* (London: Reaktion, 2006); Philip Fradkin, *California: The Golden Coast* (New York: Viking Press, 1974); Philip Fradkin and Alex Fradkin, *The Left Coast: California on the Edge* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); David Helvarg, *The Golden Shore: California's Love Affair with the Sea* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2013).

³⁰ Despite increased research into seaside leisure, Walton continues to call for further research into tourism by maritime historians. See John K. Walton, "Tourism and Maritime History," *International Journal of Maritime History* 26, no. 1 (February 2014): 110–16.

diversity. Studies of Cape Cod and New England have extensively documented cultural and ecological changes from shifting waves of tourism and development.³¹ Studies of beaches along the Gulf Coast focus more on individual beachgoers and on questions of leisure, discrimination, and racial politics.³² A final group of analyses has looked at land ownership, public access to the coast, and questions of class.³³ In these and other studies, beaches shift from a liminal space towards a contested zone as human needs far exceeded the ever-shrinking space.

While California's shores have a prominent place in imaginary landscapes, scholarly inquiries are few. There are some popular, statewide narratives of the beaches and historical picture books of coastal communities, surfing, and pleasure piers.³⁴ The tremendous diversity of coastal topography in the state does complicate drawing parallels across regions. Like studies of other coasts, California scholarship once almost exclusively focused on production or preservation, though more recent inquiries have expanded to recognize the myriad of roles associated with seashores.³⁵ Contemporary histories of the San Francisco Bay, like Matthew

³¹ For coast-specific studies, see Richard Judd, *Natural States: The Environmental Imagination in Maine, Oregon, and the Nation* (Washington, D.C.: Resources for the Future, 2003); Matthew McKenzie, *Clearing the Coastline: The Nineteenth-Century Ecological and Cultural Transformations of Cape Cod* (Lebanon: University Press of New England, 2011); James C. O'Connell, *Becoming Cape Cod: Creating a Seaside Resort* (Lebanon: University of New Hampshire, 2003); Christopher L. Pastore, *Between Land and Sea: The Atlantic Coast and the Transformation of New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2014); John R. Stilgoe, *Alongshore* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1996).

³² N. D. B. Connolly, *A World More Concrete: Real Estate and the Remaking of Jim Crow South Florida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Andrew W Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours: African American Beaches from Jim Crow to the Sunbelt South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); P. Nicole King, *Sombreros and Motorcycles in a Newer South: The Politics of Aesthetics in South Carolina's Tourism Industry* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012); Anthony J. Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis: Politics and Leisure in the Coastal South Since the Civil War* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2014).

³³ Andrew W Kahrl, "Fear of an Open Beach: Public Rights and Private Interests in 1970s Coastal Connecticut," *Journal of American History* 102, no. 2 (2015): 433–62.

³⁴ Arcadia Publishing's "Images of America" series has produced at least one book on each Southern California beach, but provides little analysis beyond captions for an array of primary source imagery.

³⁵ The classic example is Arthur McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem: Ecology and Law in the California Fisheries, 1850-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986). For more recent, economic histories of coastal California, see Shelley Alden Brooks, "Big Sur: The Making of an Inhabited Wilderness" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2011); Connie Chiang, *Shaping the Shoreline: Fisheries and Tourism on the Monterey Coast* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2008); Timothy G Lynch, *Beyond the Golden Gate: A Maritime History of California* (National Parks Service, U.S. Department of Interior, 2012); Paul Sabin, *Crude Politics: The California Oil Market, 1900 - 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Booker's *Down by the Bay* examine the tidal zone through successive cycles of growth and environmental protection, but rarely discuss issues of recreation.³⁶ San Diego's urbanized beaches offer tantalizing parallels to the development of Los Angeles' shore, but histories of that shoreline have not yet been written.

In the last decade, historians of the region have begun to orient their attention towards the peopled beaches of Southern California, building a nascent collection of scholarship that embraces environmental, urban and cultural histories. This small sampling of work, however, has not yet fruitfully interacted to develop new approaches to beach history. Historians Lawrence Culver and Alison Rose Jefferson have explored the recreational coast as a means to explore identity through exclusion and inclusion. Others, including Sarah Elkind and Ronald Davidson, have argued for seeing the beach through a lens of rights and struggles between public and private spaces. The global popularity of Southern California's coastal culture has also received attention as studies have addressed music, surfing, film, and youth culture. Despite these promising leads, fundamental questions about the growth of the beach remain.³⁷ My work seeks to bridge these two nascent categories of Los Angeles-centric scholarship by combining analysis

³⁶ Recently there has been a surge of environmental histories of the San Francisco Bay including Matthew Morse Booker, *Down by the Bay: San Francisco's History between the Tides* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); M. Jasper Rubin, *A Negotiated Landscape: The Transformation of San Francisco's Waterfront since 1950* (Chicago: Columbia College, 2011); Richard Walker, *The Country in the City: The Greening of the San Francisco Bay Area*, Weyerhaeuser Environmental Books (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007).

³⁷ For work on recreation, see May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*; Alison Rose Jefferson, "Leisure's Race, Power and Place: The Recreation and Remembrance of African Americans in the California Dream" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015). Questions of ownership have been addressed in Davidson, "Coast Stories"; Elsa Devienne, "Beaches in the City: The Quest for the Ideal Urban Beach in Postwar Los Angeles," *La Vie Des Ideas*, July 6, 2011, 2105–3030; Elkind, *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy*; Sara Fingal, "Turning the Tide: The Politics of Land and Leisure on the California and Mexican Coastlines in the Age of Environmentalism" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Brown University, 2012). On popular culture, see Timothy J. Cooley, *Surfing about Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Matthew Ides, "Cruising for Community: Youth Culture and Politics in Los Angeles, 1910-1970" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 2009); May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*; Peter J Westwick and Peter Neushul, *The World in the Curl: An Unconventional History of Surfing* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2013).

of leisure and political economy to understand the changing motives for the creation this cherished urban space.

A few words on geography and terms may be helpful. By “Southern California,” I generally refer to the Los Angeles metropolitan region and surrounding communities found in the four-county area of Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, and Riverside. The majority of the dissertation, however, focuses more specifically on the Santa Monica Bay, which lies between Point Dume and the Palos Verde Peninsula. This narrow geographic focus allows for an emphasis on the popular beaches in the Los Angeles area regularly utilized by millions of residents and avoids other types of coastal topography. San Pedro and Long Beach, just south of Palos Verde, have been the epicenter of regional industry (petroleum, manufacturing, fishing, aerospace) in the region centered around the sprawling ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. While there are some popular beaches in the area, the industrial demands of shoreline use greatly complicate discussions of leisure’s development. Similarly, the Malibu coastline between of Point Dume and the Ventura County border has been far less peopled due to distance and less sandy beaches. While visually stunning, this stretch of sea does not fit this study’s emphasis on urbanized beaches prior to the 1970s. Finally, despite relative physical proximity to Los Angeles, beach cultures in Santa Barbara or San Diego, for example, are sufficiently different to necessitate a separate examination.

This study focuses on the human motivations to capitalize on the coast, but it is also important to remember that the nebulous ownership of beachfront in Southern California may obscure questions of whose beach or who is profiting. Beach frontage and most tidelands are public property for all to enjoy and have been explicitly protected by the California State

Constitution since 1879.³⁸ Nonetheless, much of the sandy parts of beaches, above the high tide line, can be privately owned and have repeatedly changed ownership over the years. Numerous government agencies and municipalities operate public beaches. While this list varies over time, key municipalities (from north to south) are Santa Monica, Los Angeles, Manhattan Beach, Redondo Beach, and Palos Verde. Los Angeles County and the State of California also operate an array of governing agencies, controlling the rest of local beaches.³⁹ Some beaches are even owned by the state, but leased in perpetuity to municipalities to locally operate. As a result, visitors to shore only see a totalizing landscape of uninterrupted coastline, subsuming the reality of balkanized beaches.

The following chapters provide a history of the growth and development of the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay between roughly 1880 and 1972. I begin my narrative with the Anglo peopling of the Southern California coast in the 1880s and end with the creation of the California Coastal Commission in 1972.

The first chapter describes both the dangers and opportunities presented by the beaches of Southern California. The coastline was a distinct world apart from Los Angeles when the economic boom of the 1880s jumpstarted residential development and economic activity in the region. Pleasure seekers who ventured to the coast had to deal with distance, cost, potentially

³⁸ Section 4, Article 10 of the California State Constitution states, ““No individual, partnership, or corporation, claiming or possessing the frontage or tidal lands of a harbor, bay, inlet, estuary, or other navigable water in this State, shall be permitted to exclude the right of way to such water whenever it is required for any public purpose, nor to destroy or obstruct the free navigation of such water; and the Legislature shall enact such laws as will give the most liberal construction to this provision, so that access to the navigable waters of this State shall be always attainable for the people thereof.” The California State Constitution also contained a provision forbidding the sale of any tidelands or submerged lands within two miles of any incorporated city or town.

³⁹ Various state agencies include State Parks Commission, California Coastal Commission, State Coastal Conservancy, Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Parks and Recreation, etc.). Keeping track of these agencies can prove difficult. California’s bureaucratic hierarchy changed repeatedly and agencies have changed names to further complicate matters.

dangerous swimming conditions, and restrictive social norms. Nonetheless, ever-growing numbers of visitors came to the new towns like Santa Monica, Venice, and Redondo Beach in search of leisure and coastal bathing. By the 1900s, entrepreneurs and investors had built bathhouses and plunges to solve public concerns about ocean swimming. An expansive trolley network built by Pacific Electric dramatically lowered cost and time to make the trip. Like Coney Island or other coastal amusement zones, Los Angeles' beaches remained a distinct zone of leisure bifurcated from the growing city.

The following chapter examines the eventual merging of the urban and coastal spheres as Angelenos developed "beach consciousness." The rapid rise of the automobile transformed the coastline into an accessible destination for residents across Southern California between 1915 and 1935. Convenience bred familiarity as the beach became a year-round destination and exploded in popularity. Urban culture of Los Angeles during the 1920s, however, brought greater socioeconomic and racial divisions along the shore. New coastal residential developments, like Playa Del Rey, advertised property to an explicitly middle-class audience and tied beach living to a class-based identity. Further, private beach clubs, racial covenants, and other mechanisms of de facto segregation worked to define the beach as exclusively white. While beaches remained open to all, cultural constructions of beach living were now further bounded by race and class.

The third chapter explores how Southern California municipalities began lengthy efforts to make the shoreline wider between the economic downturn of the 1930s and the early 1950s. As the beach's popularity increased, public beach acreage decreased. With a lack of local land use policies, private parties had successfully gained control of much of the coastline. Nonetheless, governments began purchasing beachfront to keep up with public demands. City, county, and Army Corp engineers artificially nourished the sands, creating a functional

landscape of wide, sandy swaths of shoreline to accommodate millions. This beneficent act belies the reality that beach improvements sudden appeared during contentious campaigns, functioning as political capital for bureaucrats and elected officials eager to please constituents.

Chapter four analyzes shifting priorities in coastal development during California's golden era, between 1950 and 1962. The earlier approach of utilitarian beach development was replaced with clear efforts at commoditization and coastal capitalism. Tawdry coastal development and unsightly attractions had no place in this aspiration landscape of midcentury Los Angeles. Private amusements parks like Marineland and Pacific Ocean Park became models for coastal development and replaced older attractions like Muscle Beach. Extensive political lobbying by the Shoreline Planning Association helped to facilitate this transformation as funding was redirected to specific beaches while manipulating the political economy to benefit elected allies. By the early 1960s, the beaches of Southern California had become even further defined bastion of middle-class identity and popular culture.

This study concludes in the early 1970s with the passage of the California Coastal Act which served a rupture point for the preceding decades' successful coastal boosterism. The 1972 passage of Proposition 20 by the voters of California marked a final stage in the evolution of the coast after decades of frantic facelifts interspersed with neglect. Latent public adulation for this hybrid landscape galvanized into political will as corporate threats against the beaches mounted. This crystallization of the importance of the beach to Angelenos stemmed not from the period's growing environmentalism, but from its centrality in daily life and culture. An electoral victory by grassroots organizations eventually wrestled the coast from profiteers and imposed lasting stasis on the construction. However, the creation of a regulatory agency and stricter

environmental protections did not completely stop efforts at coastal profiteering. Public oversight has dramatically slowed the rate of change, allowing the landscape's legibility to remain.

In 1898, Fredrick Rindge wrote, “[h]appy memories of happy days! when the family go to the beach, and cover the children with the warm sand, to their great delight.”⁴⁰ Over one hundred years later, this cliché aphorism still describes many visitors’ view of the Southern California coast. Today’s coastline, though, is not the result of happenstance or spatial determinism. Over the 20th century, a motley group of boosters, entertainers, real estate developers, journalists, politicians, planners, engineers, businessmen, and surfers drove dramatic physical and cultural changes to the landscape of the beach as they capitalized on ever more compelling scenery. Collectively, the following chapters demonstrate the calculated efficiency of these actors to manipulate consumers, popular culture, and Los Angeles’ political economy to their benefit. Constructions of middle class idyll proved rewarding for some, but also replicated racial and economic cleavages found elsewhere in the metropolis. Despite these flaws, the combination of surf and sand proved enchanting for millions of residents near and far in music, film, home-buying, and elections. Examining the rise of the beach reveals a largely unexplored facet of Los Angeles history and a foundational construction in the promotion of Southern California’s good life of leisure.

⁴⁰ Frederick Hastings Rindge, *Happy Days in Southern California* (Cambridge, 1898), 37.

Chapter 1: Dangers and Opportunities

For Angelenos, the beach before the 1880s was not a familiar place. When they visited, the excursion required planning and a fair amount of dedication. The shoreline was largely a rural area dotted with rudimentary resorts, located at least fifteen miles from many residents in central Los Angeles. Photographs from the era show small coastal outposts surrounded by deserted sand and rolling hills in every direction. Land between a westerly outpost called Hollywood and coastal Santa Monica was dominated by shifting sand dunes and agriculture, including barley, mustard greens and sprawling lima bean field. Closer to the coast, most of the landscape was “virgin soil, covered with rich grasses and multitudinous flowers...eucalyptus and pepper trees occasionally dot the vision.”¹ Overcast weather, occasional fog, and a regular marine layer reinforced perceptions that beaches were a seasonal attraction at best. Upon arriving during the limited summer months, the coast’s troublesome topography often required visitors to descend the cliffs on steep paths to the tides. Beach goers often found only a narrow strip of sand to lounge and stroll. Many visitors did not enter the waters because they were unable to swim, without bathing attire, or afraid of potential calamity. Instead, vacationers contently enjoyed the salubrious sea breeze and may have camped beneath the popular sycamore groves of Santa Monica cañon.² The journey to the beach was an adventure itself and not frequently repeated.

Until the 1900’s, much of southern California’s shoreline remained a resort community apart from the bustling and thriving city of Los Angeles. Nascent beach cities that dotted the

¹ “The Round Beach: Pleasant Excursion Over the New Road to the Sea,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 6, 1888.

² Luther A. Ingersoll, *Ingersoll’s Century History, Santa Monica Bay Cities: Prefaced with a Brief History of the State of California, a Condensed History of Los Angeles County, 1542 to 1908 : Supplemented with an Encyclopedia of Local Biography and Embellished with Views of Historic Landmarks and Portraits of Representative People* (Luther A. Ingersoll, 1908), 141.

coast regularly sought tourism as an economic engine and local identity. San Pedro and Los Angeles' political interests' victory in the controversial harbor struggle forced seaside communities like Santa Monica and Redondo Beach to focus on promoting leisure resorts.³ Most Angelenos saw their rare trips to quaint coastal communities as vacations. Pleasure piers, getaway resorts, and bathhouses dotted the shore, but beach access was residents' principal stumbling block. Thousands of acres of sparsely populated farmland still estranged the coast from the residential core of Los Angeles. The littoral remained distinct from the interior city, bifurcated by time and space, and an unpracticed part of the southern California lifestyle.

This chapter examines the initial growth of coastal Southern California as a landscape of leisure during the late 19th century and early 20th century. The natural environment of the coastline appealed to some visitors, impressed with its sublime grandeur, but no one could have predicted its meteoric rise towards popularity. Before the arrival of Anglo residents, the coastal landscape was an important place for commerce and subsistence for indigenous groups and Mexican settlers - not a space for fun.⁴ Newcomers to Los Angeles frequently saw the coastline through a lens of fear, judging physical impediments and moral hazards as insurmountable. During this era, however, Americans across the country increasingly took advantage of changes in technology, economics, and cultural mores to increasingly embrace vacations, recreation, and leisure. Amidst this climate of change, a group of bankers, railroad companies, and real estate

³ Despite repeated efforts, few communities in southern California developed commercial ports. Water depth, competition, and a lack of large plots hindered most bids.

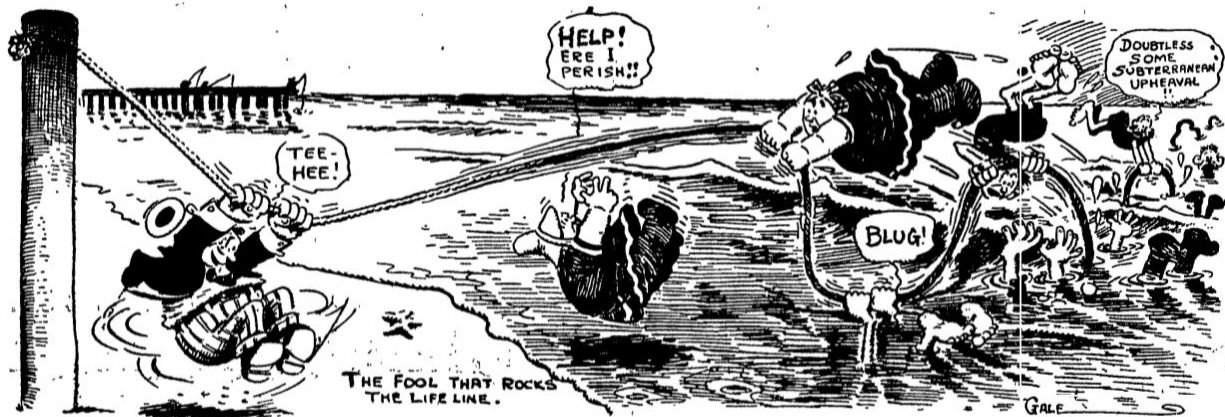
⁴ For more on early coastal Southern California and particularly the Chumash people, see Lynn H Gamble, *The Chumash World at European Contact: Power, Trade, and Feasting among Complex Hunter-Gatherers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Douglas J Kennett, *The Island Chumash: Behavioral Ecology of a Maritime Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); L. Mark Raab and Terry L Jones, *Prehistoric California: Archaeology and the Myth of Paradise* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2004); Seetha Reddy, "Fish Tales from the Ballona: The Role of Fish Along the Mainland Coast of Southern California," *Journal of California and Great Basin Anthropology* 35, no. 2 (December 2015): 237–55.

syndicates worked tirelessly to overcome obstacles. First, coastal boosters sought to address the dangers of swimming by selling safety with great success. Second, railroads and trolleys slowly snaked from Los Angeles' core to beaches along the Santa Monica Bay, bringing ever more visitors each year. This newly built coastal environment proved profitable as its creators sought to build an ever more elaborate coastal paradise distant from the realities of daily life.

Aquatic Dangers

When the *Los Angeles Times* satirized a typical day at the beach in 1909, they mocked what passed for ritualistic entertainment. The article described a prototypical weekend beach tableau of crowds sitting on the sands and watching select groups of bathers. Amidst this potentially utopic landscape, however, so-called “beach comedians” mischievously wrought havoc along the shore, upending umbrellas and kicking sand upon neighbors. Amateur attempts at acrobatics resoundingly failed. This pandemonium extended into the tides along the pendulous life lines that extended from the shore into the waves and girded the assorted bathers. A prototypical female patron, “working her way ponderously down, hand over hand...never stopping until the waves dash as high as her ankles. Then she grabs the line with desperation and stands and waits...never releasing her death grip until the tide is gone.” Men, women, and children all congregated along the line. In the article’s illustration below, “the most pestiferous of the beach funny men” tugged on a life line with comedic yet disastrous results. Swimmers were flung in the air and seemed to be on the verge of drowning. Recreational relaxation could quickly turn into a safety hazard.⁵

⁵ “BEACH COMEDIANS PESTS OF LIFE LINE.: Aggravating Stunts by a Character Whom Everybody Has Met-- Especial Enemy of Fat Ladies and Thin Men--Fate's Sandwich,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1909.



The most pestiferous of the beach funny men.

Figure 1. “BEACH COMEDIANS PESTS OF LIFE LINE: Aggravating Stunts by a Character Whom Everybody Has Met--Espesial Enemy of Fat Ladies and Thin Men--Fate's Sandwich,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1909; ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

This comedic series of events at the beach depict an era before Angelenos confidently swam amongst the waves. Fears of waves, cold water, and perils lurking beneath ocean remained powerful inhibitions in the growth of the recreational coast. Other potential visitors worried about social etiquette and public modesty. A majority of beach-goers restricted visits to strolling and lounging on the sand. Across the country during the 1870s and 1880s, though, a growing cross section of residents ventured into the tides with few safety precautions. Despite these bathers' eager attitude, the overwhelming majority of Americans did not know how to swim.⁶ Guides to sea-bathing in the 19th century suggested ungainly or arduous strokes. Other guides gave suggestions for non-swimmers such as, “the best plan is to walk out quickly into the water until it is on a level with the shoulders, then moving about quickly, using both legs and arms in

⁶ Most Americans began to learn to swim during the 1870s and 1880s as the public bathing movement gained popularity. See David Glassberg, “The Design of Reform: The Public Bath Movement in America,” *American Studies* 20, no. 2 (September 1, 1979): 5–21; Marilyn T. Williams, *Washing “the Great Unwashed”: Public Baths in Urban America, 1840-1920* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991); Jeff Wiltse, *Contested Waters: A Social History of Swimming Pools in America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

the exercise, they may obtain satisfactory results.”⁷ The potential for calamity, however, did little to dissuade the growing number of Americans eager to escape urban life and bath in the tides.

In Southern California, additional dangers abounded along the coast. The marine geology of California’s coast is different from the Atlantic coast’s ocean-facing barrier islands, which buffer the surf. The Pacific Ocean’s waves are routinely larger than the Atlantic Ocean’s due to its greater expanse. During heavy surf typical of winter months, the region’s waves reach five feet or more and can tower over bathers. Bulky bathing attire only exacerbated the situation, often becoming unwieldy or cumbersome. Few bathers knew how to spot the perilous riptides and nearshore currents commonly found in Southern California. One guide to sea-bathing guessed that the visitors in the greatest danger “know nothing of the beaches, and venture far more than those who do often they cannot swim, and are helpless when in danger.”⁸ Many bathers arriving during the 1880s had never been to the region’s beaches before. Many of the Midwesterners who moved to Los Angeles in the late 19th century had never even seen the ocean before. Newspapers routinely parodied these migrants as skinny, pale, blonde patrons naïve to the dangers of the ocean. Unfortunately, there was more than a little truth to the humor.

The only safety mechanism available to bathers was the rocking life line or swim line. These structures consisted of a long rope attached from one wooden pole on shore to a submerged pole beyond the tides. While the poles assisted some bathers, their limited capacity and sporadic placement created a mere illusion of safety. Bathers and businesses, not local government, built these impromptu contraptions. As early as 1874, the *Los Angeles Herald*

⁷ Ghislani Durant, *Sea-Bathing: Its Use and Abuse* (New York, A. Cogswell, 1878), 48, <http://archive.org/details/seabathingitsuse00dura>.

⁸ John H. (John Hooker) Packard, *Sea-Air and Sea-Bathing* (Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, 1880), 118–19, <http://archive.org/details/seaairseabathing00pack>.

describes their construction in Santa Monica by private bathers.⁹ Life lines grew in number over the early years, but their efficacy was hard to measure. While their increased presence suggested at least limited improvements to safety while swimming, the lines also allowed bathers to unsafely venture beyond secure footing, raising the risk of drowning. The structures also proved ephemeral as the tides quickly rotted the bottom of the wooden poles and winter storms pounded from the top. Beyond physical flaws, the practical experience of bathing while clutching a coarse, soaking rope proved strenuous and not particularly enjoyable. Photographs of Southern California beach scenes featuring life lines almost always depict far more bathers not using the line.¹⁰ Despite life lines' conceptual appeal, bathers' tethered experiences perpetually raised the specter of drowning, clashing with the idealized leisure of the beach.

As more visitors went to the shores of Los Angeles during the boom decade of the 1880s, the frequency of accidents markedly rose. Over the decade, rates of coastal drownings reported by the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Los Angeles Herald* became a weekly occurrence in the summer months. In the previous decades, published accounts of drownings in Southern California often stemmed from occupational accident, such as sailors loading and unloading boats just offshore. During the 1880s, however, stories of accidents in the tides often stem from beach goers who did not know how to swim or were unfamiliar with the dangers of the Pacific Ocean. Descriptions of these accidental drownings simply state, "the deceased immediately upon going into the water sank and was drowned not being able to swim."¹¹ At the beginning of the

⁹ "Santa Monica," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 11, 1874.

¹⁰ Numerous photographs in the Ernest Marquez Collection depict the beaches of Santa Monica during the 1880s and 1890s. These two images are representative of the underused presence of life lines on the shoreline. H.F. Rile, *Santa Monica Surf Bathing*, Photographic Print, 1889, Ernest Marquez Collection, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Photo Archives, <http://hdl.huntington.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15150coll2/id/19676>; H.F. Rile, *Santa Monica Bathing Scene*, Photographic Print, 1890s, Ernest Marquez Collection, The Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens. Photo Archives, <http://hdl.huntington.org/cdm/ref/collection/p15150coll2/id/19745>.

¹¹ "Drowned Accidentally," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 30, 1887.

decade, distance and a lack of familiarity largely isolated the sort of public fear and chaos now associated with such tragedy from many early residents. Many of these accidents occurred on less crowded stretches of beach where no nearby bathers could render assistance. Some newspaper reports vaguely describe the locations, like “between Long Beach and Wilmington.” Bathers ostensibly disappeared into the tides by a divine act or unknown natural forces. Without visual confirmation or a corpse, residents were left to wonder about the fate of those who vanished.

Most stories of early coastal tragedies are quite grim. In June of 1882, a father and son went swimming near the salt works in Redondo Beach. Jonas Nelson and his son Robert Nelson worked and managed a large ranch in Green Meadows (near South Los Angeles). The younger Nelson did not know how to swim and may have never previously visited the Pacific Ocean. According to a newspaper report, the bathers secured a life line to the shore, but tragically, Robert Nelson lost his grip and was pulled underwater. The elder Nelson drowned attempting to rescue his son. Neither body was found.¹² Other swimmers were luckier and their shrieks attracted life-saving attention from local residents more familiar with the Pacific Ocean. The periodic heroic acts of notable individuals received substantial newspaper attention. In 1884, J.L. De Force, Chief dispatcher for the Southern Pacific Railroad in Santa Monica, single-handedly rescued a man from drowning after hearing his cries. A reporter from the *Los Angeles Herald* described his “gallant” character and “daring and heroic deed.”¹³ Despite published accolades, these acts of bravado did little to more broadly instill the bravado of lifesaving as an ideal characteristic.¹⁴ In 1886, George Bixby, who would inherit the Bixby Ranch, helped rescue a

¹² “Sad Casualty,” *Los Angeles Herald*, June 27, 1882.

¹³ “A Daring and Heroic Deed,” *Los Angeles Herald*, April 22, 1884.

¹⁴ In Australian beach culture, the lifesaver has been idealized as the model, masculine citizen. See Booth, *Australian Beach Cultures: The History of Sun, Sand, and Surf*; Cameron White, “Save Us from the Womanly

swimmer who drifted out beyond the breakers. Bixby brought a life preserver and rope through the surf, secured the swimmer, and guided him back to shore. Amidst Bixby's efforts and the public commotion, he was pickpocketed.¹⁵ Calamity lurked amidst a landscape of leisure.

The dangers of drowning entered the public conversation as tragedies and deaths repeatedly occupied the front page of a variety of local newspapers across Southern California. The continued drownings of women and children struck an emotional chord as the ocean rendered even the most masculine and muscular of men helpless. The inescapable horror of seeing someone drowning just beyond rough tides was a tragic occurrence and prompted extensive public outpourings of sympathy and morbid interest. Obituaries bemoaned the seemingly unpredictable dangers of bathing in the Pacific Ocean. Despite these mounting deaths, however, it would take over two decades for local governments and municipalities to organize formal lifesaving organizations. Even federal agencies like the United States Coast Guard gave little thought to watching bathers, instead focused on maritime perils. Much of the early coastline was unincorporated, private land. Even in larger municipal areas, there was little consensus or financial support for any safety precautions.

Amidst the alarming regularity of accidental drownings, an uncomfortable status quo spawned a variety of local reactions. Some community members attempted to encourage beach education and swim lessons. For example, the *Los Angeles Herald* reprinted the suggestion of Irish physician Henry MacCormac and called for more residents to learn to swim or at least to tread water.¹⁶ Others sought to raise public awareness about the variables in tidal movement and wave height. Angelenos and more generally Americans knew little about ocean mechanics or the

Man' The Transformation of the Body on the Beach in Sydney, 1810 to 1910," *Men and Masculinities* 10, no. 1 (2007): 22–38.

¹⁵“SAVED AGIN!: Long Beach Has Another Semi- Drowning Sensation,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1886.

¹⁶“Treading Water,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 29, 1881.

tides. In 1883, the *Herald* noted that “residents of Santa Monica can choose their own hours and go bathing at time of low water, while the business men...[bath] even if the tide is flood and the water above safety point.”¹⁷ After a flood tide almost drowned beach goers in 1886, a local Santa Monica weekly began to publish daily tide information. Other entrepreneurs took advantage of the public concerns and attempted to profit from the danger. A local pawn shop in Santa Monica advertised, “the despondent young man that was saved from drowning...has changed his mind. He has found that his embarrassments can be relieved by pawning his watch at People’s Loan Office.”¹⁸ Drowning was increasingly a marker of an outsider, unaware of the dangers lurking beneath the water.

By the end of the 1880s, as public concern mounted, a series of high profile incidents threatened both the incipient tourist industry and residents’ confidence. Despite periodic unsafe swimming conditions, both residents and visitors to Southern California often visited the shorelines of Long Beach. The Long Beach Hotel even claimed to offer a rescue crew ready to help struggling swimmers. However, in July of 1888, Annie Schaffer drowned in front of a crowd of a few hundred beach goers in a preventable tragedy. Schaffer, who was born and raised in Southern California, worked at the hotel and was known as one of the area’s strongest swimmers. Despite her familiarity with the Pacific Ocean, she drowned before a rescue boat from shore could be launched. The delayed launch of the rescue boat became a source of contention as hotel management was responsible for keeping a drilled crew ready and available.¹⁹ In reality, this was close to impossible because the safety crew actually worked inside the hotel as waiters, dressed in formal attire. Less than a month later, the water in front of the Long Beach

¹⁷ “A Noble Deed,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 24, 1883.

¹⁸ People’s Loan Office, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Herald*, July 21, 1886.

¹⁹ “The Cruel Deep,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 26, 1888.

Hotel again became the site of calamity. Despite heavy surf and large breakers, Elmer Alford, a recent arrival from Kansas ventured past a buoy into deep water. When he attempted to swim back to shore, a strong undertow prevented him. Other bathers hesitated to help him, perhaps remembering the recent Schaffer drowning. Chastened by their previous inaction (or unrealistic work expectations), the life boat crew was stationed on the sands and rushed into the waves. These efforts proved futile as heavy surf repeatedly capsized their boat and prevented a rescue attempt Alford drowned. His death marked the third drowning in Long Beach within a year.²⁰ The hotel's customers avoided further drownings when a kitchen fire eventually burned the hotel to the ground in late 1888. Ignorance, inaction, and inept precautions continued to cause problems along the shoreline.

Early visitors to the beach also recoiled at the chilly temperature of the Pacific Ocean. Most swimmers find seventy to seventy-eight-degree water comfortable for bathing. During the summer heat of August, water temperatures in Los Angeles or Santa Monica average a somewhat comfortable sixty-eight degrees (yet cooler than the over eighty-degree average water temperature found in Philadelphia or Delaware). In the winter, ocean temperature exceeded the East Coast, but still fell to an uncomfortably cool temperature in the high fifties.²¹ Southern California offered a longer bathing season, but was still too cold for most beach goers during winter. Bathers' worsted wool suits were supposed to help them retain warmth in the ocean, but did little once sodden and cold. Beyond simple concerns of comfort, many Americans believed that danger lurked in cold water too. An 1886 article in *Popular Science Monthly* claimed

²⁰ "Swept Out to Sea," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 20, 1888.

²¹ These temperatures reflect modern conditions. There is insufficient data on historical ocean surface temperatures in Southern California for the 19th century. Despite ocean warming over the last century, these measures provide a close approximation of past conditions. See "Coastal Water Temperature Guide" (Silver Springs, MD: National Centers for Environmental Information, 2016), <https://www.nodc.noaa.gov/dsdt/cwtg/>.

quickly entering cold water seized the heart, causing “cramps,” and, ultimately most bathing accidents.²² Other medical professionals worried that “the pleasures of bathing” dangerously distracted swimmers, often causing “syncope” or fainting upon exiting the water.²³ These concerns related to water temperature became particularly pronounced during the winter months. Easterners escaping rain and snow enjoyed the salubrious sea air and temperate weather, but largely avoided the frigid depths.

Residents and visitors to Southern California slowly began to recognize that not all beaches were equally suited for bathing. With little scientific understanding, residents and visitors learned through experience which beaches did not have to have dangerous rocks or crags. Despite most beaches’ picturesque sandy shores, heavy surf, strong undertow, and violent rip tides plagued the very same beaches. On unseasonably balmy days in January, the Pacific Ocean still remained cold. In the aftermath of the 1888 drowning in Long Beach, The *Los Angeles Herald* reported, “in spite of the fact that the beach is a fine one, it must also be admitted it is scarcely adapted for bathing purposes, as the undertow is remarkably strong.” The *Herald* continued, “there will doubtless be many who will never bathe there again.”²⁴ The surf in Long Beach was particularly strong and unforgiving. Sheltered coves, including Terminal Island and Avalon on Catalina Island, became increasingly popular for ocean swimming because of a lack of breakers. Visitors to Terminal Island noted the safety of its tame surf for children. An advertisement for a bathhouse claimed “ladies and children will find the south beach safe at any tide and highly enjoyable.”²⁵ The majority of the Southern California coastline, however, was unprotected and these small shifts in habits increasingly presented a dilemma for property

²² “Principles of Sea Bathing,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1886.

²³ Durant, *Sea-Bathing*, 52–53.

²⁴ “Swept Out to Sea.”

²⁵ “New Bath Houses,” *Los Angeles Herald*, March 25, 1886.

owners, hotel proprietors, and entrepreneurs to adapt to the skepticism about the safety of the Southern California coast.

Bathing Opportunities

The surf in Santa Monica presented a particular conundrum to local entrepreneurs and boosters. Located roughly twenty miles north of Long Beach, the area's coastline possessed especially challenging tidal conditions. When the city was founded in 1875, the initial plots sold clustered at the northern end, appropriately, termed North Beach.²⁶ This newly formed town site centered around the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad and its wharf. The railroad ensured a constant stream of visitors during the summer, but the waves were too strong for inexperienced swimmers. While some early bathers brought tents and provisions for their beachfront stays, many other visitors arrived unprepared for ocean bathing. Few Americans bathed in the ocean with enough regularity to justify owning bathing attire. In 1876, a local Santa Monica entrepreneur named Michael Duffy capitalized on this need and founded the sixteen-room Pasqual (or Pascual) Marquez bathhouse with private, freshwater baths in each room, but no swimming pool. Marquez also rented bathing suits to visitors.²⁷ Despite the Victorian popularization of public bathing, only the most affluent residents in Los Angeles had private bathtubs in their homes. Duffy's bathhouse initially opened to serve the needs of visitors hoping to bath for cleanliness or rejuvenation, but guests quickly recognized that the indoor baths also

²⁶ Today, North Beach is the stretch of sand North of Colorado Avenue and the Santa Monica Municipal Pier.

²⁷ The Pasqual Marquez Bathhouse was named after the son of Francisco Marquez, the land grantee for the Santa Monica Canyon. See Louise Gabriel, *Early Santa Monica* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2006), 16. The bathhouse is described as offering, "a large variety of bathing suits of all kinds and sizes; fixtures for freshwater shower baths in each room, and everything else necessary for comfort and convenience. His other charges are very low – only two bits." See, "Santa Monica Items," *Los Angeles Herald*, April 21, 1876.

offered a safe bathing space. In 1877, Duffy's success inspired Santa Monica's founders' Senator John P. Jones & Robert Baker to build the Santa Monica Bathhouse, adjacent to Duffy's.²⁸ The structure was larger and also provided safe bathing, yet resembled the drab, nearby tents. Neither bathhouse proved wildly successful, but their continued popularity confirmed the public desire for beachfront bathing and, further, hinted at the potential success of larger establishments.

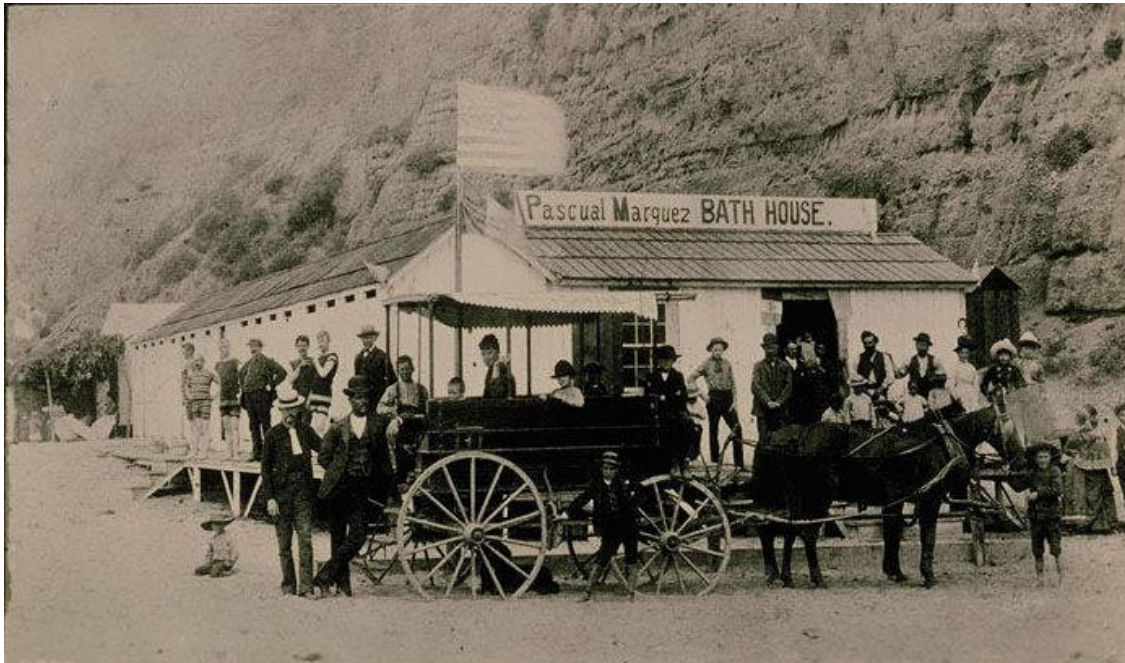


Figure 2. *First Bathhouse, Just North of Santa Monica Canyon, Owned by Pascual Marquez, Courtesy of the Santa Monica Public Library*²⁹

The boom of the 1880s quickly transformed Santa Monica from a small community to a bustling town. New residents arrived from across the country as the town's population grew 400% over the decade similar to other town sites outside of Los Angeles. Santa Monica's growth helped facilitate municipal services and a growing business district. During the early 1880s, the

²⁸ Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History, Santa Monica Bay Cities*, 150–52.

²⁹ Charles C Pierce, *First Bathhouse, Just North of Santa Monica Canyon, Owned by Pascual Marquez*, Photographic Print, 1887, Santa Monica Public Library Image Archives, <http://digital.smpl.org/cdm/ref/collection/smarchive/id/4898>.

town had stagnated amidst financial difficulties from its founders' failing silver mine, but it eventually surged forward with newfound capital and visitors. Most emblematic of this new period of growth was the construction of the Hotel Arcadia. J.W. Scott, who previously ran the Santa Monica Hotel during the slow years, opened the grandiose hotel. The visually striking hotel featured 125 rooms with luxurious furnishings, electric bells, and over a thousand yards of imported carpet. A rollercoaster-esque, switchback railway transported guests over a deep ravine in the bluffs to the three-story building on the sands. Similar to picturesque resorts like Monterey's Hotel Del Monte and Pasadena's Raymond Hotel, the hotel was intended as an exclusive resort for wealthy guests, particularly during the winter. Visitors and guests to the hotel frequently had their names published in the society sections of local newspapers. On a crowded August evening, guests to the hotel included John Schumacher, a wealthy landowner, William H. Taylor of Risdon Iron Works, State Senator Reginaldo Francisco del Valle, Los Angeles City Engineer John Henry Dockweiler, and A.H. Denker, owner of the United States Hotel and much of Rancho Rodeo de las Aguas (present Beverly Hills). In front of the hotel's sprawling porches and balconies, there was a large, sky-lit bathhouse featuring hot and cold saltwater baths. Bathers concerned about "cramps" from the ocean's cold water flocked to the perceived safety of warm tubs fed by an eighteen-thousand-gallon saltwater tank. Large signs boasted over one thousand bathing suits for rental to use in the year-round hot baths. Large, wooden verandas often attracted visitors and bathers as they rested amidst the shade. Photographs of the Hotel Arcadia show it offered a sturdy life line for surf bathing, but posted a large warning sign encouraging bather to

watch for danger.³⁰ The signs conspicuous placement reminded bather they could pay for a safer solution in its private baths.

After a brief lull, the popularity of beachfront baths reached new heights as new designs and new experiences attracted ever more visitors. During the summer of 1889, fickle consumers showed a waning interest in the old North Beach Bathhouse. Advertisements in local newspapers proclaimed that bathing rates had been slashed in half from fifty cents.³¹ In July, at the height of the summer profitability, the bathhouse was attacked by a debtor and forced to turn over all bathing suits and towels.³² By the middle of October, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that Santa Monica's attractions had failed to attract large attendance to the beach.³³ Just a week later, the beleaguered bathhouse was sold to interests fronted by J.W. Scott with capital backed by Senator Jones.³⁴ Scott's grand ambitions for transforming the Santa Monica beachfront persisted. Upon completion in 1894, the new bathhouse was a sprawling palace for swimming, bathing, and leisure. The building was roughly 450x100 feet, dwarfing the nearby Hotel Arcadia. Inside, the bath house featured over three hundred dressing rooms, a bowling alley, photograph gallery, manicure parlor, barber shop, and restaurants. The centerpiece of the new bathhouse was two luxurious pools with heated saltwater. Each pool was 125x125 feet, lit by grand skylights during the day. Large windows offered views of the sand and sea. Bleachers for spectator seating flanked both pools. The layout even included a shallow pool intended for woman and children.³⁵

³⁰ *Hotel Arcadia in Santa Monica*, Photographic Print, 1889, Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, <http://jpg1.lapl.org/pics22/00030663.jpg>; *Playing on the Beach*, Photographic Print, 1900, Works Progress Administration Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, <http://jpg3.lapl.org/pics18/00028601.jpg>.

³¹ North Beach Bathhouse, Classified Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1889.

³² **"The Council," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 16, 1889.**

³³ "The Beach Fails to Draw the Usual Crowd," *Los Angeles Times*, October 14, 1889.

³⁴ "The Spilman Bathhouse Bought Out By Mr. Scott," *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1889; Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History, Santa Monica Bay Cities*, 190.

³⁵ "Opened Today," *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1894; "Sheet 5, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map from Santa Monica, Los Angeles County, California" (Sanborn-Perris Map Company Limited, May 1895).

Newspapers lavished the bath house with attention, proclaiming its pools as “matchless” and a place for “cleansing and aquatic entertainment, where people can bathe and luxuriate in surf, plunge or hot bath, or, if resting from their labors, watching the antics of merrymakers.”³⁶

The introduction of plunges to Southern California proved overwhelmingly popular with visitors and successful for their owners. This new means of experiencing ocean bathing transformed the public admiration of Southern California’s beaches into a year-round, love affair. The term plunge, short for plunge bath, were large pools used for washing many people, but as recreation became more popular, they came to resemble more familiar swimming pools.³⁷ During the 1870s and 1880s, many of the hotels and boarding houses in Santa Monica only opened for the summer beach season. By the early 1890s, many of the hotels rescheduled with grand schemes of year-round operation because of growing consumer demand. Plunges’ warmth indefinitely extended the season and increased the profitability of coastal endeavors. For visitors, vast pools of heated saltwater along the coast solved many of the existing problems of the beach experience. Bathers could enjoy the rejuvenating waters of the Pacific without concern for the constantly changing physical environment of temperature, tides, or daylight. Advertisements for the North Beach Bath House repeatedly included the phrase “WARM PLUNGE” in an oversized, bolded font.³⁸ At the Long Beach Bathhouse, a large sign over the plunge proudly noted its eighty-four degree waters next to the Pacific Ocean’s chillier sixty-two degrees.³⁹

³⁶ “Days at Santa Monica,” *Los Angeles Herald*, 14 July 1895.

³⁷ The origin of the word plunge baths comes from the 18th and 19th century practice of cold water pools for therapeutic use when bathers would literally plunge into the water. For more on the origins of the word, see Christopher Love, *A Social History of Swimming in England, 1800 – 1918: Splashing in the Serpentine* (Routledge, 2013), 63–69.

³⁸ North Beach Bathhouse, Advertisement, *Land of Sunshine*, June 1895.

³⁹ *The Plunge, Long Beach, California, Bath House*, Postcard, 1916, Werner von Boltenstern Postcard Collection, Department of Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University, <http://digitalcollections.lmu.edu/cdm/ref/collection/chgface/id/294>.

Foremost, plunges' warm waters muted public concerns about possible ailments of shock, fainting, or worse from the cold. Bathers could leisurely remain in the baths for far longer than the Pacific Ocean with little concern. Bath houses also boasted of the sheltered waters. An 1892 advertisement printed, "one can bathe with perfect safety and free from all breakers at the Crystal Plunge" in Santa Monica.⁴⁰ During the 1890s, swimming demonstrations and classes unsurprisingly became increasingly common at area plunges as more visitors learned to swim before leaping into the Pacific.

The novel experience facilitated by the coastal plunges had a glamorous appeal to many visitors, tourists, and residents. The rates of bathing and swimming grew during the late 19th century and encouraged the opening of bathhouses across the country. Los Angeles, a young city in a desert, lagged behind national averages and only had a few baths or swimming pools in the area.⁴¹ At least two smalls, private baths operated by waterwheels fed from irrigation ditches near Naud Junction, north of the original Los Angeles Plaza.⁴² An 1884 editorial declared "there is probably no inland city in the Union of this size that is not provided with swimming baths."⁴³ Coastal plunges presented the obvious solution for years until the City of Los Angeles built municipal pools the 1910s. During the late 19th century, ideals of Victorian culture like modesty and cleanliness demanded certain physical realities and financial means that remained far out of reach for many Americans on a daily basis. Visitors from Los Angeles and beyond eagerly left behind their daily struggles and embraced memorable, new adventures while on vacation at the beaches of Southern California. Bathing was widely perceived as an experience primarily

⁴⁰ "Visiting Cards Engraved," *Los Angeles Herald*, June 12, 1892.

⁴¹ Kevin Starr, "The Sporting Life," *California History* 63, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 31.

⁴² The city's earliest bathhouse was opened by Oscar Macy, later Los Angeles City Treasurer (1887-1888), at the corner of Alameda and Bath Street. See Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 60-61; J. Perry Worden, *Sixty Years in Southern California, 1853-1913: Containing the Reminiscences of Harris Newmark* (New York: Knickerbocker Press, 1916), 210.

⁴³ "Necessity for a Public Swimming Bath," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 23, 1884.

reserved for affluent elites. The bathhouse at the Hotel Arcadia extended the hotel's fashionable social scene to the beachside. Visitors who might not have been able to afford the Arcadia's expensive rates or its plush carpets could enjoy a swim in a similar bathhouse. When the North Beach Bath House's plunges opened, the sprawling structure and its bevy of amenities appealed to a wide cross-section of visitors and residents. The bath house charged twenty-five cents per person for admission to the plunge, a substantial sum for a visiting family during the period. Thousands of visitors splurged on the indulgent experience, however, and entered the imposing building. As bathers emerged from one of hundreds of changing rooms in matching bathing attire, they shed most conspicuous markers of social status. Immersed amongst the anonymity of the urban crowd, visitors could escape the mundane burdens of reality. If just for a fleeting afternoon, many visitors could try to relax, embodying the middle-class traits of refinement and leisure. Parents hoped that the experience for their children would leave a lasting influence of gentility.

In the evening, crowds continued to surge to the North Beach Bath House and its competitors along the coast as technological advances helped fashion an otherworldly experience. Inside the bath house, hundreds of electric lights underwater cast the plunges in enchanting hues as reflections danced on the skylights. The plunges that glowed brightly next to the dark and deserted Pacific Ocean captivated visitors. In the basement of the bathhouse, huge boilers kept the plunges warm and bathing suits dry. Advertisements for the North Beach Bath House proclaimed, "[i]t has all modern improvements that science and money can provide, and it is kept open year round."⁴⁴ Subsequent plunges constructed from Redondo to Venice also included luxurious lighting above and below the water. New technology enabled bath houses to

⁴⁴ "The Story of Santa Monica By the Sea," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 3, 1895.

improve on the Pacific Ocean and create a more perfect coastal experience. In particular, the electric lights captivated the senses and minds of guests. Gaslights provided the primary source of illumination in Los Angeles and elsewhere until after the turn of the century. Electric lights, though, became increasingly fashionable after their tremendous popularity at the 1881 Paris Exposition and subsequent fairs. Promoters of all kinds quickly learned that radiance could attract large crowds.⁴⁵ Festooned with electric lights inside and outside, Southern California's plunges created an atmosphere that not only evoked cosmopolitan roots but also offered a quintessentially modern leisure experience. Bathers could enjoy the visual spectacle as "mermaids and horrors...disport[ed] themselves to the best advantage."⁴⁶ Rejuvenation, urbanity, and technology combined into a mesmerizing landscape.

Beyond the haute allure of modernity, these coastal bathing experiences also created a vibrant world of fun for visitors of all ages as visitors splashed, played, and gawked. Traditionally, bathing had been segregated by gender. Through much of the 19th century, men and boys often bathed nude in rivers and lakes while women avoided public bathing. With little fresh water in Los Angeles, the city's zanjias provided the most common spots for bathing despite official regulations otherwise.⁴⁷ The earliest visitors to the beaches likely also bathed nude amongst the sparsely peopled sands and dunes. But with the rising popularity of beaches, many of the newly constructed public baths in the eastern United States included separate facilities for female bathers. Strict gender norms and aspirations of modesty were common in well-studied areas of England and the Atlantic coast, but other beaches clearly eschewed this Victorian

⁴⁵ David E. Nye, *American Technological Sublime* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1994); Lauren Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland: Amusement Parks, Movies, and American Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

⁴⁶ "An Ingenious Swindle," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 3, 1896.

⁴⁷ In 1852, the Los Angeles Common Council enacted a ban on bathing, cloth washing, and trash disposal in the zanjias. Nonetheless, public bathing seemingly regularly continued until the city began construction of a modern sewage system in 1892. See Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River*, 62.

emulation.⁴⁸ Southern California's beaches and plunges had its own social milieu as men, women, and children bathed near each other. Spaces like bathhouses and coastal attractions facilitated male-female interaction in contrast to more strictly gendered urban environments.⁴⁹ At the Redondo Beach Plunge, "men [were] left in the background, except, of course, the expert swimmers, while the girls, who can scarcely swim across the tank, are perfectly willing to go down the slide, dive from the spring board, or fall from the rings."⁵⁰

For many of the youthful visitors, bathing along the shore was also an opportunity to flirt in a seemingly anonymous and unrestricted environment. Newspapers often described "the merry maids in their chic bathing suits [who] tempt you to join them" and the fashionable trend towards "bloomers and bare feet." Santa Monica could boast that it was the city "where Fin De Siecle summer girls congregate most."⁵¹ While working as a reporter for the *Denver Post*, cowboy poet James Barton Adams wrote with how "gentlemen and ladies, young and old, lose all their dignity and all of the finer frills of modesty when in the surf." He continued, "'in these [bathing] costumes men and matrons and beaux and belles will meet and play in the water and loll about in careless abandon...as free from as sense of modesty as our first parents."⁵² While the era's bathing suits were not very revealing by modern standards, unmarried men and women leered at

⁴⁸ Particularly, Orvar Löfgren, *On Holiday: A History of Vacationing* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 117–19; Stilgoe, *Alongshore*. More recent scholarship on baths in Australia has also challenged this simplistic generalization. See Marie-Louise McDermott, "Wet, Wild and Convivial: Past, Present and Future Contributions of Australia's Ocean Pools to Surf, Beach, Pool and Body Cultures and Recreational Coasts" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Edith Cowan University, 2012), <http://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses/517>.

⁴⁹ This sort of heterosocial leisure environment also existed in other urban areas as described by Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006). Similar arguments about the beach, admittedly in an Australian context, have been made in Caroline Ford, "A Summer Fling: The Rise and Fall of Aquariums and Fun Parks on Sydney's Ocean Coast 1885–1920," *Journal of Tourism History* 1, no. 2 (October 1, 2009): 95–112.

⁵⁰ "Redondo," *Los Angeles Herald*, August 18, 1884.

⁵¹ "A Sunday at Santa Monica," *Los Angeles Herald*, July 21, 1895.

⁵² "J. Barton Adams at Santa Monica," *Los Angeles Herald*, September 10, 1902.

the procession of form-fitting attire and exposed legs. Bathing also potentially allowed casual physical contact between men and women as they splashed and played. Limited visibility beneath the water potentially obscured the actions from public sight, perhaps adding to the taboo appeal of transgressive behavior. Even as visitors gathered at the train stations to depart the shoreline, antics continued. Young men would gift fraternity pins and even “gather suddenly about a girl and, joining hands to prevent her escape, sing her love songs, fervid if slightly out of tune, until her cheeks are crimson.” Few experiences in Los Angeles could match the range of sensations offered by the shoreline.

Not everyone was a fan of this seemingly wanton disregard for public morality in the name of leisure. From the beaches' earliest popularity, residents of coastal communities complained about the behavior of visitors. In 1876, residents of Santa Monica complained about the desecration of the Sabbath and about "making their town a rendezvous for wicked pleasure-seekers from Los Angeles."⁵³ Standards and enforcement became an increasingly contentious subject during the 1890s as ever more bathers visited beaches, bath houses, and plunges. The issue was far from unique to Southern California as discussions of appropriate bathing attire and behavior preoccupied resort communities from Newport, RI to Cape May, NJ. Defining acceptable public bathing attire for men and women was the focus of moral efforts in beach communities near Los Angeles. Letters to the *Los Angeles Herald* complained of male bathers and “the demoralizing effect of a ‘hog’ on two feet instead of four, in a half-nude state wallowing in the sand in the presence of women and children.”⁵⁴ Others agitated about female bathers’ “dripping wet garments,” “unseemly attitudes,” and “careless speech and action” that

⁵³ “The Sabbath in Santa Monica,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 9, 1876.

⁵⁴ “Whose Costume Needs Reform The Most?,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 23, 1895.

invited male attention.⁵⁵ On very rare occasions, police arrested bathers for indecent exposure and charged them with disturbing the peace. Despite these public conversations and occasional outcry, few restrictions came to the plunges and baths of Southern California during the first decade of the 20th century.

By the turn of the century, the beaches of Southern California had increasingly become an enchanting world apart from the urban rat race and tedium of agricultural life. Shifting cultural mores, glamorous plunges, and captivating electrical lights contributed to attracting a diverse group of visitors from Southern California and beyond. Public fears of drowning declined as precaution and public awareness became more common. Ranchers, the families of small business owners, and affluent members of society all enjoyed vacations to the sun, sand, and surf. This slow adaption of the coast into the social life of men and women from a range of economic backgrounds still faced one major obstacle.

Transit Troubles

In early June, 1870, a group of friends including Henry Hamilton, editor of the *Los Angeles Star*, set out from Los Angeles to visit the Santa Monica coast. The group left at sunrise, hoping to quickly cover the sixteen miles on a buckboard. Things did not go as planned. While the group had an idea of a general direction, the existing trail was poorly maintained, cut through a series of ranchos, and was often prone to washing out. After approximately five miles of trying to follow a faint trail through the mud, Hamilton found himself in the middle of several farmers' fields. After another few miles, the party again found themselves lost until they could ask for

⁵⁵ "In Her Bathing Suit," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 8, 1898.

guidance from some sheep ranchers. Their struggles continued after a series of directions mistakenly sent them north into Sepulveda Canyon, where they worried about rumored grizzly bears. Hamilton and his friends finally arrived to the shoreline after almost nine hours.⁵⁶

Like Henry Hamilton, not all early visitors described the coast as bucolic, instead focusing on muddy wagon routes that left Los Angeles and travelled along unpaved roads in order to reach the beach.⁵⁷ Access represented a fundamental challenge to the growth of the recreational seashore for decades after its initial growth. Time, cost, and general popularity of existing transportation means served as serious impediments when both Angelenos and Americans planned vacations. During the late 19th century and early 20th century, as the coastal attractions and communities began to take hold, successive evolutions in modes of transportation rapidly facilitated the eventual debut of the region's beaches as premier playscapes for ever-larger crowds. These shifts not only enabled the popularity of bathhouses and plunges during the 1890s, but also brought even larger changes during the first decade of the 20th century.

Travel by horse or buckboard to the coast presented an array of challenges that compounded existing obstacles. While some 19th century authors have described glamorous scenes of horseback adventure along an Arcadian coast, reality was far more mundane.⁵⁸ Beyond expected difficulties of time, distance, and navigation, the use of a horse for a day or three for a leisure expedition represented a financial freedom that many early Angelenos did not possess.

⁵⁶ *Los Angeles Star*, June 4, 1870. Also described in Henry Winfred Splitter, "Los Angeles Recreation, 1846-1900: Part II," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 43, no. 2 (1961): 166–99.

⁵⁷ Most notably Preuss and Arnaz County Road. See William Myers and Ira Swett, *Trolleys to the Surf: The Story of the Los Angeles Pacific Railway*, Interurbans Special 63 (Glendale: Interurbans Publications, 1976).

⁵⁸ Richard Henry Dana, *Two Years before the Mast: A Personal Narrative of Life at Sea* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1840); Nordhoff, *California*; William Heath Davis and Douglas Sloane Watson, *Seventy-Five Years in California: A History of Events and Life in California: Personal, Political and Military; under the Mexican Regime; during the Quasi-Military Government of the Territory by the United States, and after the Admission of the State to the Union: Being a Compilation by a Witness of the Events Described; a Reissue and Enlarged Illustrated Edition of "Sixty Years in California", to Which Much New Matter by Its Author Has Been Added Which He Contemplated Publishing under the Present Title at the Time of His Death* (San Francisco: J. Howell, 1929).

Horses also caused great clouds of dust and sand as they descended often precipitous paths to the shoreline. While there were some early attempts to build roads to abate the dust caused by horses, the efforts proved minimal at best. On hot days, the growing piles of horse manure also created an unpleasant olfactory experience. During the 1870s, a prototypical beach tableau often featured dozens of buggies haphazardly spread along the top of the beach. Visitors would often try to anchor their horses and buggies to succulents or shrubbery in the coastal dunes. Occasionally, beachgoers return from a scenic stroll to find their horses stolen. As more beachgoers visited, the inadequacies of travel by horse became increasingly obvious.

The first modern means of coastal access was a series of local railroad lines built for steam engines by early land owners during the late 1870s and 1880s.⁵⁹ These passenger trains quickly replaced the antiquated and impractically slow horse-drawn carriages. Like much of Southern California, the introduction of the railroads served as the critical financial stimulus for the formation and growth of numerous coastal communities. When the founders of Santa Monica built the Los Angeles and Independence Railroad, there was little thought given to creating a vacationers' paradise. While many railroads in Southern California served as enticements to sell residential real estate, routes to the beach offered a different financial incentive. Redondo Beach was founded by the Redondo Beach Land Company in the late 1880s as a coastal bathing town, but the Santa Fe Railroad built a branch line from Inglewood with different goals.⁶⁰ Railroad companies hoped to serve industrial wharfs in Santa Monica, Redondo Beach, and San Pedro primarily transporting freight. An individual fare was one dollar to Santa Monica from Los Angeles. Despite the high fares and the popularity of the beach, income from passenger rail was

⁵⁹ On early passenger rail in Southern California, see Gerald M Best, "Early Steam Suburban Railroads In Los Angeles," *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, no. 99 (1958): 8–26.

⁶⁰ Franklin Hoyt, "The Redondo Railroad," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1954): 132–33.

often insufficient to support failing freight lines, eventually contributing to closures and consolidation. Only in 1889, after the steady growth of bath and boarding houses, railroads finally began to offer winter service to the beach. In the early 1890s, Collis P. Huntington, the powerful head of Southern Pacific Railroad, attempted to secure federal funds for the construction of a commercial harbor in Santa Monica. This prompted the well-known “free harbor fight” that declared San Pedro would be the region's official harbor.⁶¹ This decision largely voided industrial endeavors in Santa Monica and Redondo Beach, clearing the way for the ascendancy of coastline devoted to leisure.

Railroad companies may not have initially imagined they would become boosters for coastal leisure in Los Angeles, but quickly adapted. The Los Angeles and Pacific Railroad, successor to the Los Angeles and Independence, helped bankroll the construction of bath houses, hotels, and commercial amusements near their railroad's terminus. In 1895, Southern Pacific built a bicycle race track near the beach, capitalizing on the national trend.⁶² In 1898, Southern Pacific Railroad founded *Sunset* magazine as a tool to promote the company's routes and resorts. The magazine enthusiastically touted the desirability of coastal fun in Santa Monica. In the magazine's second issue, *Sunset* reported:

Others, who a few years ago could not leave their business for an outing, now, because of the frequent train service, bring their families to the Arcadia for the summer and go to and from their city business daily. So there is no diminution in the transient population of the pretty city, but instead an increase, for the fame of Santa Monica is constantly widening.⁶³

⁶¹ Numerous accounts of this struggle exist, detailing financial and political challenges. For a cohesive overview, see William Deverell, *Railroad Crossing: Californians and the Railroad, 1850-1910* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Eric A. Morris, “Where to Put the Port? The Free Harbor Fight and the Historical Development of Los Angeles,” *Journal of Planning History* 14, no. 4 (November 1, 2015): 263–86.

⁶² Ingersoll, *Ingersoll's Century History, Santa Monica Bay Cities*, 192.

⁶³ “Notes From the Resorts,” *Sunset*, August 1898.

The frequency of the train service, however, did in fact leave much to be desired. Despite Southern Pacific's claims, most rail lines to the region's beaches only operated twice or thrice daily, offering service in the morning, afternoon, and evening. Despite this limited service, many railroads like the Los Angeles and Pacific, hemorrhaged money operating these coastal line, instead hoping to capitalize on real estate transactions. When a storm washed out rail tracks between Los Angeles and Santa Monica, the Los Angeles and Pacific Railroad was forced to cease operations. They had operated winter train service for just over one month.⁶⁴

Railroads' contributions to the growth of the early leisure environment provided critical infrastructure and capital, but financial challenges and passenger capacity provided repeated complications to their long-term viability. In addition to the Los Angeles and Pacific Railroad, the Redondo Beach Land Company's Redondo Railroad was forced to use narrow-gauge rail because of financial constraints.⁶⁵ The Redondo Railroad was able to overcome financial challenges by the early 1890s as Redondo Beach became an increasingly popular destination, and the line was often filled near or at capacity on weekends. Even in early February of 1889, "every train to Santa Monica and Long Beach was crowded."⁶⁶ By summer of that year, "the first trains from town had not only every seat occupied, but all standing room was at a premium."⁶⁷ Newspapers even joked about the "Sunday Beach Train Face," that came from worrying if you'd get a seat on the train home from the beach. Beyond these overcrowded cars, many Americans still struggled to afford rail travel. Even coastal trips organized by excursion agents using second-class cars for group vacations proved too expensive for many. This seeming logjam

⁶⁴ "SANTA MONICA: Latest Gossip from Down by the Sea," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1889; Franklin Hoyt, "The Los Angeles and Pacific Railway," *Southern California Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (September 1952): 261–70.

⁶⁵ Hoyt, "The Redondo Railroad."

⁶⁶ "Tie and Track: Railroad Managers Want The Earthe," *Los Angeles Times*, February 4, 1889.

⁶⁷ "SANTA MONICA: Another Day of Enjoyment on the Sands," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1889.

persisted through much of the first half of the 1890s as demand outpaced infrastructure and limited the growing profitability of the coast.

Trolley Triumph

By the turn of the century, some pleasure-seekers to the Santa Monica Bay arrived via a daylong trolley tour that brought thousands to the beach for the first time. Increasingly, electric-powered trolleys on traction lines replaced aging steam-engine locomotives in Los Angeles and beyond.⁶⁸ The Los Angeles Pacific Railroad's (LAP) Balloon Route excursion began operating in 1901 and was the most popular early trolley route, taking passengers on a seven-hour loop that included eight beaches and twenty-eight miles of coast.⁶⁹ Visitors departed downtown and stopped at a series of tourist attractions including the Hollywood studio of flower painter Paul de Longpré and the Pacific Branch of the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers in Sawtelle (a federal facility for disabled veterans from the Civil War). The route's primary destination was the "superb beach attractions" of Santa Monica, Venice, Playa Del Rey, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, and Redondo Beach.⁷⁰ Along the Pacific, visitors followed a formulaic tour with popular amusements, scenic coastal views, and a wide variety of souvenirs

⁶⁸ For more on the rise of trolley nationally, see Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Brian J Cudahy, *Cash, Tokens, and Transfers: A History of Urban Mass Transit in North America* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990); Peter D Norton, *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2011); Robert C Post, *Urban Mass Transit: The Life Story of a Technology* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007). On the rise of trolleys in Los Angeles, see Glenn S. Dumke, "Early Interurban Transportation in the Los Angeles Area," *Southern California Quarterly* 22, no. 4 (December 1, 1940): 131–49; William D. Middleton, *The Interurban Era* (Milwaukee: Kalmbach, 1961); Spencer Crump, *Ride the Big Red Cars: How Trolleys Helped Build Southern California* (Los Angeles: Crest Publications, 1962); Robert Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis: Los Angeles, 1850-1930* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967).

⁶⁹ Beginning in 1904, the excursion was privately operated by Charles M. Pierce, but worked in close collaboration with the Los Angeles Pacific Railroad and later, Pacific Electric.

⁷⁰ Los Angeles and Pacific Railroad, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1910.

for sale. For just one dollar, the all-inclusive route even included a stop in Playa Del Rey at an expansive pavilion for a fish dinner. Visitors could enjoy the sights of the beach and return to their hotel in just one day. In 1910, the company claimed ridership on the tour at between 60,000 and 75,000 passengers per year.⁷¹ The route was so successful that other trolley tours of the Los Angeles region quickly followed.

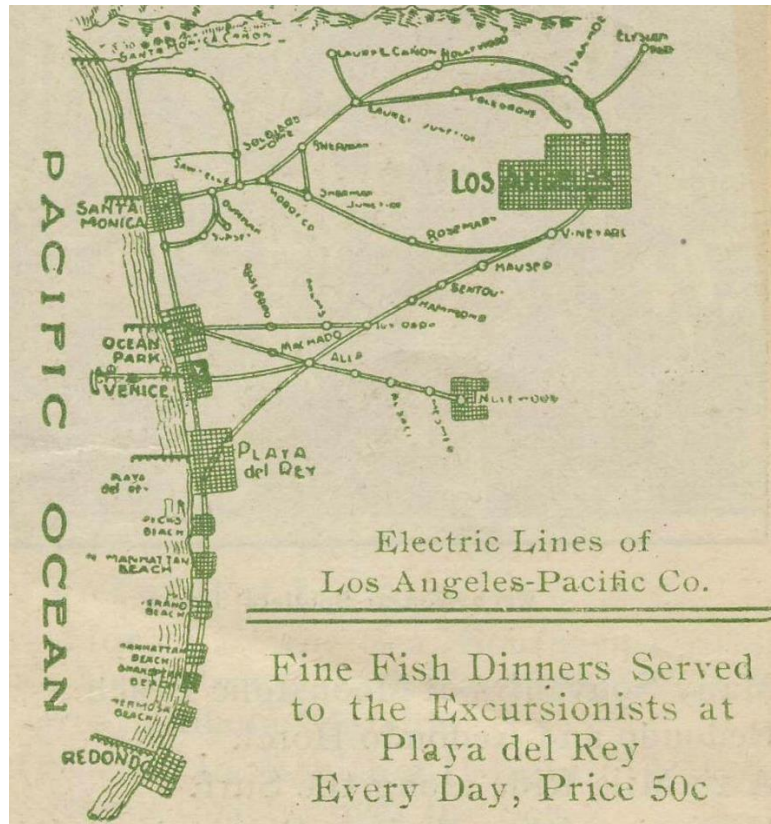


Figure 3. Daily Balloon Route Excursion Brochure, Courtesy of Pacific Electric Railway Historical Society⁷²

The initial growth of traction lines to the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay was primarily the work of one railroad syndicate. During the first decade of the 20th century, the Los Angeles

⁷¹ D.W. Pontius, "Methods of a Los Angeles Road," *Electric Traction Weekly* 6, no. 40 (October 1910): 1095–97.

⁷² "Daily Balloon Route Excursion Brochure," 1910, Mount Lowe Preservation Society Collection, Pacific Electric Railway Historical Society, <http://www.pacificelectric.org/pacific-electric/western-district/daily-balloon-route-excursion-brochure-1910/>.

Pacific Railroad operated the most heavily traveled routes to the coast amidst the system's rapid expansion. LAP was owned and operated by General Moses H. Sherman and Eli P. Clark. Sherman, a businessman with a background developing transit lines in Phoenix, and his brother-in-law Clark. Sherman's arrival to Los Angeles sparked speculation about his intentions. As Sherman and Clark began purchasing railroads, they revealed their intent to replace the complex web of disconnected lines with an efficient traction-powered network. The creation of the LAP involved a complicated secession of buyouts and mergers of at least twenty-six different companies. After some early struggles with bondholders, in 1895 Sherman and Clark began focusing on building interurban traction lines on existing railroad beds, like the old Los Angeles and Pacific route. On April 1st 1896, LAP (then operating as the Pasadena & Pacific) opened its first line running from 4th Street & Broadway in Los Angeles to Front Street (Pico Boulevard) & 2nd Street (Main Street) in Santa Monica. Sherman and Clark again faced financial trouble in 1897 and 1898, briefly selling company bonds to local tycoon Henry Huntington, son of Collis P. Huntington. Sherman and Clark quickly formed a series of shell corporations, eventually regaining control of the system and expanding the lines to one hundred thirty-two miles of track by 1903. They also gained control of all interurban traffic to the beaches the same year after a rancorous struggle with William S. Hook and Abbot Kinney's Los Angeles Traction Company. Hook and Kinney had attempted to draw visitors southward to their coastal amusements in Ocean Park and Venice.⁷³ This rapid and ruthless development led to local newspapers labeling the construction as "Sherman's March to the Sea." For a period, Henry Huntington threatened to

⁷³ During the summer of 1903, LAP and LAT fought vigorously for control over beach passengers. The two lines ran parallel to each other, separated by approximately .5 miles. The companies raced to complete construction and continuously brought suit. In May, LAT was partially purchased by E.H. Harriman and Southern Pacific in May of 1903. By July, Henry Huntington gained control of the LAT system. This temporarily stalled feuding for coastal predominance. For more, see Myers and Swett, *Trolleys to the Surf: The Story of the Los Angeles Pacific Railway*.

build parallel beach lines to the LAP system when he gained uninterrupted right-of-way between 6th Street and Santa Monica.⁷⁴ Between 1903 and 1910, the LAP grew to over two hundred miles of track and 172 passenger cars, serving growing hordes of faithful beach enthusiasts. New transit routes designed and marketed more explicitly for passengers appeared later as the profitability of the beach and coastal amusement districts increased. A spider web of traction lines expanded westward from downtown Los Angeles to Santa Monica, Ocean Park, Venice, Hermosa Beach, and Redondo Beach and later to San Pedro and Long Beach. Rail lines physically connected shoreline communities with the built environment of the city. Also, interurban lines enmeshed the scenic shore with the sprawling region. Visitors from suburban Pasadena, Anaheim, Redlands, and further east could now tour these rapidly growing, but still modest coastal attractions.

Trolleys made coastal visits a far more feasible reality for all Angelenos. Traction lines enabled networks of trolleys to run with far greater frequency. The LAP replaced twice-daily train lines with trolley departing every fifteen minutes. During the summer, trains departed even more frequently to meet the ever-growing demands. When local papers complained about overcrowding on beach trains in 1900, they also noted “Santa Monica, having the trolley and steam cars both, handles crowds more easily perhaps than any other beach.”⁷⁵ The introduction of broad gauged lines in 1908 allowed the LAP to handle over 100,000 passengers a day with larger passenger carriages. The relative speed and convenience of the new routes represented a dramatic shift. A carriage or buggy ride to the coast had once required hours and multiple stops for the horses. Now, in less than one hour, trolleys whisked passengers from downtown Los Angeles to the shoreline. By 1913, a new schedule helped trolley cars called “Flyers” take riders

⁷⁴ “Huntington Hits the Map,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1906.

⁷⁵ “The Beach Tide,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1900.

to Venice in only 45 minutes.⁷⁶ The length of coastal trips became a veritable steeplechase as companies improved lines to boast shorter travel time. Newspaper articles triumphantly proclaimed “there are numerous beach resorts within an hour’s ride from Los Angeles, over smooth roadbeds and in luxurious electric cars.”⁷⁷

Trolleys also potentially offered lower fares than many railroads. Trolley competition between E.H. Harriman, Sherman, and Huntington drove down the cost of coastal excursions. The LAP offered round-trip interurban fares to Santa Monica for fifty cents or forty cents with a ten-trip ticket. Slower and less luxurious trolley rides could be had for as little as ten cents. Trolleys would become the de facto means of public transportation in Los Angeles for decades. Nonetheless, many Angelenos could visit nickelodeons near home or work for a far less expensive leisure outing. The relatively low transportation cost still inhibited the frequency of coastal visits. In 1907, cognizant of these realities, the Chamber of Commerce unsuccessfully urged all traction companies to lower interurban fares to twenty-five cents or twenty cents with a monthly ticket. As working class Angelenos used trolleys for their daily commute, the luxury of a weekend visit to the beach became more plausible.

Public popularity for the Los Angeles Pacific’s coastal lines also benefitted from sensational publicity. The heavily advertised Balloon Route helped to popularize beach visits among both tourists and residents. The LAP advertised regularly in newspapers and magazines, on billboards, and with hired solicitors. The company persistently inundated visitors and almost every hotel featured colorful advertising for the excursion dominated by depictions of the Pacific Ocean. Timetables and advertising materials proclaimed that “the popular line to the popular

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ “Sunny Southern California Famed as Italy of America,” *Los Angeles Herald*, October 9, 1910.

beach” would take passengers to Santa Monica, an “all-the-year-round resort.”⁷⁸ Advertisements echoed regional boosters and local chambers of commerce who increasingly preached about the year-round character of the region’s attractions. Not surprisingly, businesses along the excursion’s route helped to pay for this remindful advertising. For many visitors, this was the first opportunity in their lives to visit the beach or see the Pacific Ocean. Advertisements for the route boasted “it was the only ocean voyage in the world on wheels – and never any seasickness.”⁷⁹ Many residents took advantage of the relatively inexpensive leisure opportunities that may have been initially oriented towards out-of-town visitors.

These promotional tactics by trolley companies in Los Angeles largely parallel national efforts to familiarize Americans with the landscapes of California and the West. During the early 20th century, trolleys and railroads both used evocative language and imagery to attract passenger traffic to coastal destinations and to other places of grandeur like national parks. The advertising budget for Southern Pacific Railroad alone increased over 1000% to \$1.8 million between 1892 and 1911.⁸⁰ Transportation companies and real estate syndicates recognized they needed to promote the unknown to visitors from the landlocked Midwest and snowy East Coast by providing viewers with a narrative of place and an understanding of leisure. Adventure or natural beauty were ubiquitous selling points, but romance, recreation, and other ideals also composed the diverse sales pitch. The efficacy of the campaigns stemmed not only from their saturation or

⁷⁸ Myers and Swett, *Trolleys to the Surf: The Story of the Los Angeles Pacific Railway*; A.O. Smith, “Relief Map Of Territory Served By Lines Of Pacific Electric Railway In Southern California Largest Electric Railway System In The World Mount Lowe Trip And Resort, Great Mountain Trip And All Year Resort Orange Empire Trolley Trip, Through The Kingdom Of The Orange Old Mission Balloon Route Trip The Ideal Way To See The Southland” (Los Angeles: Pacific Electric Railway Company, 1920), Map collection on Los Angeles, California, the United States and the world, Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

⁷⁹ Myers and Swett, *Trolleys to the Surf: The Story of the Los Angeles Pacific Railway*, 169.; “Los Angeles Pacific,” Electric Railway Association of California, <http://www.erha.org/balloon.htm>.

⁸⁰ For more on railroad boosterism of national parks and nature, see Peter Blodgett, “Defining Uncle Sam’s Playgrounds: Railroad Advertising and the National Parks, 1917-1941,” *Historical Geography* 35 (2007): 80–113; Marguerite S Shaffer, *See America First: Tourism and National Identity, 1880-1940* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001).

bold claims, but also from the promotion of place with idealized illustrations and photographs. A 1910 Daily Balloon Route Excursion brochure features a skewed map that depicted the Los Angeles area as dwarfed by the coast.⁸¹ Playa Del Rey, largely undeveloped at this point, is depicted as almost 40% the size of Los Angeles despite being at least sixty times smaller. On another brochure, entitled “Trolley Trips Through Wonderland,” the cover depicts a pristine, sunny seascape with ebullient children in the foreground and a pleasure pier just visible on the horizon.⁸² Advertising for coastal traction lines promoted a beach visit as the iconic leisure experience in early Los Angeles, confidently introducing the landscape of the beach to guests from near and far.

In 1911, Henry Huntington took over Los Angeles Pacific and other interurban lines in the “Great Merger” as his Pacific Electric Company (PE) came to operate the most popular routes to the sea. The merger ended years of struggles between E.H. Harriman and Huntington for control of coastal routes. LAP’s green cars were painted over as PE’s now ubiquitous red cars took tourists and residents west. As more Angelenos visited and lived near the coast, general ridership on the PE system continued to increase each year. Pacific Electric brought telegram service to coastal communities including San Pedro and Long Beach.⁸³ By the 1910s, the routes to the sea carried millions of passengers each year. The most popular coastal route was the Venice Short Line, which terminated at the Venice boardwalk and Kinney Pier. In 1913, the line had 4.7 million riders. The less popular Redondo Beach-Del Rey line had 1.3 million riders in

⁸¹ Pacific Electric Railway, “Daily Balloon Route Excursion,” 1910, Pacific Electric Railway Historical Society, <http://www.pacificelectric.org/pacific-electric/western-district/daily-balloon-route-excursion-brochure-1910/>.

⁸² Pacific Electric Railway, “Trolley Trips Through Wonderland: A Delightful Way to See Southern California,” Mount Lowe Preservation Society, Inc., <http://www.mountlowe.org/mlpsi-collection/brochures/pacific-electric-trolley-trips-through-wonderland-brochure/>.

⁸³ Telegraph service via Pacific Electric also extended along the coast in Orange County, with service offered at stations in Huntington Beach and Newport Beach. See “More Wires to Salt Lake,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 28, 1905.

1913. Coastal routes atypically attracted the most passengers on Sundays. The Venice line averaged over 15,000 passengers on a peak Sunday in the 1910s.⁸⁴ When average Angelenos wanted to escape the heat or relax on a picturesque weekend, the beach was now a feasible and affordable destination.

A World Apart: Tropes of the Early Coast

While the physical distance between the urban and littoral worlds in Southern California shrank between the 1870s and 1910s, the contrast between the two landscapes became yet more pronounced. The residential and commercial development of Los Angeles inched westward and beach communities grew inland, but the sociocultural experiences could not have been more different. Much of the allure of the beach grew from its seemingly oppositional construction to the mundane realities of daily life. Sea breezes replaced foul smells. The beach was synonymous with an idealized landscape not only defined by the liberating autonomy of vacation and leisure, but also its rejuvenating sun, breeze, and waters. The beachfront offered a bevy of goods and services available for fun in the sun. Bathhouses were joined by restaurants, bars, casinos, pleasure piers, amusement districts, dancehalls, nickel theaters, and souvenir shops. While visitors still came to play in the tides, this consumptive leisure became increasingly common as development overcame 19th century barriers to beach enjoyment. Particularly for working-class visitors, the beach's cheap amusements and anonymizing tides proved a strong pull. In many ways, this early coast reflected the growth of a leisure landscape familiarly reminiscent of the

⁸⁴ "The above figures are from a report submitted to PE President O.A. Smith by consulting Engineer Arthur C. Jenkins, dated November 30, 1948. This report subsequently served as the basis for PE's successful abandonment plea." "Venice Short Line," Electric Railway Association of California, <http://www.erha.org/pewvs.htm>.

Coney Island, Cape May, Blackpool, and other amusement beaches along the Atlantic Ocean. The contours of this isolated coastal wonderland were defined by densely clustered amusement districts, sensational or gimmicky attractions, rapid visual divergence, and continued commercial messages of reinforcement.

Coastal Clusters

When visitors to the coastal amusements disembarked, trolleys deposited guests in close proximity to the amusement districts and pleasure piers of Santa Monica, Ocean Park, Venice, Del Rey, and Redondo. From the station to the shore, bright lights and eye-catching displays enthralled guests in the totalizing experience of the beach visit. A 1915 *Los Angeles Times* article on a congested beach day described “thousands who got off [street cars] and walked until they were tired.”⁸⁵ Yet, guests who strayed from the amusement districts quickly ended up off the beaten path. Above Santa Monica’s North Beach was a cañon (Temescal Canyon) with “the rougher and wild scenery of the hills, with the sycamore and maple trees.”⁸⁶ Most guests, however, never left the mesmerizing coastal corridor, enchanted by its sights and sounds.



Figure 4. Huge Crowd on Windward Avenue, Courtesy of Los Angeles Public Library ⁸⁷

⁸⁵ “Storm Scenes Better Magnet Than Summer,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 1915.

⁸⁶ *Los Angeles Herald*, Number 138, 28 May 1911 — A Few of the Delights of Seaside Life Combining Attractions at Coast Cities

⁸⁷ *Huge Crowd on Windward Avenue*, Photographic Print, 1905, Security Pacific National Bank Collection, Los Angeles Public Library, <http://jpg1.lapl.org/pics19/00009136.jpg>.

Despite a booming tourism industry, shortcomings in coastal transit contributed to the sense of distance between beach and city. Coastal visitors clustered around well-known amusement districts near traction lines, but rarely strayed. Guests knew they'd have to ride the same trolley line home later in the day. Visitors often overcrowded the sands nearest limited access ways while large swaths were entirely deserted. Each beach proved to be self-enclosed community. In most cases, these areas or "recreational business districts," followed a familiar development pattern of other seaside resorts of the era along the Gulf Coast and in New Jersey. Hotels, strip development, and residential expansion radiated from transportation nodes and piers. Geographers of tourism argue communities served by railroads often built compact amusement districts near the rail termini.⁸⁸ Competing trolley syndicates also made little effort to integrate lines. If visitors wanted to escape the city for a replicate Italianate experience on the coast, they had two choices for strolling amongst the canals. Pacific Electric built the traction lines that served 'Doge' Huntington's community of Venice, while the LAP built lines that served 'Doge' Harriman's community of Naples. In spite of their proximity in imaginary geographies, no line served both attractions. Distance, competition, and intermittent adjacent development isolated each coastal destination. Visiting the beach during the 1900s and 1910s meant visiting one crowded amusement district.

Novelty

While the seaside was a popular destination in the summer and on weekends or holidays for tourists, its place apart from urban life also stemmed from its seductive sensations, curios,

⁸⁸ Klaus J. Meyer-Arendt, "Recreational Business Districts in Gulf of Mexico Seaside Resorts," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 11, no. 1 (September 1, 1990): 39–55; Stephen Williams, *Tourism Geography: A New Synthesis* (London: Routledge, 2009), 91–96.

and spectacles. The consumption of this visual culture fueled beachfront amusements financially sustained by wonderment and novelty instead of repeat customers. Briefly, the most famous spectacle along Santa Monica's beaches at the turn of the century was the Camera Obscura. Perched in front of the North Beach Bath House's bowling pavilion, the obscura bent light and changed perspective to project a panoramic view of the Santa Monica coastline on a large table in the middle of a darkened room.⁸⁹ With admission only ten cents, the paradoxical confusion of the obscura quickly attracted visitors. When the attraction opened, the *Santa Monica Outlook* wrote, "once you see it your doubts and perplexities are all cleared up."⁹⁰ Unsurprisingly, from almost the beginning, the obscura struggled to attract returning guests already familiar with the gimmick. In 1907, the obscura was gifted to the City of Santa Monica to be operated by the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce as it shifted from profitable amusement to cultural landmark. In less than ten years, the obscura had been rendered passé in a constantly struggle to shock and awe visitors. Promoters, developers, and boosters increasingly recognized the need for a constant stream of new attractions to bring Angelenos back to a distant world of sunshine and leisure.

Between 1905 and 1913, beachfront attractions grew larger, louder, and more elaborate as they competed for visitors' attention and dollars. Pleasure piers quickly became the most well-known of these coastal amusements.⁹¹ Abbot Kinney, Venice of America's developer, finished

⁸⁹ The Camera Obscura was built by Robert F. Jones, nephew of Senator John P. Jones, in 1898. Despite a move from the beachfront to the Santa Monica Senior Recreation Center along Palisades Park, the obscura is still open and operating as of 2017. For more information, see: City of Santa Monica, "Camera Obscura Art Lab at 1450 Ocean," <http://www.smgov.net/Departments/CCS/content.aspx?id=39798>.

⁹⁰ "What They Say," *Santa Monica Daily Outlook*, August 27, 1898.

⁹¹ For a general overview of Southern California pleasure piers, see Jennifer Lynn Krintz, "Pleasure Piers & Promenades: The Architecture of Southern California's Early Twentieth Century Beach Resorts" (Masters Thesis, University of Georgia, 2009); Gray, *Designing the Seaside*. Other more specific works include James Harris, *Santa Monica Pier: A Century on the Last Great Pleasure Pier* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2009); Historical Commission of Redondo Beach, *Redondo Beach, 1880-1930* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2006); Ernest Marquez, *Santa Monica Beach: A Collector's Pictorial History* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2004); Jeffrey Stanton, *Venice California: Coney Island of the Pacific* (Los Angeles: Donahue Publications, 1993).

constructing the resort in 1905. He built a saltwater lagoon, an elaborate system of canals, and scenic Venetian-style bridges. Kinney initially imagined an intellectual resort inspired by the Chautauqua movement. When Venice first greeted guests, Kinney ordered orchestral concerts and events featuring Joaquin Miller, Dr. Josiah Strong, and Ellery's Royal Italian Band for six months in front of a mostly empty house.⁹² Quickly, though, Kinney recognized that most visitors found carnival rides and mechanical amusements far more enchanting. On a busy day in Venice, "the miniature railway trains were on the jump, the pleasure launches were moving at full speed, and the canals were alive with small crafts and gondolas."⁹³ Venice's popular toboggan "railway" lurched along the oceanfront lit by a glowing constellation of colored electric lights through elaborately designed alpine landscapes along a one-and-one-half mile route.⁹⁴ By 1909, Kinney entirely abandoned designing around his European lagoon and instead focused on his grand, twelve-hundred-foot pleasure pier. He built a three-mast ship into the pier as a restaurant. The expanded pier added an aquarium, a musical carousel, a Ferris wheel imported from 1911 Alaska–Yukon–Pacific Exposition, and popular new mechanical amusements such as Giant Safety Racer roller coaster, the Captive Balloon ride, the Dippy Dips ride, the Tunnel of Love rapids ride, and the Virginia Reel coaster.⁹⁵ This rapid succession of spectacles continued to attract Angelenos back to the beach for the ephemeral experience of novelty and gimmick.

Visual Difference

⁹² Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 80; Marlon Thann Gruen, "Arcadias and Avalons: Reframing Real Estate, Radicalism, and Race in the Cooperative Commonwealth of Los Angeles, 1893 to 1929" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 2015), 101–8; "Ellery's Band to Give Concerts At Venice," *Los Angeles Herald*, March 24, 1905.

⁹³ "Lively Sunday At The Beach," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1909.

⁹⁴ For a contemporary account, see "Venice, the Convention City," *Pacific Municipalities*, 1913.

⁹⁵ Local historian Jeffrey Stanton has rather single-handedly documented the amusement zones of Ocean Park and Venice from a wide personal collection of primary sources and photographs. His two books offer the best history of pleasure piers along the Santa Monica Bay. See Jeffrey Stanton, *Santa Monica Pier: A History from 1875 to 1990* (Los Angeles: Donahue Pub., 1990); Stanton, *Venice California*.

An array of lights, sounds, and sights overwhelmed the senses of visitors disembarking from a streetcar in Venice or Ocean Park and marked this landscape of leisure as quite different from the monotony of daily life. Visitors escaped responsibilities and concerns to play and relax. The riotous landscape of lights, sounds, and fun all but instantaneously enveloped guests into its seemingly surreal landscape. Electric lights introduced by bathhouses had spread along the shoreline during the 1900s as hundreds of thousands of bulbs twinkled next to the sea. Amidst “whirling generators and the throbbing pulse of fast-moving machinery,” amusement zones like Venice used technology and spectacle to create a cavalcade of stimulus. In 1907, a reporter described the amusement district at night:

the outlines of a city spring into white against the black curtain of night. The long lines of buildings, the airy contour of slender spires, the still more slender yards of a ship, are accentuated by blazing electricity. Arches suddenly flash over the street, entrances are marked by bands and blocks of light – all in the almost white, almost yellow glow of the incandescent. Then there are here and there the blue-white blazes of the arc light – yonder a crimson splotch where the carbon filaments gleam behind their prison of ruddy glass – here some dots of green, a little further away purple, down the street a patch of pink – all adding their individual notes to the mighty chord of coruscation.⁹⁶

When guests wandered beyond the amusements districts to the beach, the spectacles ranged from the Pacific Ocean and wildlife to displays of flesh by bathers. The visual stimulus was all consuming.

When visitors left the beach, the abrupt divide in the visual landscape signaled the end to the leisurely world of coastal fun. Like today, leaving vacations and amusements inevitably brought the return of daily worries and concerns. Trolleys quickly left beach towns to again be surrounded by agricultural fields. When beachgoers finally returned to Los Angeles less than an hour later, the visual world of the coast was long gone. The rapid mobility enabled by the trolley

⁹⁶ “With The Turn Of Switch Modern Venice Of The Pacific Outshines Old City Of The Doges Of The Adriatic,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1907.

maintained a spatial and cultural divide between the city and the coast. This stark visual contrast between the urban and littoral also served to magnify the juxtaposition between the two landscapes.

Financial Realities

This world of sun and sand frequented by millions of visitors also proved to be highly lucrative, encouraging the growth of pleasure-based economy driven by promoters, provisioners, and profiteers. In most coastal communities in Southern California, transportation syndicates played a critical role in financing not only the construction of leisure attractions, but also residential tracts and communal infrastructure. According to a 1911 article in *Billboard* magazine, rail and trolley companies had a stake in seventy-five percent of all amusement parks nationwide.⁹⁷ Unsurprisingly, developers used the stark contrast of the beach to sell real estate in budding coastal communities. Early land tycoons along the southern California coast, like Kinney or Henry Huntington, had grandiose visions for the future potent of their communities, hoping to grow to rival any coastal development. When Kinney founded Venice, he was forced to reckon with watery marshland that others had overlooked as he imagined building a coastal utopia. He endeavored to recreate a great metropolis with a lifestyle that stressed science and art. Developers like Kinney hoped to attract Angelenos to their resorts and residences by emphasizing difference from the rest of southern California. This oppositional construction of notions of place defined the beachfront as split from the urban. They hoped this differentiation would attract visitors from across southern California.

The strategy proved successful in selling real estate and municipal growth adjacent to coastal communities begin slowly. Nonetheless, real estate developers capitalized on the

⁹⁷ J.J. Weaver, "Park Construction Maintenance and Amusements," *Billboard*, March 20, 1911. Cited in Rabinovitz, *Electric Dreamland*, 9.

increasingly popularity of the coast and constructed new residential subdivisions outside of the urban center and near coastal trolley stations.⁹⁸ The prototypical East Coast “streetcar suburbs” strategically built along electric traction networks began to appear in Southern California as Ocean Park, Venice, Hermosa Beach, Huntington Beach and all rapidly grew during the 1900s. Early studies, like the work of Sam Bass Warner, emphasize the role technology played in determining transit development in early urban America, but these studies underestimated the importance of regional political economies, particularly in Los Angeles.⁹⁹ Coastal railroads and trolleys’ adoption reflected the more human causal forces of Angelenos’ material desires and syndicates’ capitalist dreams.

Residential growth during this period in Los Angeles was rapidly ubiquitous. By 1904, the scramble for ownership of beach frontage became highly competitive when over five miles of coastline sold within just three months. Syndicates made extensive purchases with substantive financial backing, far exceeding early but often furtive efforts at speculation. Many real estate developers along the coast, including Huntington, Kinney, Clark, Sherman, Robert Gillis, and William Hook, had financial interests in the streetcar and rail lines. Other developers, like Charles Le Roy Bundy, collaborated with the LAP or PE to build rail facilities for their new housing communities. More often than not, rail lines preceded these communities and drove their development. William May Garland, who developed Ocean Park and Hermosa Beach during the 1890s and early 1900s, built in cooperation with existing lines. They hoped to attract beach goers on their ways to major coastal destinations. Local newspapers confirmed that “the phenomenal

⁹⁸ Eric Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban: The Development of U.S. Cities & Towns, 1780-1980* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 162–68.

⁹⁹ Among the first texts on the subject was Sam Bass Warner, *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston, 1870-1900*, 2nd edition (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978).

growth has been made possible by the inroading of the steel rails of the electric railroads.”¹⁰⁰ In Redondo Beach, the population in 1890 was 603 and had only increased to 855 in 1900. After the already-existing narrow-gauge steam railroad was electrified in 1903, the population quickly grew to 2,935 in 1910. Similarly, Santa Monica’s population more than doubled between 1900 and 1910 after the LAP opened in 1896.¹⁰¹ The LAP’s owners, Moses Sherman and Eli Clark, also owned extensive real estate along their traction lines and helped to develop the communities of Sawtelle, Playa Del Rey, and Hermosa Beach. Robert Gillis, founder of the Santa Monica Land and Power Company, provided substantial funding and land to the LAP to ensure traction service for his company’s growing municipality. Despite modest profits on the PE system, Huntington and his associates made millions speculating on real estate on the city’s edges.¹⁰²

The projection of the uniqueness of coastal place by Kinney, Clark, or Sherman depended on its difference from city life, but also on constructing a totalizing landscape. These promoters carefully contoured the smells, sounds, and sights in this newly built environment to perpetually promote the mass consumption of leisure. For decades, some Angelenos had camped on the beach in tents and impromptu cabins. Developers quickly recognized that forcing guests to stay in hotels and boarding houses not only offered greater profits, but also more beachfront space for the carefully sculpted landscape of leisurely consumption. As early as 1888, Senator Jones sued tent proprietors in an effort to purge campers from the beach front. Santa Monica officials quickly passed an ordinance making beach camping a misdemeanor.¹⁰³ Many campers simply went beyond the city limits and pitched their tent while others started large tent cities further

¹⁰⁰ “Sensational Scramble For Beach Frontage And Boom Started,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1904.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (Oxford University Press, 1985).

¹⁰² Friedrichs, *Henry E. Huntington and the Creation of Southern California*, 68–97.

¹⁰³ “BEACH CAMPERS: Their Case is Argued and Submitted to the Court,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1888.

south in Huntington Beach, Newport Beach, Laguna Beach, and Coronado (San Diego). Extensive private ownership of the shoreline complicated efforts at drafting municipal ordinances. Many tent cities existed on private land and others were owned by popular religious organizations like Southern California Methodist Assembly. The issue would continue to arise, however, as the value of coastal real estate and consumption quickly grew. In 1907, the City Trustees of Ocean Park attempted to purge a tent city from Kinney's neighborhood of Villa City by using municipal fire ordinance.¹⁰⁴ In 1914, Redondo Beach trustees also used fire ordinances to ban tent cities.¹⁰⁵ Underlying these efforts was a clear attempt at gentrification to upgrade the appearance of coastal resorts. There was no space for the visuals of drying laundry in the perpetual paradise of beachfront leisure.

By the 1910s, the seductive world of the Southern California coast beckoned to a broad range of residents and visitors from beyond. When Anglo settlers arrived to the Los Angeles area during the second half of the 19th century, the potential opportunities of the coastal landscape seemed out of reach because of dangers and difficulties. Existing moral and physical stigmas forced boosters, railroads, and real estate syndicates to promote a built environment methodically tailored to address these widespread concerns. As these obstacles were conquered around the turn of the century, their removal began a rapid process of growth and development. Beach safety slowly increased as Americans became more familiar with beaches. Heated bath houses encouraged ever more visitors to the beach. Sprawling plunges helped hundreds of visitors grow to thousands. The eventual rise and success of electric traction networks fundamentally altered the landscape of the coast by linking it to the city with railroad ties and streetcar suburbs. Beaches were now clustered destinations for a coastal holiday that thrived on convenience,

¹⁰⁴ "Intent Is To Strike Tents," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 1907.

¹⁰⁵ "Fight on at Beach to Move Tent City," *Los Angeles Herald*, May 11, 1914.

novelty, and spectacle. The forces of capital responsible for these leisure emporiums knew their tremendous potential for financial gain as they tirelessly worked to create a profitable paradise along the sands.

Like Coney Island or Blackpool, coastal Southern California was a world apart from urban life: a unique wonderland for tourists and locals alike. In this era, visitors to the beach enjoyed the escapist pleasures of consumptive leisure, riding on roller coasters and dining from concessionaires. Some guests dreamed of erudite elegance as they enjoyed a ride on the Balloon Route or bathed in heated and illuminated plunges. Life on the sands operated in a liminal cultural space of greater socioeconomic fluidity as the rigid urban categories of class and race held less sway. Local newspapers declared it “the ‘Coney Island’ of the Pacific, lively, chic, and Bohemian.”¹⁰⁶ While Los Angeles was still growing into a city, boosters had already succeeded in creating an alternate universe of perpetual recreation and leisure among the tides.

¹⁰⁶ “‘Coney Island’ Is Ocean Park,” *Los Angeles Herald*, July 4, 1905.

Chapter 2: Beach Consciousness

The 1920s and early 1930s brought dramatic and lasting change to Southern California. As other historians have suggested, the rhythms of urban life transformed in Los Angeles as the modern metropolis took on the recognizable characteristics of automobiles and sprawl.¹ Population dramatically spiked as hundreds of thousands of migrants arrived at the Pacific coast with dreams of new lives. These patterns continued near the coast. Waves of brick, cement, and asphalt marched westward and carpeted the landscape as residents settled closer to the ocean. During these two decades, expanded automotive transportation networks in southern California eventually linked the sands of the Santa Monica Bay to Los Angeles with a veritable web of thoroughfares. A trip that once necessitated advanced planning was now just a drive away.

This dramatic increase in urban mobility to the beach is a largely untold story, but predictably parallels other burgeoning American cities of the era. Underlying this particular infrastructural expansion, however, was a conscious effort by a new generation of real estate developers eager to renovate the Los Angeles coast by pivoting development away from touristic hotels, piers, and seasonal attractions. Amusement operators, city planners, and even beach-hungry residents had done little to agitate for the new roads to facilitate surging rates of frequent

¹ In addition, 1920s Los Angeles acquired crucial industries like Hollywood and established Los Angeles' predominance as a Western city. For more, see Tom Sitton and William Deverell, eds., *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001). A small but diverse sampling of other important works on the decade include Elkind, *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy*; Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*; James Gregory, *American Exodus: The Dust Bowl Migration and Okie Culture in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*; Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*; Kevin Starr, *Material Dreams: Southern California through the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

coastal visits by Angelenos. Instead, developers and real estate tycoons attempted to capitalize on surf and sand by building residential coastal communities and promoting urban coastal living to Angelenos. Advertising seduced potential buyers with promises of the convenience of living and playing by the shore. Housing tracts, beach clubs, and recreational attractions offered a new financial impetus for coastal land development as the profits of increasingly hackneyed pleasure piers and amusements zones declined. This capital-driven transformation of space rapidly converted sandy, dilapidated bluffs into the suburban neighborhoods and recreational districts.

Developers and community builders not only transformed and urbanized the built environment of the coast, but also changed the way Angelenos lived and understood place in their growing metropolis. The civic mobility enabled by the profitable real estate strategy had a lasting impact on the behavior of residents throughout the region. The experience of driving to the beach became increasingly ordinary for many as inconveniences abated. Ease of access enabled quick visits by the nicknamed ‘lunch box crowd’ to the shoreline. These newly routine behaviors helped Angelenos to conceptualize the once-quaint coastline as urban beaches and an extension of the city. Studying mobility brings changing urban spatialization and temporalization into dialogue. Some scholars have argued that while movement is a simple, physical reality, mobility is both locally contextualized and socially produced.² Simply, “mobilities create spaces and stories – spatial stories.”³ The collective experience of mobility facilitated the construction of an entirely new cultural landscape by tagging the shoreline as an everyday place of southern California life in the minds of beachgoers and beyond. The spatial story here is a newly

² Tim Cresswell writes, “mobility is to movement what place is to location. It is produced and given meaning within relations of power” in Tim Cresswell, *The Tramp in America* (London: Reaktion, 2001). See also Tim Cresswell, *Place: A Short Introduction* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004); Tim Cresswell, *On the Move: Mobility in the Modern Western World* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

³ Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman, eds., *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), 5.

perceived reality of sun and surf developed from the practiced experiences of daily life by growing crowds of residents.

This chapter maps the changes in urban transportation modalities as cars replaced streetcars and trains along the coast. I begin with a short history of the rise of the automobile along the Los Angeles shoreline and the role of real estate in segmenting coastal access. The process of transforming the coastline to heed the needs of residents resulted in an ideal bounded by race and class. The beach quickly became a very different landscape for visiting tourists. This stark shift most dramatically unfolded as developer Fritz Burns transformed the aging and unpopular community of Playa Del Rey into a popular beachfront and middle-class, residential neighborhood. Contrasting the historical senses of mobility reveals how local conceptions of the city's "coast" grew to include a far broader swath of shoreline extending from north of Santa Monica to the Palos Verdes. Fundamentally, the experience of going to the beach became an increasingly routine and cherished part of daily life in the Southland.

A Drive to the Beach

The rapid ascendancy of the automobile brought dramatic changes to Los Angeles and its residents. During the first decade of the 20th century, motor enthusiasts or the affluent primarily purchased automobiles, but ownership became accessible and widespread in Los Angeles during the 1910s. Even before the city's population boom in the 1920s, Los Angeles already had the highest per capita rate of automobile ownership in the country.⁴ Car registration increased from

⁴ Martin Wachs, "Autos, Transit and the Sprawl of Los Angeles the 1920's," Working Paper (University of California, Irvine Institute of Transportation Studies), 1984, <http://www.its.uci.edu/its/publications/papers/ITS/UCI-ITS-WP-84-2.pdf>.

less than 20,000 in 1910 to over 100,000 in 1920.⁵ At the same time, trolley ridership increased sluggishly during the 1920s despite the region's population growth. Cars and roads blanketing the Southland quickly became the new norm.

The automotive boom is generally accepted as a defining trait of Los Angeles history, responsible for its diffuse form, inadequate public transit, and suburban identity. It has garnered intense interest for its potential as the archetypal postmodern metropolis.⁶ Scholars from history, planning, sociology, and urban studies have identified numerous factors responsible for the explosion of automobile ownership and road construction in the region.⁷ While the beach was a popular destination for early motorists, it was too infrequent a destination for Angelenos to justify purchasing vehicles. Historians have also rejected the evil car companies mythologized in *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?*⁸ Instead, as others have noted, reasons for the prodigious proliferation of automobile registrations resulted from the appeal of cars to consumers. Angelenos often had suspicions and dislike for trolleys and railroad executives, could afford automobiles and cheap oil, and lived in a single-family housing with a garage in a horizontally developed city. Further, fiscal policies by local and state government created a system of public

⁵ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 92.

⁶ The Los Angeles School arose in the 1980s focusing on postmodernism and the political economies of urban space. Key members included Edward Soja, Allen Scott, Michael Dear, Mike Davis and Jennifer Wolch.

⁷ Extensive work on Los Angeles and the automobile exist. General texts on the subject include Scott L. Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia*; Matthew William Roth, "Concrete Utopia: The Development of Roads and Freeways in Los Angeles, 1910-1950" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Southern California, 2007). Richard Longstreth has studied the automobile and commerce in Richard W. Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950*, Reprint (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998); Richard W. Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2000). Studies of automotive culture in Los Angeles include Eric Avila, *The Folklore of the Freeway: Race and Revolt in the Modernist City* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014); Banham, *Los Angeles*; Ashleigh Brilliant, *The Great Car Craze How Southern California Collided with the Automobile in the 1920's* (Santa Barbara: Woodbridge Press, 1989); Christopher W. Wells, *Car Country: An Environmental History* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).

⁸ Robert Zemeckis, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, 1988.

assistance for highways and road building.⁹ Historians have also debated the exactly when the automobile's local hegemony eclipsed traction systems, often pointing to the 1924 Major Traffic Plan.¹⁰ As the paved roads extended in all directions from downtown Los Angeles, city officials and developers constructed ever more routes to the sea.

A limited network of roads had long existed, but was wholly inadequate for the needs of a bustling city. The city's earliest roads were unpaved, had uneven roadbeds, and generated clouds of dust. During the late 19th and early 20th century, a nationwide "Good Roads" movement called for new and improved roadways for bicyclists and motorists alike.¹¹ Urban residents rallied for existing roads to be widened, oiled, and paved, while primarily rural farmers resisted the potential taxation of urban development. In Los Angeles, there was support for the movement in large part because of the city's haphazard jumble of bumpy streets, congestion, and few direct coastal routes. An early road map from 1900 reveals that downtown Los Angeles had a relatively straight street grid, but coherence faded in the less densely developed surrounding communities.¹² The automotive urban environment encouraged a lower density of residential development, but quickly led to infilling around key transportation nodes¹³. The building of subdivisions in Los Angeles was a booming industry with few regulations and this resulted in little consistency in road building in various new communities. The most direct route to the Pacific from downtown was due south to the port in the City of San Pedro, but the industrial

⁹ For more information on the growth of automotive networks in Los Angeles during the 1920s, see Wachs, "Autos, Transit and the Sprawl of Los Angeles the 1920's"; James J Flink, *The Automobile Age* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1988), 140–77. On public policy, see Sabin, *Crude Politics*.

¹⁰ Most notably in chapter four of Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*. This opinion has been challenged more recently, however by Roth, "Concrete Utopia."

¹¹ Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 57–58.

¹² A.L. George and N.B. Blunt, "Sectional & Road Map of Los Angeles County : Including Part of Orange and Ventura Counties, Showing the Oil and Mining Districts" (Los Angeles: Stoll & Thayer Co., 1900), Library of Congress Geography and Map Division, <https://www.loc.gov/item/2012592099/>.

¹³ Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban*, 179–81.

neighborhood was never a popular tourist destination.¹⁴ The area's waterfront was devoted to unloading freight onto rail cars and lacked an amusement district or a sandy strand. Some visitors continued further south to the Pike in Long Beach, Huntington Beach, or Newport Beach. Most of the early automobile traffic though vaguely followed the trolley lines and headed westward out of downtown.

As the city grew, boosters, developers, and officials built more transportation links westward. Efforts on the first paved road to connect downtown Los Angeles and the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay began in 1906 with a planned extension of the paving of Washington Boulevard to the Venice area.¹⁵ The next year, the Venice Chamber of Commerce joined in clamoring for an "asphalt paved road, not less than twenty feet in width."¹⁶ In 1909, a paved extension of Pico Street to Santa Monica was proposed, replacing "a disconnected highway of varying widths."¹⁷ An Automobile Club of Southern California map from 1912 depicts Wilshire and Washington boulevards as the only key seaward thoroughfares.¹⁸ Closer to the Pacific Ocean, auto enthusiasts, supported by the Automobile Club, built stretches of coastal routes as part of scenic and racing loops. These early roads largely replicated existing traction lines and did not change Angelenos' understandings of place or mobility.

¹⁴ San Pedro and the nearby city of Wilmington were consolidated by the City of Los Angeles in 1909.

¹⁵ "WIDEN HIGHWAY: Link in Boulevard From Los Angeles to the Sea," *Los Angeles Times*, June 23, 1906.

¹⁶ "Paved Way to Sea is Plan: Venice Chamber to Ask Auto Men's Help," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1907.

¹⁷ "Great Auto Highway From Los Angeles to the Sea," *Los Angeles Times*, July 25, 1909.

¹⁸ "Automobile Routes from Los Angeles to Neighboring Beach Cities, 1912" (Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California, 1912), Automobile Club of Southern California collection, 1892-1963, USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll59/id/305/rec/15>.

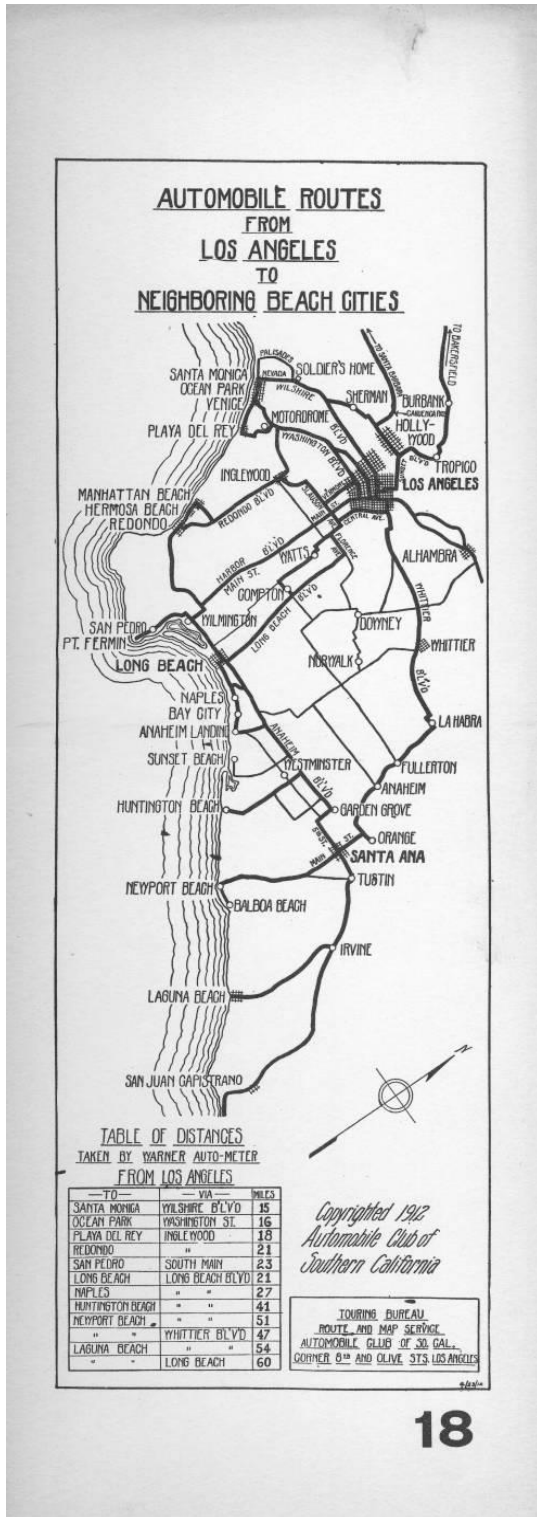


Figure 5. Map of 1912 Roads ¹⁹

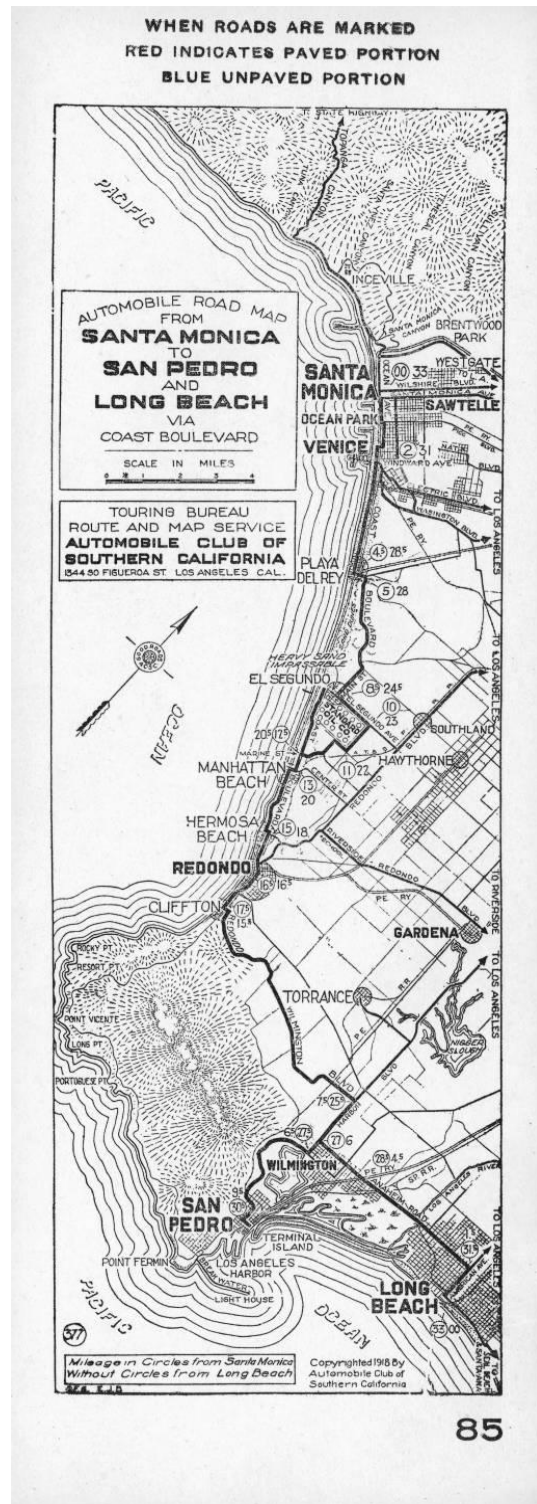


Figure 6. Map of 1918 Roads ²⁰

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Automobile Road Map from Santa Monica to San Pedro and Long Beach via Coast Boulevard, 1918" (Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California collection, 1918), Automobile Club of Southern California

Beginning in the 1910s, on state and federal levels, a series of highway bond issues helped to finance the ambitious expansion of asphalt.²¹ These funds helped support subsidies from general taxes. In Los Angeles, funding for road construction came from the city's budget, municipal bonds, and assessment districts on property owners.²² Potential unimproved routes, however, dwarfed funding for roads. Beginning in the early 1920s, fiscal concerns prompted legislators to narrow selections to politically expedient rural areas while also looking for additional funding. In 1923, a tax on gasoline and vehicle registrations supplemented these funds and helped to encourage public support for road building. Beginning in 1924, user taxes exceeded federal aid, bond expenditures, and general fund expenditures.²³ The dramatic increase in income switched away from direct subsidies to taxing users created tangible results. Planners mitigated public backlash and allowed street building to continue across the state. The 1927 Breed Act further redirect road construction to urban areas like Southern California. As more funding became available, cries for greater coastal access arose.

Accelerated street and highway building during the 1910s and 1920s became a national trend. Throughout the Southland, residents campaigned for more paved roadways and grand thoroughfares in their communities. From the San Fernando Valley to Redlands to Anaheim, citizens campaigned for a network of roadways that at least duplicated the existing geographic mobility in the Pacific Electric system. Impatient for progress, developers and residents pressed local officials for greater coastal convenience. Even as roadways expanded, a local newspaper

collection, 1892-1963, USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll59/id/336/rec/13>.

²¹ Members of the good roads movement pushed for this funding and received general political support with hopes of economic benefits. Acts include 1909 California State Highways Act, The Federal Road Act of 1916, the California State Highways Act of 1915, and the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1921.

²² Roth, "Concrete Utopia," 65.

²³ Sabin, *Crude Politics*, 172; Jeffrey Brown, "Statewide Transportation Planning in California: Past Experience and Lessons for the Future" (California Transportation Futures Conference, Los Angeles: University of California Transportation Center, 2000).

editorial complained, “the difficulty of reaching and viewing the ocean appears unexplainable to observers.”²⁴ The demands of a burgeoning metropolis rendered seaward routes built in the 1910s simply insufficient and often eclipsed by mass transit. Los Angeles’ crowded shoreline and jammed streets incited the populace to call for comprehensive transit to the coast. Beachgoers, car enthusiasts, and real estate developers each had specific complaints about the existing transit system, yet all saw increased automotive routes as the solution and collectively agitated.

In 1913, the *Los Angeles Times* reported on a balmy February in Venice, “the thoroughfares were jammed with honking machines.”²⁵ A drive to the beach was supposed to save time, but traffic congestion on key boulevards in beach communities in the late 1910s, particularly Santa Monica, Ocean Park, and Venice, grew notoriously difficult. Limited coastal infrastructure severely flagged under even infrequent visits by most residents. Near the beach, the adjacent narrow streets struggled as pedestrians, cars, jitneys, and trolleys all shared the same space, limiting the mobility enabled by the automobile. Abbot Kinney’s archaic dream of transportation on canals and traction lines left the city with most streets little wider than alleyways. Cars struggled to pass each other. As the rate of automobile ownership skyrocketed through the 1920s, problems with traffic worsened. The city convened panels and adopted traffic abatement strategies. The construction, widening, and paving of Pico and Venice boulevards funneled thousands of vehicles towards the shore. As beachgoers turned onto smaller streets to head north or south to their chosen beach, the bottleneck of traffic became tremendous. With routine frequency, the Venice area streets of “Mesmer Avenue, Esplanade, Trolleyway, and Vista Del Mar were lined with automobiles all day.”²⁶ The limited automotive routes to the beach

²⁴ “Coast Road Interests,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, February 1, 1926, Box 80v, Fritz Burns Papers, CSLA-4, Department of Archives and Special Collections, William H. Hannon Library, Loyola Marymount University.

²⁵ “Strand Is Visited,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1913.

²⁶ “Record Crowds Visits Palisades Del Rey,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, July 1, 1926.

somewhat mimicked the trolleys, depositing the majority of visitors in close proximity to each other. Even if mass transit proved speedier, car owners increasingly proved resistant to relinquishing their wheels for an afternoon trip. Angelenos looking to easily drive, park, and play at the beach still had few options.

When beach goers eventually succeeded in navigating the crowded thoroughfares, they encountered a different kind of crowding on the sands. Los Angeles' population grew at a historic rate during the 1920s while acreage of public beachfront simultaneously contracted. The situation was exacerbated by the constant population growth and by the difficulty accessing some sandy shorelines with limited beach easements. The available per capita square footage of beach dramatically decreased over the decade. Photographs of the popular beaches of the era illustrate throngs of beachgoers utilizing every square inch of beach. The beach south of Ocean Park's Lick Pier appears to be a quivering morass of umbrellas jockeying for space in photographs. Swimmers stand at least ten deep holding on to safety ropes. Each summer, however, there was less available space to pitch umbrellas. As residents altered the coastal ecosystem and tidal environment, beaches eroded at an accelerated pace, leaving a decimated strand. As the Pacific Ocean reclaimed sand, the lack of public ownership or legal protection of the shoreline enabled businesses to purchase and develop wide swaths of the coast. During the 1920s, Los Angeles city and county planners repeatedly noted need for immediate action to preserve space for public beaches. An active oil industry built hundreds of oil derricks along the shore, towering over beachgoers.²⁷ Expensive beach clubs purchased prime property and constructed exclusive beaches for members. Together, these factors squeezed ever-larger crowds onto the same few, overtaxed beaches.

²⁷ For more on coastal oil drilling and beaches, see Sarah S. Elkind, "Oil in the City: The Fall and Rise of Oil Drilling in Los Angeles," *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 1, 2012): 82–90; Sabin, *Crude Politics*.

Coastal real estate developers tried to surpass the success of trolley tycoons, like Henry Huntington or Moses Sherman, by building subdivisions next to automotive thoroughfares.²⁸ Developers hoped that speculative real estate gambles would succeed with the construction of sufficient infrastructure. Increasingly, a new generation of real estate tycoons recognized that investing in mass transit or dealing with Pacific Electric was no longer financially necessary to sell real estate. The Venice Chamber of Commerce noted that beach roads would “connect the rapidly growing high-class residence district of Los Angeles with the residence district of the beach resort” in 1907.²⁹ Developer, landowner and prominent Santa Monica citizen Carl Schrader attempted to capitalize on automotive suburbs by demolishing the once-grand Arcadia Hotel along Fremont Avenue and renovating the tract into the Seaside Terrace subdivision. Over the next five years, Schrader and others secured the rights of way along Fremont to the city limits of Los Angeles and raised enough funds to widen and pave what would become Pico Boulevard.³⁰ Early Los Angeles planners had designed highways “leading to West Coast beaches ... at more frequent intervals than the needs of adjacent property indicate,” but public demand continued to overwhelm forecasts.³¹ Planners dramatically underestimated the popularity of automobiles and beach visits.

²⁸ Starr, *Inventing the Dream*, 71–73.

²⁹ “Paved Way to Sea is Plan: Venice Chamber to Ask Auto Men’s Help,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1907.

³⁰ “To Subdivide Tract,” *Los Angeles Herald*, August 12, 1909; “High-Line and Air-Line Boulevard to Beach,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1914.

³¹ Hugh Pomeroy, “Pomeroy Describes Highways,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, July 15, 1926.

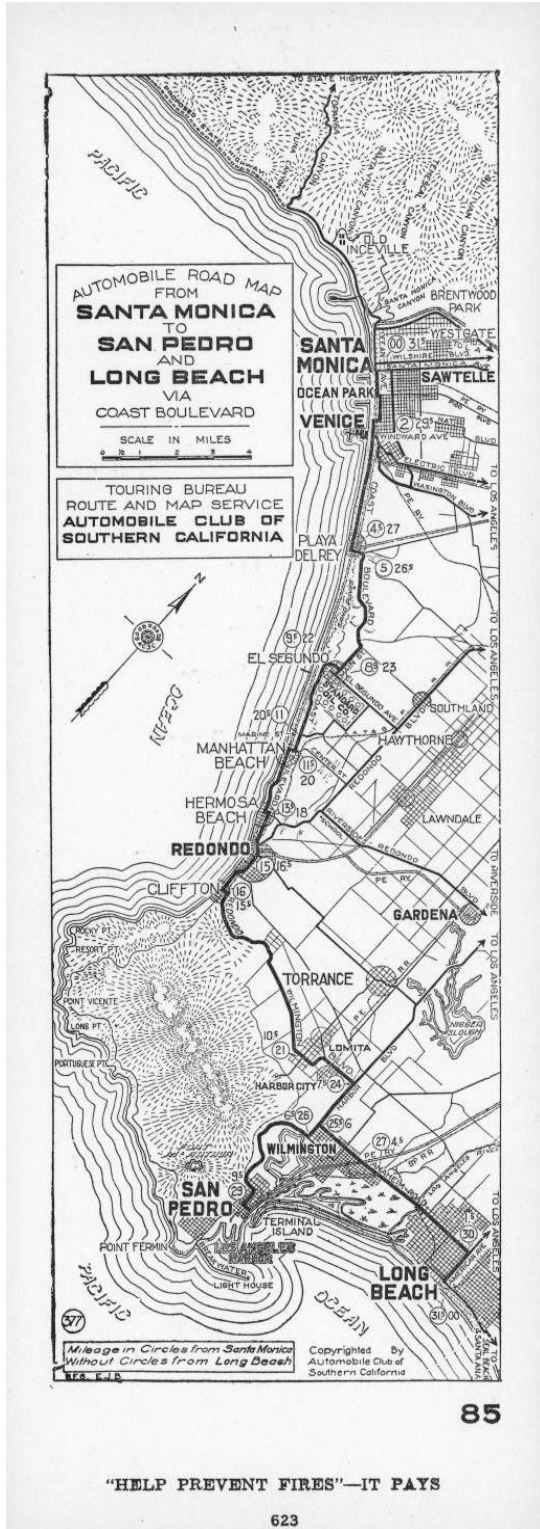


Figure 7. Map of 1923 Roads ³²

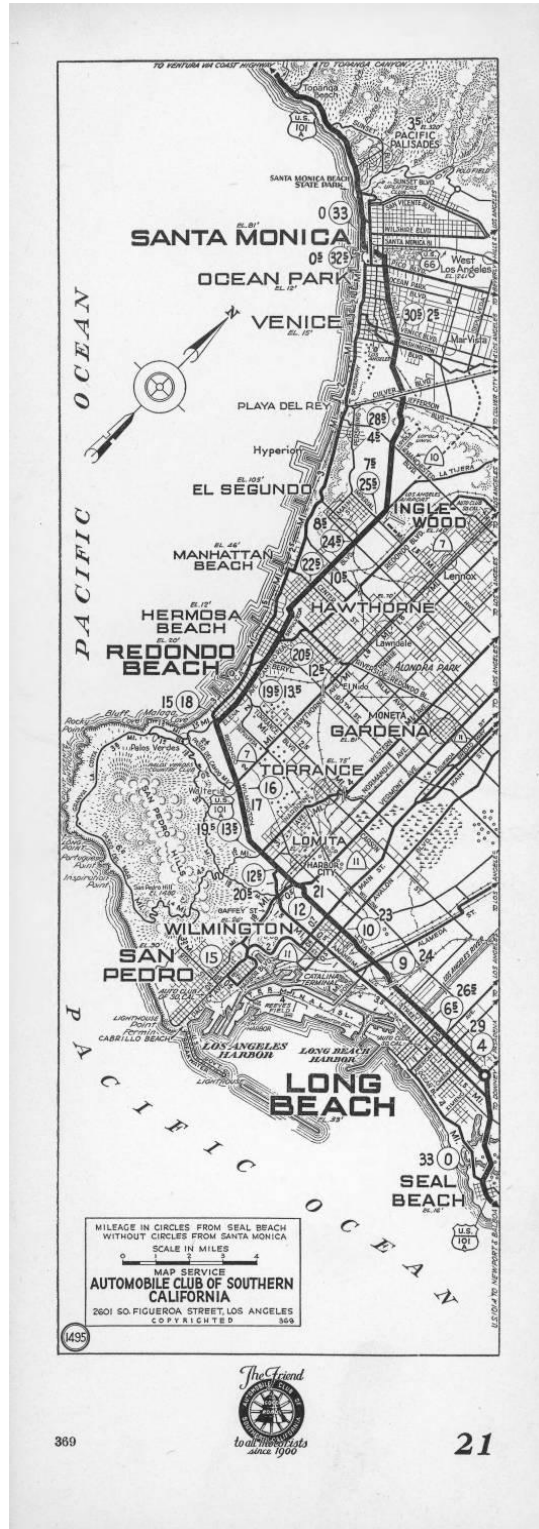


Figure 8. Map of 1936 Roads ³³

By the early 1920s, coastal development expanded beyond the saturated communities of Santa Monica and Venice, to areas north of Santa Monica Canyon and south towards Ballona, Playa Del Rey, and El Segundo. A lack of thoroughfares, however, was a constant problem. An Automobile Club map illustrates the confluence of coastal routes to a narrow band of coastline in Santa Monica and Ocean Park as late as 1923.³⁴ Between Washington Boulevard in Venice and Riverside-Redondo Boulevard in Redondo Beach, there was a noticeable void in the street grid. The interurban electric railways had only stopped once between Venice and lower Manhattan Beach.³⁵ Expanding beach access to less popular areas like Topanga, Playa Del Rey, El Porto, Manhattan Beach, and Hermosa Beach was an obvious solution. Existing infrastructure buckled as crowds funneled along a few narrow boulevards, and some feared the region's beaches might lose their scenic charm.

Planners and engineers dramatically increased the number of coastal automobile routes over the next dozen years. Cities, like Los Angeles, overcame hurdles to road construction. Updates in 1911, 1913, and 1919 to the Improvement Act simplified the cumbersome process of assessment district approval that had existed under the Vrooman Act of 1885.³⁶ Municipalities also now had newly available funds for road construction. In 1926, from north to south, municipalities constructed San Vicente, Santa Monica, and National Boulevards due west,

³² B.F.G. and E.J.B., "Automobile Road Map from Santa Monica to San Pedro and Long Beach via Coast Boulevard, 1923" (Automobile Club of Southern California, 1923), Automobile Club of Southern California Collection, 1892-1963, USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/compoundobject/collection/p15799coll59/id/119/rec/11>.

³³ "Automobile Route along the Pacific Coast from Seal Beach to Santa Monica, 1936" (Los Angeles: Automobile Club of Southern California, 1936), Automobile Club of Southern California collection, 1892-1963, USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll59/id/309/rec/1>.

³⁴ B.F.G. and E.J.B., "Automobile Road Map from Santa Monica to San Pedro and Long Beach via Coast Boulevard, 1923."

³⁵ This rail line was never used for any steam-hauled service and generally saw lower usage than most routes.

³⁶ Assessment districts remained a challenge for city planners in densely developed areas, particularly vexing head of the Streets Division of Los Angeles, Henry Osborne Jr. In the largely agricultural or undeveloped coastal neighborhoods, however, existing residents put up little resistance. For more, see Roth, "Concrete Utopia," 65–68.

creating seven principal seaward thoroughfares.³⁷ By the end of the year, the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* reported, “at least eight major boulevard projects, centering in the Santa Monica Bay District and calculated to relieve traffic strangulation which exists in several points in Venice, Ocean Park, Santa Monica...are underway.”³⁸ A decade later, a 1936 Automobile Club map illustrated a street grid that would be more familiar to modern residents.³⁹ More than 10 broad boulevards paved wide stretches from downtown to the Santa Monica and Venice. In addition, new boulevards including Culver, Manchester, Jefferson, and Center served newer municipalities southwest of Los Angeles. Some congestion remained on the crowded north-south streets of Santa Monica and Venice where property owners and residents resisted efforts to expand streets via assessment districts, fearing the loss of private property. Nonetheless, beachgoers from across the Southland now not only had access to a longer strand, but a greater variety of beaches. Angelenos could swim in El Segundo, play in Venice, and stroll in Santa Monica.

The Santa Monica Land and Water Company was one organization responsible for promoting this road development in its subdivisions and became boosters for its spread. Its head Robert Gillis, like other developers of the era, increasingly rejected the hegemony of the Pacific Electric system, and focused spending on roads. Subdivisions built on the hilly real estate along the Santa Monica Mountains were also far more suited to automobiles. Emphasizing street construction also allowed developers to transfer some of the infrastructure costs to residents via assessment districts. Building was still expensive and by 1927, Gillis had spent over \$600,000 building and improving roads in just the community of Huntington Palisades, part of the

³⁷ Brown, “Map Showing Automobile Routes from Los Angeles & Pasadena to Santa Monica, Ocean Park & Venice, 1926” (Automobile Club of Southern California, 1926), USC Digital Library, <http://digitallibrary.usc.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/p15799coll59/id/326/rec/1>.

³⁸ “Eight Major Boulevard Projects Are Under Way Now in the Bay District,” *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, December 5, 1926.

³⁹ “Automobile Route along the Pacific Coast from Seal Beach to Santa Monica, 1936.”

Westgate Addition.⁴⁰ He not only owned thousands of acres in and near Santa Monica, but was also the onetime owner of the *Santa Monica Evening Outlook* and used it as a booster publication for car transportation, regularly emphasizing transit issues during the period.⁴¹

Perhaps the most symbolic of these paving projects came as the City of Los Angeles cemented over much of Abbot Kinney's elaborate canal system in Venice. The canals long had issues with poor water circulation, but the smell and "unsanitary" pollution increasingly became a regular source of complaints by local business owners and the Venice Chamber of Commerce.⁴² The experience of driving was also particularly challenging in the district. Canals and winding streets intended to offer Italianesque charm instead created congestion and left few spaces for parking. Officials hoped to renovate the amusement district into an automobile-friendly neighborhood with a recreational beach able to serve the needs of the rapidly growing city. Some Venice residents resisted the plan, however, concerned about property values, increased taxes, and the loss of the city's unique charm, eventually launching years of lengthy litigation.

When Los Angeles annexed declining and ailing Venice in 1925, with plans of urban renewal, efforts towards paving increased. Venice became Los Angeles' premiere beach property and officials hoped to modernize the neighborhood to meet the demands of the surging population. Since Abbot Kinney's death and the onset of Prohibition, infighting and ineptitude dominated local politics. Frustrated Venice residents voted for annexation, tacitly approving Los Angeles' outspoken support for paving. Residents wanted the mobility and autonomy of the greater metropolitan region, not a decaying amusement district. After five years and repeated

⁴⁰ Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*, 105.

⁴¹ Gillis eventually sold the *Outlook* to publishing tycoon Ira Copley in 1928.

⁴² "Canal Case Decision is Made Final," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, December 20, 1926.

appeals, the courts finally adjudicated in favor of the Los Angeles City Council's wishes. Over the summer of 1929, truckloads of sand filled the canals and workers paved new roads. The *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "Famed Waterways Give Way Before March of Progress," confirming the city's official narrative of progress.⁴³ Governor C.C. Young presided over a fete to celebrate the conversion of canals to streets. The loss of Venice's titular attribute was an acceptable cost for an increasingly easy and carefree beach visit for most.⁴⁴

New seaward roads and the automobile fundamentally addressed the greatest complaints about coastal access on the existing trolley system in Los Angeles. Before the cheap automobiles of the interwar period, trolley rides to the shore were too expensive for many, particularly if the family's wage earner already paid to commute. Surging numbers of cars across Southern California, however, lowered the financial cost of a visit to the beach for tens of thousands of residents. By the 1920s, the opportunity to own an automobile extended to the working class. Affordable second-hand cars and increased economic opportunities enabled by mobility substantially lowered financial barriers to ownership.⁴⁵ Trolley fares decreased with competition and as residents organized a "concerted campaign for cheaper transportation from the city to the beaches"⁴⁶

Driving to the beach was also far more convenient and time efficient means of visiting the shoreline. While the Pacific Electric system offered a geographic breadth across much of Southern California, the nearest trolley stop (or bus stop) was often a substantial distance from beach goers' residences. For drivers, however, travel times to the shore decreased throughout the

⁴³ "Vanishing Canals At Seaside Resort," *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1929.

⁴⁴ "Venice Fete Marks End of Canals," *Los Angeles Times*, June 30, 1929; Tom Moran and Tom Sewell, *Fantasy by the Sea: A Visual History of the American Venice* (Culver City, CA: Peace Press, 1980); Stanton, *Venice California*; Jeffrey Stanton, "Filling Venice's Canals," *Venice History Site*, April 6, 1998, <http://www.westland.net/venicehistory/articles/canalfill.htm>.

⁴⁵ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 204–5.

⁴⁶ "Carfare Cut Is Sought By Bay District," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, September 27, 1926.

Southland. Though traffic became the bane of many residents in the 1920s, much of the congestion was centered in downtown. Heading west, drivers could choose the most direct route to the beach. Previously, limited destinations on the traction system had restricted residents to an area of coastline near main terminuses. Now, drivers across the Southland had far more efficient and prompt access to the beaches of their choosing. Further, residents now had their choice of destination as the wider mobility enabled by the automobile opened a far wider potential area for beach visits. With more shoreline accessible, prototypical activities were popularly paired with specific stretches of sand. Visitors eager to gaze at the playful crowds could drive to Venice, residents looking to relax drove to El Porto, and fishermen drove to Redondo. Finally, the carrying capacity of automobiles allowed visitors to bring their own umbrellas, picnics, fishing equipment, recreational amusements, and boats. Residents did not need to depend on rental companies or vendors clustered near the recreational business district. Tourists staying in nearby hotels increasingly forced these businesses to reorient their business. It was now not only speedier and potentially cheaper to drive rather than take a trolley, and cars also provided a greater degree of the cherished mobility and individual autonomy.

This shift in habits contributed to the decline in of Pacific Electric and their once ubiquitous red cars. Nationally, early urban mass transit receded in a variety of municipalities with the automotive surge.⁴⁷ In Los Angeles, both profitability and system conditions slowly began to dip in the 1920s, though the region's explosive growth ensured a still sizeable consumer base. In 1911, after Southern Pacific took control of Pacific Electric, the company increasingly focused on profitable freight rail, rarely providing improvements to passenger rail. Newly

⁴⁷ For more on the decline of trolleys in America, see Martha J. Bianco, "Technological Innovation and the Rise and Fall of Urban Mass Transit," *Journal of Urban History* 25, no. 3 (March 1, 1999): 348–78. On Pacific Electric in Los Angeles, see Sy Adler, "The Transformation of the Pacific Electric Railway Bradford Snell, Roger Rabbit, and the Politics of Transportation in Los Angeles," *Urban Affairs Review* 27, no. 1 (September 1, 1991): 51–86.

constructed residential communities more often came with garages than proximity to trolley stations. By 1930, Pacific Electric and the Los Angeles Railway collectively lost almost \$1.5 million.⁴⁸ Trolleys managed to hang on and serve the coast through the 1940s, but years of neglected maintenance eventually forced the immediate closure of the Venice Short Line in 1948, ending an era of beach transportation.

Umbrellas and beach goers blanketed the sands of the Santa Monica Bay, increasingly visiting newly accessible sections of the strand that had been largely vacant in earlier eras. A 1910 Pacific Electric brochure map depicted the region's coast as mostly blank and sporadically dotted with coastal attractions. By the beginning of the 1930s, development was omnipresent along the entire Santa Monica Bay. At one far end of the bay, north of Santa Monica Canyon, visitors began to motor to the beachfront near Topanga Canyon, Malibu, and the Rindge Estate. At the other end, new subdivisions in Palos Verdes, Manhattan Beach and Hermosa Beach drew more visitors to the southern expansions of the Los Angeles region.

Playa Del Rey

As Angelenos descended on the sands, new coastal links accelerated urbanization most notably in sections of the Santa Monica Bay with sparse population and limited mass transit accessibility. While tourists and residents had long flocked to the cities of Santa Monica, Ocean Park, and Venice, beachfront development south of La Ballona Creek and in surrounding wetlands lagged behind. Located near today's Marina Del Rey and Los Angeles International Airport (LAX), the sleepy beginnings of Palisades Del Rey or Playa Del Rey did not foreshadow

⁴⁸ Mark S. Foster, "The Model-T, the Hard Sell, and Los Angeles's Urban Growth: The Decentralization of Los Angeles during the 1920s," *Pacific Historical Review* 44, no. 4 (November 1, 1975): 459–84.

its rapid development during the twenties. While its neighbors grew in the previous decade, commercial development in the area was sporadic. In just a decade, however, its redevelopment by a new subdivider and newly constructed automotive routes transformed the coastline from a seemingly remote and seedy stretch into a popular beach and residential development. Playa Del Rey demonstrates how new found automotive mobility enabled a dramatic shift in coastal experiences for Angelenos going to the shore.

During the first few decades of the area's development, setbacks and repeated bad luck seemed to doom the beachfront and its adjacent lagoon. During the 1880s, local landowners and the Santa Fe Railroad Company explored building a large port at the mouth of the creek, but the project went bankrupt as the developers struggled unsuccessfully to dredge the lagoon to a sufficient depth.⁴⁹ In 1902, real estate scion Henry Barbour and Los Angeles Pacific's owners Moses Sherman and Eli Clark led a syndicate of investors that bought the land and founded Playa Del Rey - "King's Beach" in Spanish - as a coastal resort community designed for out-of-town guests. Their entity, the Beach Land Company, built a hotel, an elaborate pavilion, a 3000-seat amphitheater/bandstand, a funicular to the top of the palisades, and developed the lagoon for bathing, fishing, and boating.⁵⁰ In 1904, the Los Angeles Pacific Santa Monica-Lagoon line began to service the community as part of the Balloon Route Excursion. In 1911, Pacific Electric helped build a popular motordrome that briefly rivaled the Indianapolis Speedway.⁵¹ When Venice annexed the community in 1911, streams of visitors and tourists seemed to be just around the corner.

⁴⁹ Marco R. Newmark, "Early California Resorts," *The Historical Society of Southern California Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 1953): 129-52; Jan Loomis, *Westside Chronicles: Historic Stories of West Los Angeles* (The History Press, 2012), 53.

⁵⁰ "Old Ballona Sold: Millionaires Plan Ocean Beach Resort," *Los Angeles Herald*, June 15, 1902.

⁵¹ For a detailed history of the Los Angeles Motorodrome, see John Crosse, "Playa del Rey: Speed Capital of the World, The Los(t) Angeles Motordrome, 1910-1913," *Southern California Architectural History*, March 12, 2011, <http://socalarchhistory.blogspot.com/2011/03/first-board-track-opened-at-los-angeles.html>

Little went right for the community, however, and it stagnated in its first incarnation. Despite the financial support of local elites and the city's largest transportation network, the community never had the same popularity or commercial success as its northern neighbor, Abbot Kinney's Venice. A grand pleasure pier was never constructed. Trolley access to the area initially came south from Venice and Ocean Park, rather than directly seaward from downtown, adding to travel time. A later Los Angeles Pacific trolley spur never generated the traffic of the competing Venice Short Line and took longer to reach the beach. There was little developed along the Playa Del Rey trolley spur after leaving Culver City other than fields of celery, cauliflower, and lima beans. This rural swath of agricultural fields reinforced a sense of isolation from other amusement districts.⁵² For private transit, adjacent wetlands complicated access to the area as most early roads avoided the swampy area. Repeated fires also haunted the small community with no fire department. The fishing pier collapsed into the surf in 1911 and again in 1917, the motordrome burned down in 1913, the pavilion burned, the post office, the school, and the library closed. Local sheriffs closed the once-grand Hotel Del Rey in 1917 amidst unsupported accusations of prostitution.⁵³ While the trolleys continued to run through Playa Del Rey, only a few residents stubbornly remained along the oceanfront palisades. During these doldrums, elected representatives from the cities of Santa Monica and Venice sought to minimize competition and ensure future economic growth by transforming the land into a naval base, but the federal government was not interested.⁵⁴

⁵² David J. Dukesherer, *'Round the Clump of Willows: Westchester/Playa Del Rey, California* (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2010), 19; D. J. Dukesherer, *Beach Of The King: The Early History of Playa Del Rey, Westchester, Playa Vista, California* (Charleston: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2009).

⁵³ "Go Down With Decrepit Pier," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1917.

⁵⁴ United States Congress House Committee on Rivers and Harbors, "Playa Del Rey Inlet and Basin, Venice, Cal. Report on Preliminary Examination of Playa Del Rey Inlet and Basin, Venice, Cal.," House Document 1880, 64th Congress, 1917; "Naval Base Again Sought By Venice," *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1921; "Have Vision Of New Seaport: Venice Men Want Naval Base at Playa Del Rey," *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 1921.

As Playa Del Rey sat forgotten during the late 1910s and early 1920s, the City of Venice and the Los Angeles County made limited efforts to link the area to the growing metropolis. Playa Del Rey was one of the few communities in Los Angeles County whose population decreased between 1910 and 1920. Roads from Venice had to cross the Ballona Lagoon and bridge construction was expensively unappealing. Development around the new community was mostly limited to agricultural fields and vistas festooned with oil derricks. Few Angelenos had reasons to visit the crumbling community. The traction links that served Playa Del Rey were among the least utilized in the Pacific Electric system, running with fewer cars and less powerful motors. Residents may have seen the somewhat forgotten lines as passé to the regionally trending middle-class, suburban communities.

Playa Del Rey's prime coastal real estate was too valuable to languish during Los Angeles' housing boom in the 1920s. The surging manufacturing and oil industries near coastal communities created a growing market for homes nearby. Across the region, subdividers created a variety of residential communities tailored to different classes.⁵⁵ Santa Monica had long attempted to cultivate an air of exclusivity with high real estate prices and expensive hotels. Its southerly neighbor, Ocean Park, cleverly attempted to appeal to a more middle-class demographic. The rapid expansion of residential development during the 1920s, however, put this practice into greater relief. In an area south of Playa Del Rey now called the South Bay, the adjacent communities of Torrance and Palos Verdes modeled this contrast. Torrance was developed as a model industrial community with worker housing restricted to surrounding large,

⁵⁵ For more on growing South Bay industry, see Ronald A. Davidson, "Before 'Surfurbia': The Development of the South Bay Beach Cities through the 1930s," *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* 66 (2004): 80–94; Nicolaidis, *My Blue Heaven*.

manufacturing and development plants.⁵⁶ Neighboring Palos Verdes, however, was developed as an affluent residential community nestled amongst the peninsula's rolling hills. Costs and restrictions in the lease explicitly limited the community to single-family homes costing at least \$4000.⁵⁷ The class character of Playa Del Rey's redevelopment had yet to be decided.

Development finally came to Playa Del Rey's overlooked stretch of sand. After another fire befell the community in 1924, landowners gave up and sold the property. The development firm Dickinson & Gillespie, led by company Vice President Fritz Burns, purchased the tract with visions of a beachfront paradise.⁵⁸ Fritz Burns was born in Minnesota and after serving as a Lieutenant in World War I, he moved to Los Angeles with real estate dreams. Burns found success during the 1920s and rose to prominence in the real estate industry in the 1940s, leading the Home Builders Association of Los Angeles and later the National Association of Home Builders. Burns saw himself as a community builder and would continue efforts at master planning on a grand scale in future developments, especially during his later partnership with Henry Kaiser and Kaiser Community Homes.⁵⁹ Before the rise of professional urban planners, developers like Burns played a significant role in sculpting the landscape of the city. Fritz Burns honed his real estate tactics developing the smaller communities of Glendale Manor and

⁵⁶ Greg Hise, "'Nature's Workshop': Industry and Urban Expansion in Southern California, 1900-1950," in *Manufacturing Suburbs: Building Work and Home on the Metropolitan Fringe*, ed. Robert Lewis (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ Marsh, *Suburban Lives*, 170.

⁵⁸ The former Hotel Del Rey was repurposed as the Hope Development School for Girls in 1920. Amid concerns of fire, a former patient committed an act of arson and burned down the building in May of 1924, killing 24 and injuring many.

⁵⁹ For more information on Fritz Burns, see James Thomas Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles: The Biography of a Community Developer and Philanthropist* (Thomas and Dorothy Leavey Center for the Study of Los Angeles, Loyola Marymount University, 2001). Burns has received some historical attention for his role in midcentury community building. See Greg Hise, "Home Building and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles: The Roots of the Postwar Urban Region," *Journal of Urban History* 19, no. 2 (February 1, 1993): 95-125; Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*. Burns has been critiqued for his relatively narrow vision of community, however. He vocally attacked public housing in Los Angeles as a means of socialism. See Keane, *Fritz B. Burns and the Development of Los Angeles*, 94-95; Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 39-45.

Hollydale Gardens (part of modern Hollywood) and had substantial success with what he described as the “higher class” of sales tactics.⁶⁰ For his first big project in Los Angeles, Burns not only planned to build extensive residential subdivisions, but also dreamed of a new business district, yacht harbor, and public access to expanded beaches.

Fritz Burn’s grand plans for Playa Del Rey, however, hinged on changing prevailing opinion about the community’s inaccessibility, tawdry origins, and once-ramshackle beach cottages. Burns directly addressed the issue in a campaign to change perceptions with brochures for the community openly acknowledging, “the original development experienced the handicap of inaccessibility.”⁶¹ He consciously aimed his advertisements at potential residents with automobiles, selecting Angelenos from a comfortable economic background. Promotional drawings depicted large single-family homes with generous garages and repeatedly mentioned the list price guaranteed surfaced roads. He wanted to build a beach that emphasized daily utility to residents and conjured visions of livability. He sought to establish it as a coastal residence and destination for his coveted higher class, emulating the posh beach communities of Palos Verdes or Los Angeles’ Pacific Palisades. Burns promised that living along the coast would no longer required residents to sacrifice access to the bustling life of Los Angeles.

Burns hoped his vision of modern coastal living would appeal to his intended middle-class demographic by specifically emphasizing “the home supreme.”⁶² Advertisements hinted at the value of home ownership in Playa Del Rey beyond rapidly appreciating real estate. During the 1920s, homeownership, like the automobile, became a defining trait of the middle-class and the marker of an ideal citizen. A single-family home was a virtuous home. President Herbert

⁶⁰ Fritz Burns to Robert Burns, September 22, 1922, Folder 1, Box 1, CSLA-4.

⁶¹ Palisades Del Rey, Advertisement, Undated, Folder 6, Box 3, CSLA-4.

⁶² Ibid.

Hoover repeatedly tried to inspire Americans towards higher rates of homeownership by promising “permanent prosperity.”⁶³ In Playa Del Rey and elsewhere, this dream was facilitated by a greater emphasis on mass production in the building industry, expanding access to ever more Americans.⁶⁴ Publications of the era stressed that homeownership not only facilitated greater political engagement through communal ties, but also provided a nurturing space for families.⁶⁵ The cover of one brochure featured a young boy and his dog on the beach watching darting sailboats. Recreation for couples and families was a repeated theme in marketing. Burns also promised to protect this carefully cultivated class character. He stated Playa Del Rey would retain beneficial character by ensuring “entire property appropriate restricted and zoned,” using similar tactics to Palos Verdes.⁶⁶ Buying a home along the coast could ensure new residents’ dreams of both a homogenous class bulwark and the promised benefits.

The planned centerpiece of the community embodied this class-based vision of residential repose and ease along the Pacific Ocean. In contrast to most beach communities in Southern California at the time, Dickinson & Gillespie did not plan a pleasure pier for the community, instead preferring the niche market and affluent exclusivity of a yacht harbor. Advertisements hinted boating on the lagoon provided residents with a desirable recreational and suburban character. Burns told reporters that Playa Del Rey would feature “the freedom of the beach from commercial development,” alluding to neighboring Venice.⁶⁷ During Prohibition, many of the amusement districts near the piers in Venice had developed problematic reputations

⁶³ Adam Ward Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside: Suburban Sprawl and the Rise of American Environmentalism*, Studies in Environment and History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 18–28.

⁶⁴ The construction of Playa Del Rey homes used a system of mass production developed by Beaux-Arts architect and Columbia University Professor Ernest Flagg that emphasized efficiency in materials. Flagg described his system in Ernest Flagg, *Small Houses: Their Economic Design and Construction* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1921).

⁶⁵ Monkkonen, *America Becomes Urban*, 186–88.

⁶⁶ Dickinson & Gillespie, Advertisement, Undated, Folder 6, Box 3, CSLA-4.

⁶⁷ An Observer, “Community Development: Beach Project Close to City,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1924.

as sites for prostitution, gambling, and bootleg alcohol. Burns' yacht harbor was never constructed and few Angelenos owned pleasure crafts, but throughout the 1920s, his planning for the community was predicated on Los Angeles as ready for an evolution in coastal real estate development. This new landscape promised both greater potential profits and meshed well with his larger vision of community building. An undated lecture for brokers at the Dickinson & Gillespie Sales School repeatedly called for sales pitches to "illustrate Palisades Del Rey as knowing what to do and when to do it."⁶⁸ Buyers purchased not only proximity to ocean breezes, but also middle-class exclusivity and automotive mobility sanitized of ribald amusements. Fritz Burns and others hoped buyers would embrace a new sort of beach community with easy access to both work and the best of beachfront recreation.

Fritz Burns knew a yacht harbor was not enough to overcome the resistance in the minds of Angelenos. Burns worried that complacency had depreciated the value of the real estate and repeatedly tried to stress the newness and uniqueness of Playa Del Rey. He attempted to rename the community "Palisades Del Rey" to rebrand the community, was stopped by Venice officials, and nonetheless stubbornly continued with the unofficial moniker. The community's greatest selling point, as advertising repeatedly noted, was that this coastline was "the last of the ocean front contiguous to Los Angeles" that remained undeveloped and visitors should come "*sea for yourself*."⁶⁹ In an effort to sell property, Dickinson & Gillespie stressed that existing beaches had been "consumed to meet the demands of its first million of population. The 2nd Million is already on the way here, and they must be satisfied with a completely diminished commodity."⁷⁰ Crowding at beaches elsewhere on the Santa Monica Bay remained an issue at the popular

⁶⁸ Fritz Burns, "Dickinson & Gillespie Sales School Lecture No. 1," Undated, Folder 4, Box 1, CSLA-4.

⁶⁹ Palisades del Rey, Brochure, 1924, Folder 5, Box 1, CSLA-4.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

beaches served by trolleys. While many suspected that Los Angeles' growth in the 1920s was unsustainable, sellers capitalized on public fears of overcrowding during the real estate bubble.

Del Rey's proximity to downtown Los Angeles, Culver City, Inglewood, and Hollywood was prominently advertised. Like other developments of the era, advertisements assumed residents would commute daily to Los Angeles' core. The site was "Los Angeles' closest beach" and "at the strategic focal point of 5 Major Highways."⁷¹ Dickinson & Gillespie neglected to mention, however, that these glamorous, "strategic" boulevards, including Washington, Slauson, Manchester, Centinela, and Hollywood-Redondo were not all paved and often became impassable in inclement weather. Flooding was a perpetual concern in the streets surrounding Playa Del Rey and nearby La Ballona Creek because the marshlands sat at or below sea level. In 1924, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote, "to be frank, Palisades Del Rey is not the best in community development inasmuch as street improvements are not of the best," but continued when "improvements are completed and better facilities are provided on the tract for automobile accessibility, this project will offer more."⁷² Photographs accompanying the article depicted temporary roads in the community under development. Burns recognized the cachet of urban proximity to the alluring landscape of the coast and kept building.

In 1926, Fritz Burns established *Palisades Del Rey Press* as a community newspaper and served as editor and frequent author. The newspaper ran a mixture of original news articles, reprinted articles, and shamelessly ostentatious advertisements. The pages served as a pulpit for Burns to campaign for his growing real estate empire with the seemingly benevolent language of progress and community concern. Articles heralded the development that Burns hoped would transform Playa Del Rey into a world-class beach playground area. Burns also used the

⁷¹ Dickinson & Gillespie, "Del Rey Hills Within the 13 Mile Circle," Advertisement, Folder 6, Box 1, CSLA-4.

⁷² An Observer, "Community Development: Beach Project Close to City."

newspaper as a bully pulpit to call for further infrastructure. Despite its occasionally bombastic tone, the paper provides a detailed record of changes to the community. The paper tracked these improvements and proudly declared “[s]timulated by ... prodigious growth ... and the ever increasing urge toward the sea, what sufficed for a half century will be made a broad, smooth, concrete boulevard within the year.”⁷³ Burns was also quick to remind new residents “resurfacing...will show an immediate increase in property values. It will enlarge the field of every business establishment.”⁷⁴ While the newspaper clearly functions as a booster publication, an expansion of asphalt loomed.

Plans for greater transit links for Playa Del Rey hinged on help and attention of local officials. In the immediate aftermath of the city of Los Angeles’ 1924 Major Traffic Street Plan, regional road building was accelerated by the collective will of elites that included Henry Chandler and a \$5 million bond issue. When the City of Los Angeles annexed Venice, overdue road building in the area became the city’s responsibility. In 1926, a report by Eberle & Riggleman Economic Services to the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission critiqued the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce’s perpetually sunny forecasts of infrastructure capacity and called for an improvement of transportation between the city and county in the southern portion. The planning commission heeded the suggestion for more transit and acknowledging, “many coast areas are not readily accessible from the city.”⁷⁵ With Burns’ financial incentive for municipal attention, city road building eventually included to the beaches of Playa Del Rey.

⁷³ “Hollywood-Redondo Boulevard Ass’n Secretary Outlines Project,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, January 15, 1926.

⁷⁴ “How Speedway Improvement is Viewed,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, May 1, 1926.

⁷⁵ “Los Angeles Faces Lack of Seaside Sites,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, May 15, 1926; “Beach Survey Reviewed by L.A. Examiner,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, May 15, 1926. See also Hise, “‘Nature’s Workshop’: Industry and Urban Expansion in Southern California, 1900-1950,” 181–83.

New transit links came rapidly as the city, county, and Dickinson & Gillespie simultaneously paved new routes. Travel times between downtown Los Angeles and the coast sharply fell to just thirty-five minutes by the end of 1926 and only thirty minutes in late 1927.⁷⁶ Within the community, construction eventually finished on the community's oft-touted permanent cement pavement roads. Palisades Del Rey increasingly resembled its once-grand claim as a "radial hub of highways." External connections linked the rapidly growing beach community to Los Angeles, Culver City, and unincorporated Los Angeles County. Between 1926 and 1928, city and county highway departments paved five principal routes in the area at an unprecedented rate for the long-neglected community. Approval for the paving of Jefferson Boulevard from nearby Culver City came in June of 1926 and opened in mid-August of 1926.⁷⁷ Hollywood-Redondo Boulevard was fully paved and open by September 1, 1926.⁷⁸ By summer of 1927, the paving of Manchester and Sepulveda Boulevards was underway.⁷⁹ Summer of 1928 brought the largest push of paving for the community with over \$250,000 spent locally. Fritz Burns' *Palisades Del Rey Press* proclaimed, "construction activity breaking all records: steam rollers, ditch diggers, steam shovels, mules, money, and men – all are rushing the work every daylight hour."⁸⁰ The paper even buttressed the hyperbolic claims with an impressive array of photographs of multiple construction crews hard at work. Burns was determined to rapidly fuse his community with the city to sell real estate and his vision of coastal living.

⁷⁶ "Another Blvd. For Venice," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, October 14, 1927.

⁷⁷ "Jefferson Paving Approved," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, June 15, 1926; "Jefferson Ready for Traffic in Culver City: First Unit of New Highway is Thrown Open," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 15, 1926.

⁷⁸ "Hollywood-Redondo Boulevard Opens Sept. 1: Completion of New Highway Being Rushed," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 1, 1926.

⁷⁹ "Sepulveda Boulevard Progress Made," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, May 6, 1927; "Manchester Ready for Action," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, July 15, 1927.

⁸⁰ "Quarter Million for Street Paving – All in PDR," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, June 10, 1928.

The responsiveness of the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission led by head planner Hugh Pomeroy was no coincidence. Pomeroy was a regular speaker at and a member of the private beach club owned by Dickinson & Gillespie, the Palisades Del Rey's Westport Beach Club. The rapid pace of construction came in part from support by local political elites lobbied with free beach club memberships. Burns was also quick to praise his political allies in his newspaper. The Association of City Planners met repeatedly at the community's picnic grounds with their families for celebrations and annual events. Los Angeles Mayor Cryer and City Planner Gordon Whitnall also were regular visitors to the club.⁸¹ Even, Governor C.C. Young repeatedly vacationed at a summer residence near the beach community and visited the beach club.⁸²

The impetus for paving the boulevards to the sea was not solely motivated by greased palms. Planning in crowded areas like downtown or Venice proved challenging, but the large swath of undeveloped land on scenic beaches represented a blank canvas for innovation. Local officials Hugh Pomeroy and Gordon Whitnall helped bring about the professionalization of planning in Los Angeles. Whitnall had previously established the official Los Angeles City Planning Commission in 1920. This new class of planners shifted the profession of planning from reactively improving the social environment for residents to focusing on the ideal spatial environment for the metropolis.⁸³ They not only embraced a dramatic expansion of automotive infrastructure, but also the opportunity to develop a recreational beach for the modern city. Their vision of coastal land use emphasized public utility with limited commercial amusements and correlated with Burns' growing community. Whitnall and the chairman of the Los Angeles City

⁸¹ "City Planners Coming to Talk Beaches," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 2, 1926.

⁸² "Capital Moved to Los Angeles," *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 1929.

⁸³ Axelrod, *Inventing Autopia*, 24–30.

Council planning committee traveled to the East Coast in April of 1926 to scout Florida and Atlantic Coast beaches to renovate and improve the strands in Venice and Playa Del Rey.⁸⁴ They saw themselves as experts in building and imagining a new era for Los Angeles. Discouraging carnival attraction and focusing on the beach itself seemed to be the new ideal.⁸⁵ Providing access was the first step in meeting this idealized coastal landscape.

During the same era, developments similar to Playa Del Rey expanded along the Santa Monica Bay. Cities actively attempted to modernize their beachfronts to accommodate recreational needs. Infrastructure and smooth highways rapidly expanded across southern California and into the beach communities of Orange County to the south. Connecting the beaches to cities was the new default policy. Private organizations and neighborhoods lobbied for more roads and highways. Paved boulevards provided easy access to rapidly developing industrial areas like the Chevron Refinery in its namesake El Segundo, the South Bay's new Firestone plant in Torrance, Culver City's movie studios, and the municipal Mines Airfield (later LAX) in Westchester.⁸⁶ Newer communities on the city's periphery became increasingly networked with a regional web of roads, eventually challenging the very notion of periphery.⁸⁷ In a climate of unabated urban growth, improving coastal connections to Los Angeles' expanded strand still received more attention than most local public works projects. Officials promised Angelenos new, traffic-free access ways to the sands. Many eagerly awaited these wide thoroughfares to convey them westward. Residents and developers demanded not boulevards *from* the sea, but boulevards *to* the sea.

⁸⁴ "L.A. Officials Now on U.S. Beach Tour," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, April 19, 1926.

⁸⁵ Jones Beach in New York opened in 1929 with this similar approach and would become the exemplar for further beach construction throughout the 1930s and 1940s.

⁸⁶ "First Highway with Tree and Light Program," *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 31, 1927.

⁸⁷ Greg Hise has called this pattern of urban growth "peripheral urbanism" and has described the phenomenon as coming to dominate Southern California during the World War II era. See Hise, "Home Building and Industrial Decentralization in Los Angeles: The Roots of the Postwar Urban Region."

“Beach Conscious”

In the summer of 1926, just two years after the development of Del Rey began, beach attendance skyrocketed despite incomplete highway connections. Record breaking crowds visited the beach “from early morning until late at night,” “preparing picnic lunches, using playground facilities, taking a dip in the sea and otherwise enjoying the unsurpassed pleasure.”⁸⁸ The *Palisades Del Rey Press* continued, “[t]his more-or-less overlooked beach has recently been “discovered” by an increasing number until the municipal playground department has found it expedient and even necessary to furnish a patrol of expert [life]guards...new roads are under development that will make complete arrangements for accommodating increasing throngs.”⁸⁹

Beyond Playa Del Rey, beachgoers drove to other beaches of their choice for leisure and recreation in greater numbers during the period. In 1925, the new Los Angeles City Charter formally created the Department of Playground and Recreation, which began keeping track of beach attendance figures. In 1926, daily beach attendance was estimated at over 11,000 people a day.⁹⁰ A 1928 report by the Los Angeles Department of Playground and Recreation estimated that just over a half million residents, or roughly one quarter of the county’s population, attended the beach on just one popular summer weekend.⁹¹ In 1929, the department estimated attendance

⁸⁸ “Record Crowds Visits Palisades Del Rey,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, July 1, 1926.

⁸⁹ “L.A. Examiner Lauds Popular P.D.R. Strand,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 16, 1926.

⁹⁰ “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1926).

⁹¹ “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1928). See also Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*, 70.

at over 10 million per year.⁹² Increased coastal attendance exceeded the population growth of the County with peak attendance growing by about thirty thousand individuals in just one year.⁹³ By 1934, the department reported average weekly municipal beach attendance during the summer mushroomed to almost eight hundred thousand.⁹⁴ These numbers are just estimates of beach attendance at official city beaches, ignoring other municipalities and adventurous patrons who skirted private property to access beaches in Malibu, Santa Monica, and San Pedro. The data also reflects inconsistent standards of measurement, but clearly suggested sustained growth in beach attendance even if the rate is indeterminate.

As more Angelenos visited the beach as part of their daily lives, changes in the coastal landscape were accelerated. The beach became a more appealing recreational landscape. As the premiere public space in the Southland, beaches were a popular place for free amusement during the Great Depression. Perceived increases in aquatic safety encouraged many to wade into the waves. During the late 1920s, both the city and county of Los Angeles created lifeguard departments. The advent of professional lifeguard services along the coast dramatically decreased ocean-related deaths.⁹⁵ The diversity of recreational activities grew as Angelenos adapted to coastal living. Southern California municipalities also began lengthy efforts to make the shoreline wider. As the beach's popularity increased, public beach acreage decreased. With a lack of local land use policies, private capital successfully gained control of much of the coastline.⁹⁶ Nonetheless, governments began purchasing beachfront to keep up with public

⁹² "Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles" (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1929).

⁹³ Charles Cohan, "Beach Options May Be Closed: Acquisition Program Being Formulated County, State and Citizens Co-operating Increased Population Makes Issue Urgent," *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1930.

⁹⁴ "New Record Set for Attendance at Playgrounds," *Los Angeles Times*, August 6, 1934.

⁹⁵ Arthur C Verge, "George Freeth: King of the Surfers and California's Forgotten Hero," *California History* 80, no. 2/3 (2001): 82–105.

⁹⁶ Elkind, *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy*, chap. "Oil and Water"; Elkind, "Oil in the City."

demands. City, county, and the United State Army Corps of Engineers artificially nourished the sands, creating a utilitarian vision of wide, sandy swaths of shoreline to accommodate millions. Public attention was increasingly fixed on the surf.

The surge in popular attention altered the significance of the coast to residents of the Los Angeles environs between 1925 and 1935. As the beach figuratively grew “closer” with convenient thoroughfares that made it quicker and easier for people to get to the beach, the expectations and needs of residents evolved. Beach visits increasingly involved surf and sand rather than boardwalks and pleasure piers. The beach’s accessibility drew it closer to the center of the city’s cultural landscape. This integration into the urban life of Angelenos manifested a popular reinterpretation of the beach as a quintessential sphere of the oft-glorified southern California lifestyle. Where else could one enjoy the regional mobility to visit both the snow-capped mountains and the serene Pacific?⁹⁷ Residents could embrace the great outdoors and return from the periphery in just a few hours. Accessibility to the beaches perfectly married what David Nye described as the “natural sublime” and the “technological sublime.”⁹⁸ He argues that the beauty of the physical landscape long dominated cultural tastes, but sometime during the twentieth century, technological feats came to represent the zenith of experiences. For Angelenos, a drive to the beach married both joys – enjoying the wonders of automotive mobility and the azure vista of the Pacific.

This mobility innately changed the way Angelenos experienced the visual landscape of the coast. If beach goers had boarded the trolley in the “city” and disembarked at the beach, such clear demarcation no longer existed while driving. Diffuse development across West Los

⁹⁷ Gish, “Growing and Selling Los Angeles.”

⁹⁸ Nye, *American Technological Sublime*. The idea has its roots in part in Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). For its use in Los Angeles history and the construction of the Mulholland Freeway, see Roth, “Concrete Utopia.”

Angeles and regions of the South Bay created a hodgepodge of residential, commercial, and agricultural properties that ruptured the previously perceived bifurcation of the region. While the Pacific Ocean remained an obvious visual contrast, the tentacles of urbanization now extended to the sands. This new way of viewing the landscape of the city has been described by cultural scholars as automobility, a modern paradigm of autonomous mobility.⁹⁹ Driving down any of the key thoroughfares deposited visitors in close proximity to a wide variety of beaches. If residents enjoyed a lengthy visit at a crowded beach, it was (often) an autonomous decision not constrained by the inconvenience of mass transit.

It is a challenge, though, to measure the cultural transformation of the southern California coast in the minds of its residents. As increased accessibility shaped popular notions of daily life, the experience of beach-going evolved from seasonal tourism to a quintessential experience. The most notable shift in a regional reconceptualization of the coast as the beach, reminiscent of Fritz Burns' dreams, came as ever more residents left the sand and plunged into the surf. In earlier years, many beach patrons changed at nearby natatoriums or in their hotels. Now, as more patrons drove to the less commercialized beaches, they had few options to change attire before or after swimming. When the public beach in Palisades Del Rey opened, it was observed that "[t]here are no nearby dressing accommodations, most of the present visitors donning their watering suits in their automobiles or motoring there in their bathing costumes...plans are being developed for dressing quarters."¹⁰⁰ Newspapers politely overlooked the glaring sanitary necessity of toilets at the shore too.

⁹⁹ Mike Featherstone, "Automobilities An Introduction," *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, no. 4–5 (October 1, 2004): 1–24.

¹⁰⁰ "L.A. Examiner Lauds Popular P.D.R. Strand" *Palisades Del Rey Press*, August 16, 1926.

Millions of beach goers changing from wet swim attire in their automobiles in crowded parking lots was not a solution. The lack of shorefront amenities had been overlooked and incidental when the majority of visitors had attended coastal plunges, bathhouses, and retreats. Rentable seaside tents were once common but had been squeezed out by the crowds or banned by municipalities.¹⁰¹ The Department of Parks and Recreation acknowledged the issue, writing, “the most urgent need at present is for comfort stations facilities to meet the requirements of the vast numbers of who frequent the public beaches. Doubtless attendance would be greatly increased if this service were available”¹⁰² In 1927, the city installed comfort stations at Santa Monica Canyon, the Cabrillo Breakwater (San Pedro) and began construction on a \$20,000 comfort station and lifeguard headquarters for Venice.¹⁰³ In 1930, the city demolished the derelict Sunset Pier in Venice and replaced it with a municipal bathhouse and changing facility with a capacity of over 3000 patrons.¹⁰⁴ Despite a clear need, construction of public facilities along the shores lagged throughout the 1930s and 1940s, held up by budgetary restraints. Voters stayed hesitant in passing construction bonds and the city and county only received a trickle of money from the Works Project Administration. Overtaxed facilities, however, did not deter the millions of beach goers.

While municipalities slowly constructed public facilities, private beach clubs popped up along the southern California coast during the same time period as residents reoriented towards their increasingly urban shore. For affluent residents, beach clubs provided locker space, recreational facilities, entertainment, and opportunities to mingle with other members. The clubs

¹⁰¹ “Say Tents on Beach Immoral,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1922.

¹⁰² “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles,” 1926.

¹⁰³ “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1927).

¹⁰⁴ “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1930).

assumed their members would be driving and located themselves near main arteries for easy access, eschewing trolley routes. An Angeleno socialite might be the member of several clubs elsewhere in the city, but the rapid growth in membership of beachfront establishments suggests that many residents embraced a new sphere in Los Angeles social life. Established organizations with locations in downtown, like the Jonathan Club, opened beach branches. Clubs tended to cluster in the more cosmopolitan beach neighborhoods, like North Santa Monica. A single advertisement for Santa Monica boasted of *sixteen* coastal establishments including, the Santa Monica Athletic Club, the Los Angeles Athletic Club, the Beach Club, the Crescent Bay Yacht Club, the Edgewater Club, the Santa Monica Tennis Club, the Santa Monica Golf Club, the Chateau Club, the Gables Club, the Breakers Club, Casa Del Mar Beach Club, the Deauville Club, and the Sea Breeze Club.¹⁰⁵ In 1926, membership in Santa Monica beach clubs was reported at almost thirty-five thousand.¹⁰⁶ Despite their proliferation, though, the clubs were explicitly the domains of the socioeconomic elite. Membership was expensive and also religiously and racially restrictive. Popular beach clubs in Santa Monica built at the end of newly paved Pico Boulevard including the Casa Del Mar Beach Club, the Edgewater Club, and the Waverly Beach Club took advantage of new automotive routes, but also privatized sections of coast that had long been used by African Americans. Casa Del Mar Club went so far as to build a wall into the water to prevent trespassing.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ “Come to Santa Monica for Recreation and Romance,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 1927.

¹⁰⁶ Dickinson & Gillespie, “The Answer to Better Beach Development,” Advertisement, Undated, Folder 6, Box 1, CSLA-4.

¹⁰⁷ Alison Rose Jefferson, “African American Leisure Space in Santa Monica: The Beach Sometimes Known as the ‘Inkwell,’ 1900s-1960s,” *Southern California Quarterly* 91, no. 2 (2009): 168–71. For more on beach segregation, see Daniel Burdsey, *Race, Place and the Seaside: Postcards from the Edge* (London: Springer, 2016); David E. Goldberg, *The Retreats of Reconstruction: Race, Leisure, and the Politics of Segregation at the New Jersey Shore, 1865-1920* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017); Kahr, *The Land Was Ours*; Marsha Dean Phelts, *An American Beach for African Americans* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997); Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis*.

Dickinson & Gillespie, the developers behind Palisades Del Rey, quickly jumped on the trend, almost immediately constructing their own private seafront haven. Burns explained, “the suppressed desires on the part of the public for modern and up to date beach development is indicated by the rapidly growing membership of the Bay district beach clubs.”¹⁰⁸ The club’s building, resembling a “small adobe model of a Castilian village,” was ostentatiously decorated with ornamental iron, heavy woodwork, and red Spanish tiles and featured a swimming pool, locker rooms, tennis courts, bowling alleys, a “salt water plunge and [an] excellent beach.” The exclusive Westport Beach Club opened in 1925 “with a membership comprised of prominent business and professional men.”¹⁰⁹ Burns made sure that the club was served by a private concrete drive that enabled easy access and parking for members. Elites wanted to enjoy the sand and surf in comfort, prompting the club to install a groin, a low wall perpendicular to the sand designed to create calmer waters and arrest tidal flow.¹¹⁰ Dickinson & Gillespie even built a floating platform just beyond the waves with lifelines for swimmers. Photos reveal a bathing station immediately inside the club’s wall near the waves for quickly rising off sand and saltwater, a luxurious convenience.¹¹¹ The *Palisades Del Rey Press* regularly published photo essays of happy bathers frolicking in the club’s sands. Membership by the end of 1926 was around six hundred families. The club would be a fixture of the community until its decline in the 1960s, appearing in numerous memoirs of coastal living from the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ “The Answer to Better Beach Development,” Folder 6, Box 1, CSLA-4.

¹⁰⁹ “The Westport Beach Club at Palisades Del Rey,” Folder 6, Box 1, CSLA-4.

¹¹⁰ “Palisades Del Rey Beach One of Safest” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, June 1, 1926; Herman Schultheis, *Playa Del Rey*, Photographic Print, 1937, Herman J. Schultheis Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, <http://photos.lapl.org/carlweb/jsp/FullRecord?databaseID=968&record=46&controlNumber=26300>.

¹¹¹ Herman Schultheis, *Wall around the Pool, Westport Beach Club, Playa Del Rey*, Photographic Print, 1937, Herman J. Schultheis Collection, Los Angeles Public Library Photo Collection, <http://photos.lapl.org/carlweb/jsp/FullRecord?databaseID=968&record=6&controlNumber=5099668>.

¹¹² Fire struck Playa Del Rey yet again and the Westport Beach Club’s ornamented clubhouse burned down in 1964. The club eventually closed in 1978. A prototypical memoir would be Patrick Howard, *Latitude “50: Coming of Age in 1950”s Los Angeles* (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2007).

Many Angelenos unable to join exclusive clubs took advantage of Dickinson & Gillespie's Del Rey Swim Club when it opened in 1930. The club was opened as membership at the elite Westport Beach Club was temporarily capped due to claims of crowding. More likely, as the beginning of the Depression put a damper on the real estate market, Burns hoped to reach a different cross section of the coastal market share as affordability of a beach visit drove ever-greater numbers of Angelenos to Playa Del Rey. He planned to open his newest and most affordable Del Rey subdivision, Surfridge, and knew the importance of advertising a new urban lifestyle near the beach. The club was intended for "real honest-to-goodness people," meaning white, middle-class families. Membership was only \$15 a year, substantially lowering the economic bar for a broad class of Angelenos. Burns wrote, "the Del Rey Swim Club is part of our community project, serves as an accommodation to the many fine people residing in the Del Rey area, and also, thru its non-resident members, fosters a patronage for the Del Rey beach amongst the representative families of Los Angeles."¹¹³ An inventory list reveals the club rented umbrellas, monogrammed swimsuits, and beach chairs while also operating a concessions stand.¹¹⁴ While the club was quite popular, its low membership fees were only sustainable as Dickinson & Gillespie's real estate empire grew. Early success proved fleeting and the club was unable to survive the Depression, closing sometime in late 1933 or early 1934. For its duration, the club filled a glaring need for residents looking to incorporate regular beach visits into their busy daily lives.

Changing facilities played a fundamental role as interstitial places that coupled the shifting sands and the urban experience, girding a coastally centric lifestyle. Patrons could drive up to the seemingly transformative facilities and walk out as beach-goers. A rapidly growing city

¹¹³ Fritz Burns, "Swim Time at the Beach Is Here," June 18, 1930, Folder 2, Box 8, CSLA-4.

¹¹⁴ Weekly Statements of the Del Rey Swim Club 1930-1932, Folder 4, Box 4, CSLA-4.

expanding along coastal boulevards ended the undeveloped boundary between the city and sands. The beach was no longer a landscape of leisure separated by a trolley ride. Bathhouses, beach clubs, comfort stations, and even parking lots became regular outposts of automotive mobility on the sands, beaconing to bathing Angelenos. Angelenos increasingly recognized and appreciated these automobile-friendly nodes that linked the working needs of punctuality and proper attire and playful wants of fashion, recreation, and leisure.

The expansion of these in-between places also ensured “the coast became integrated with the growing city of Los Angeles as a particular sort of recreational space...the beach was becoming a *de facto* urban park.”¹¹⁵ Driving allowed beach goers to be less constrained by time or cost, encouraging residents across the Southland to visit recreational beaches more regularly. The City of Los Angeles reported that “Mr. and Mrs. Average Angeleno will visit the beach at least nine times” this year.¹¹⁶ With a quick drive, residents could go to the beach, change into swimming attire for a quick dip or tanning session, yet be back dressed in street attire and in their vehicle minutes later. From Boyle Heights to Hollywood to Vernon, locals came to visit the beach for a couple of hours, not days or weeks on an expensive pre-planned vacation. It was a space to eat lunch or gather with friends. In a city devoid of public parks in many neighborhoods, the sunny sands filled this void. Understanding the coast as an urban park reveals a popularity and centrality of the beach evidenced by contemporary newspapers. The *Los Angeles Times* stated, “before the past decade or so, for instance, one merely went to the beach on special occasions...that was before we were really beach conscious.”¹¹⁷ Increased convenience reinforced the reality that the beach really was just a drive away.

¹¹⁵ Ronald A. Davidson, “The Beach versus ‘Blade Runner’: Recasting Los Angeles’ Relationship to Modernity,” *Historical Geography* 35 (2007): 56–79.

¹¹⁶ “Ten Million Visit City’s Beaches,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1929.

¹¹⁷ John Cornell, “What’s Balmy on the Beach?,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1938.

Refracting the City

As the beach became a part of the urban geography of Los Angeles, the wide thoroughfares brought more than just pleasure seekers looking to frolic in the tides. The once distant coastal world of endless amusements became increasingly politicized as citizens, planners, developers, and city officials became committed to the future of the landscape. Like Playa Del Rey, the new topography of the coast was designed for Angelenos, not tourists, and channeled the values of Progressive Era city activists. This merging urban and littoral world in the 1920s, however, required far greater stratification of space. Coastal real estate developers, like Fritz Burns, spearheaded processes of class segregation and housing marketing segregation in an effort to appeal to that ideal and ascribe greater value. Both public and private forces also instituted far stricter racial policies during this era in efforts to remake or “whitewash” the city into a shining beacon on the Pacific. As Bill Deverell argued, “Los Angeles was the spot – city leaders of the 1920s like to call it, without a trace of irony, the ‘white spot’ – where prophecy met history, where a place inherited millennial destiny.”¹¹⁸ Contemporary visions of the beach not only imagined white sands, but also white bodies.

Prior to the 1920s, a mix of private covenants, illegal policies, and the potential for physical violence enforced a de facto policy of whites only at most beaches. Common intimidation tactics included threats of trespassing, vandalized vehicles, and blatantly inaccurate signage. White beach goers more frequently targeted African Americans for harassment than

¹¹⁸ Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 4. For a more detailed analysis of the explicit racial undertones to the ostensibly labor-related phrase “white spot,” see Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*, 38–44.

Mexican Americans or Asian Americans, but the racial diversity of Southern California created wide variance in the frequency and manifestations of violence. Some discrepancy and ambiguity exists in sources on everyday experiences of nonwhite Angelenos. There is no denying white hegemony along the shore, yet nonetheless, most residents found ways to the waves.¹¹⁹

In this earlier era, industrial, remote or undesirable sections of the shoreline often served the recreational needs of targeted populations. Although limited in source material, we can see that researching the social history of leisure and community formation at these sites is challenging given a paucity of sources and existing research. African Americans primarily recreated at Bruce's Beach in Manhattan Beach and the "Inkwell" in Santa Monica. Bruce's Beach opened as a resort in 1912 much to the chagrin of Manhattan Beach developer George Peck who was unable to find any other buyers, but aggressively campaigned against nonwhite residents. The "Inkwell" became popular in the early 1900s due to its prime location in Santa Monica. A sewage line carrying waste and smell onto the sands repulsed white residents and allowed African-Americans access to an otherwise restricted shoreline.¹²⁰ Beaches near Japanese American fishing communities in Santa Monica, Palos Verdes, and San Pedro looked and smelled far too industrial for most white Angelenos. After dredging and unsightly landfill in the

¹¹⁹ For example, Josh Sides describes how African Americans were welcomed at the Santa Monica Pier Amusement Park while other sources describe Peck's Pier in Manhattan Beach as the only welcoming pier in Southern California. Sides' description echoes Wallace Thurman's writing in *The Blacker the Berry*. See Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 21; Robert Garcia and Erica Flores Baltodano, "Free the Beach - Public Access, Equal Justice, and the California Coast," *Stanford Journal of Civil Rights & Civil Liberties* 2 (2006): 143; Wallace Thurman, *The Blacker the Berry* (New York: The Macaulay Company, 1929). Other sources describe how beaches were entirely off limits to African Americans yet oral histories and photographic evidence suggest otherwise. Chance and luck as well as time and location clearly played important roles in determining the success of beach visits for African Americans and others.

¹²⁰ Few monographs devote more than a passing paragraph or two to the African-American experience at the beach. Alison Rose Jefferson's dissertation offers the most complete history of Bruce's Beach and the "Inkwell." See Jefferson, "Leisure's Race, Power and Place." For more, see Jefferson, "African American Leisure Space in Santa Monica"; Douglas Flamming, *Bound for Freedom: Black Los Angeles in Jim Crow America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

early 1900s, Brighton Beach on Terminal Island became the primary public space for thousands of residents of Furusato, a Japanese fishing village around the canneries.¹²¹ These leisure areas served as important spaces for place making and community building in an era when little public park space was available. Ethnic enclaves along the beaches proved transitory, however, as Southern California grew rapidly.

Beginning in the 1920s, increased migration of whites from the South and Midwest altered local demographics and contributed to an uptick in racial discrimination in coastal communities. Romanticized landscapes, bright economic forecasts, and a mild climate captivated Americans of all backgrounds and drew them westward. New residents who tried to recreate small town living with the benefits of urban life also wanted racial homogeneity. Restrictive policies seemed to reflect a cultural ideal rather than a reaction to Los Angeles' growing African American population. As we've previously seen, planners and city officials worked to create policies and infrastructure to buoy the promotion of an idealized lifestyle along the coast. Racially restrictive covenants ensured that vast swaths of Los Angeles would be white.¹²² Almost every coastal community attempted to entirely exclude African Americans. Despite access to beaches in Manhattan Beach and Ocean Park, those same communities restricted residential ownership to white residents. Additionally, Santa Monica, areas of West Los Angeles, Playa Del

¹²¹ For more information on Furusato, see Naomi Hirahara, Geraldine Knatz, and J. Eric Lynxwiler, *Terminal Island: Lost Communities of Los Angeles Harbor* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2015); David Metzler and Allyson Nakamoto, *The Lost Village of Terminal Island* (Our Stories, 2007); Kanshi Stanley Yamashita, "Terminal Island: Ethnography of an Ethnic Community : Its Dissolution and Reorganization to a Non-Spatial Community" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Irvine, 1985).

¹²² During the 1920s, covenants only allowed African Americans to move to areas South or East of downtown. For more on racially restrictive covenants and suburban ideals, see Robert M Fogelson, *Bourgeois Nightmares: Suburbia, 1870-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005); Weiss, *The Rise of the Community Builders*. In Los Angeles, see Laura Redford, "The Promise and Principles of Real Estate Development in an American Metropolis: Los Angeles 1903-1923" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2014); Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*; Jefferson, "Leisure's Race, Power and Place"; Scott Kurashige, *The Shifting Grounds of Race: Black and Japanese Americans in the Making of Multiethnic Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Rey, Redondo Beach, and Palos Verdes maintained such policies through the 1940s. Promotional material for Playa Del Rey made sure to note that community featured “perpetual racial restrictions.”¹²³ The complete construction of coastal communities allowed white developers to build towards a coastal ideal from the ground up. Racially fluidity in Los Angeles did occasionally allow Mexican and Asian Americans to purchase property in largely restrictively homogeneous communities, but developers were generally successful in their efforts to shape coastal residency.¹²⁴

White landowners saw nonwhite ownership of beach frontage as an even more serious threat to their suburban coastal ideal than residential communities. New developments repeatedly impinged on once-remote sections of beaches. In the 1920s, white residents and officials aggressively sought to prevent private African American beach parks and resorts on the sands. When Willa Bruce purchased her stretch on sand in 1912, no restrictive phrasing was included in the lease for undesirable land. After operating in relative obscurity for a decade, Bruce’s Beach was condemned and owners evicted in 1924 in an effort to purge the city of non-white shoreline ownership. City officials claimed this would ostensibly allow the construction of a public park. Instead, the land was leased to a white citizen for \$1 a year. After protests on the sands and in the water by the local chapter of the NAACP, the beach was opened to the general public. The victory was hollow though as it robbed African Americans of a safe and convenient beachfront leisure space. African Americans were not the only targeted group. In 1920, the City of Santa Monica declared a Japanese fishing community unsanitary and razed the homes. In lieu of official actions regarding the coast, some white residents sought alternatives as racially

¹²³ Dickinson & Gillepsie, Palisades Del Rey Printed View, Folder 6, Box 3, CSLA-4

¹²⁴ For more on the challenges presented to Asian American home buyers in California, see Charlotte Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends: Asian Americans, Housing, and the Transformation of Urban California* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

restrictive private beach clubs became increasingly common. The “Inkwell” shrunk in 1924 as a result of the opening of the Casa Del Mar Club. The exclusive Jonathan Club’s beach facility in Santa Monica maintained discriminatory membership policies from its inception in 1927 until a lawsuit by the California Coastal Commission and the Anti-Defamation League in 1988.¹²⁵

Despite this growing hostile climate, the interplay of race and recreation proved complicated in Los Angeles. Beaches remained open to all but the city began segregating public swimming pools in 1923. Many officials perceived a far greater potential for interracial contact because of the contained design of indoor swimming pools. The opaque nature of the policy perhaps intentionally misled residents. When asked about beach segregation in an oral history, an elderly African American man named Walter Gordon replied, “The beaches were...I’m hazy on the subject. I know I didn’t go to any other beach but Bruce’s Beach. So apparently we weren’t welcome at the other beaches.”¹²⁶ As Douglas Flamming wrote, racial policy “continued to be unpredictable, if not downright incomprehensible.”¹²⁷ Beaches in Los Angeles also never served as the flashpoint for violence or racial conflict like other cities throughout the country.¹²⁸

Urbanized Beach?

¹²⁵ Robert Stewart, “Jonathan Club Loses Appeal to High Court on Bias Ruling,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 12, 1988.

¹²⁶ Walter Gordon, Shades of Los Angeles Project, interview by Amy Kitchener, Transcribed Summary, 1993, Los Angeles Public Library, http://173.196.26.181/catalog/shades/transcripts/Walter_Gorden.pdf.

¹²⁷ Flamming, *Bound for Freedom*, 275.

¹²⁸ Public beaches have been the site of racial violence repeatedly throughout the 20th century. The Chicago Race Riot of 1919 was inflamed by the stoning of a black youth swimming at a Lake Michigan beach when his raft drifted too far. Other clashes include the Jackson Park Riot in Chicago (1916), Euclid Beach Park Riot in Cleveland (1945), Crystal Beach Riot in Buffalo (1956), Rainbow Beach Riot in Chicago (1960), St. Augustine, Florida (1964). For more information, see Victoria W. Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters: The Struggle over Segregated Recreation in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

Residents, officials, and developers spent decades clamoring for greater coastal accessibility. Few resisted merging the city's landscapes with leisurely seascapes. Urban coastal mobility expanded with each new route and more southern Californians incorporated the beach into their everyday lives. Citizens of Santa Monica repeatedly approved funding for improving broad east-west thoroughfares. There was widespread popular approval for the construction of a bevy of boulevards that modernized Playa Del Rey with cement and asphalt. In Venice, most people agreed with business leaders and officials who advocated for the canals to be drained, infilled, and paved.

In some cases, however, small groups of determined residents successfully resisted the regime of road construction. Throughout the 1920s, Los Angeles and Venice officials proposed purchasing Pacific Electric's rights of way along 2nd Avenue, also known as Trolleyway, and paving over the traction lines. Like paving the canals, a wide thoroughfare adjacent to the shoreline would "take care of the enormous amount of vehicular traffic which may naturally be expected to arrive."¹²⁹ Finding the right narrow street to widen into a boulevard proved challenging. The City of Los Angeles abandoned efforts to expand Trolleyway in 1926, hoping to pave a different north-south boulevard in Venice as difficulties dissuaded council members.¹³⁰ Proposed road construction ground to a halt against the protests of local landowners in the assessment district, the threat of a mayoral veto, and a lingering canal-filling lawsuit on officials' minds. Residents angrily passed out petitions against the route.¹³¹ Councilmembers and city engineers agonized over possible placements from March until November of 1929 to little

¹²⁹ Council File #4210, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, May 10, 1928, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center (LACRC).

¹³⁰ Trolleyway was astonishingly not paved until 1954.

¹³¹ "Trolleyway Notes Being Circulated," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, May 17 1928.

avail.¹³² The small but vocal group of landowners was victorious and the issue disappeared as financial concerns gripped the city.

At first glance this struggle appears to correlate with mid-1920s efforts by residents to reject the increased taxation and headache of street widening paid for with assessment districts. Alternatively, residents would have noticed the construction and improvement of many boulevards just beyond the developed core of Venice. More likely, this early episode foreshadows a shift in public attitude beginning in the early to mid-1930s. Increased skepticism of highway building resulted in the repeated rejection of efforts to build a grand coastal highway through Venice and along the coast. Officials attempted to push for an essential link in the State Highway Commission's long efforts to finish constructing the Roosevelt Highway (now the Pacific Coast Highway) along the state's entire coastline. The highway provided a critically needed north-south thoroughfare in many parts, despite its roots in a byzantine, legalistic mandate for a route "along the Pacific coast by the most direct and practicable routes."¹³³ Highway construction was to be completed as a series of small segments as funding became available. Residents, however, rejected the financial and aesthetic costs of the modern highway-building regime. During the Depression, the white-hot pace of public works construction slowed throughout southern California. Voters passed far fewer constructions bonds, government agencies faced budget shortfalls, and road construction funding from the gas tax plummeted. As the Roosevelt Highway project kept being proposed, the public grew entrenched in opposition.

¹³² Council File #4210, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, March 15, 1929, LACRC; Council File #4210, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, July 9, 1929, LACRC; Council File #6964-4706-5816, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, October 15, 1929, LACRC; Council File #6696, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, November 13, 1929, LACRC.

¹³³ The choice of coastal routes seemingly had little to do with scenic pleasure or beach access, but instead a was random turn of phrase in the 1910 state highway legislation. For a more complete history of the freeway's successful construction in Malibu, Ventura, and San Diego, see Roth, "Concrete Utopia," 255–69; Carina Monica Montoya, *Pacific Coast Highway in Los Angeles County* (Charleston: The History Press, 2014).

Many of the grand coastal thoroughfares had been constructed in the relatively empty spaces used for agriculture and oil production. There was little cost or disadvantage to the average resident. A new highway impinging on the shoreline and demanding the advanced engineering of new beaches seemed over the top, even for traffic sensitive Angelenos. The public was increasingly unwilling to sacrifice the existing environment for greater convenience. While landowners and officials bickered over assessment districts and long-term prospects, public goodwill towards coastal road building waned.

Early proposals routed the Roosevelt Highway through urban areas, but in the mid-1930s, proposals appeared for a coastal highway linking Santa Monica and Playa Del Rey. The idea took a radical approach: highway engineers and local planners suggested routing four miles of highway on the sands. The new highway would run on top of existing beachfront south of Santa Monica and necessitate remaking the beach westward of the existing low tide line through extensive dredging and coastal engineering. The curved shape of the shoreline also required further complex engineering and was a less effective shape for highways. Officials debated “whether the...strand, which is the loadstone [sic] that chiefly attracted patrons, will be increased or decreased.”¹³⁴ They claimed beaches have “great natural advantages and attractions for the recreation-seeking public, but...need...a north and south highway permitting traffic to circulate.”¹³⁵ Supporters continued to point to a 1915 report on coastal engineering that seemed to confirm the feasibility of rebuilding beaches after construction.¹³⁶ This elaborate plan was seen as the peak of engineering or a cultural debacle. Some elected officials doubted the physical feasibility of the endeavor. Despite this uncertainty, the plan had the support of the Chamber of

¹³⁴ “Battle Grows Hotter Over Santa Monica-Playa Del Rey Road,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1935.

¹³⁵ “Coastal Link Plans Told,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1935.

¹³⁶ Leeds & Barnard, “Final Report on Shore Protection at Venice,” *Southwest Contractor*, October 9, 1915, Folder SS, Box 43, John Anson Ford Papers, Huntington Library.

Commerce, local realty boards, and even the Los Angeles Playground & Recreation Department. Each group believed that more coastal access would benefit business, property values, and beachgoers as population and automobile ownership increased. Playground Commissioner George Hjelte supported beach access, but also stressed the scenic potential of the route. Residents reacted with outrage to the proposal, however; sending hundreds of letters, inundating officials on the State Assembly Roads and Highways Committee in Sacramento, and forming the “Save-the-Beach Association.” The plan seemed dead.

In 1937, the extension of the Roosevelt Highway yet again reappeared in front of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. The county had always been a financial partner in construction plans, but was content to defer leadership. Throughout 1936, supporters of the proposal had convinced Supervisor Leland Ford to champion their cause of a beachfront highway and quietly began privately negotiating with key beachfront landowners.¹³⁷ Leland Ford proposed purchasing the beach frontage of the Kinney Corporation’s Venice pier and other oceanfront properties needed for the highway to expedite the construction project.¹³⁸

Despite public statements to the press supporting the project, individual supervisors remained dubious. Supervisor John Anson Ford, the 1937 Democratic mayoral nominee, was skeptical. He confided in a personal letter, “some of City Hall’s best lobbyists have been most active in promoting this whole project with the Board.”¹³⁹ He began a strong campaign against the property purchase and highway construction, annoyed that the county proposed spending \$700,000 to buy out the Kinney Pier lease rather than wait for it to expire in 1946. His bigger concern, however, was that “when you start tampering with the ocean, you’re apt to get into lots

¹³⁷ Letter from George Larsen, Chairman, Acquisition Committee, Shoreline Planning Association to Leland Ford, Supervisor, July 20, 1937, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP.

¹³⁸ “Beach Road Aids Listed,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1938.

¹³⁹ Letter from John Anson Ford to Manchester Boddy, October 13, 1937, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP.

of trouble.”¹⁴⁰ Ford feared the potential for disaster outweighed any transportation benefit. In March of 1938, the Board of Supervisors voted 3 to 2 to refuse to purchase the Kinney’s beach frontage for \$120,000. Through a close relationship with Manchester Boddy, editor of the Los Angeles *Illustrated Daily News*, Ford was able to rally public opposition to the project. Repeated public editorials excoriated the project.¹⁴¹ The City of Santa Monica quickly dropped their support for the county’s plans. Los Angeles City Council meetings read public complaints into the record. This public attention prompted an investigation revealing a confidential memo that confirmed that indebted Kinney Corporation interests had promised the utilitarian-sounding Shoreline Planning Association lobbyist a percentage of stock upon the deal’s approval.¹⁴² Los Angeles Mayor Republican Fletcher Bowron and Democrat Ford both loathed the corruption of recalled Mayor Frank Shaw and his complex network of cronyism.¹⁴³ Bowron subsequently supported Ford in defeating the proposal and eventually selecting a different rerouting committee. Victorious, they instead suggested the near impossible. They proposed building the road through the heart of Venice, aware of the challenges to intentionally sabotage the project. A similar coastal road project in 1944 proposed building a scenic shoreline parkway between Playa Del Rey and Palos Verde, but also never went anywhere.¹⁴⁴ Political forces and proactive citizens demonstrated a repeated unwillingness to tamper with the existing landscape when the beach was already accessible enough. To today, no highway has been built through Venice.

¹⁴⁰ “Statement Regarding Hearing Before the Board of Supervisors on the Matter of Proposed Purchase of the Kinney Pier Property, Venice,” November 30, 1937, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP.

¹⁴¹ Letter from John Anson Ford to R.R. Kilroy, December 1937, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP; Letter from John Anson Ford to R.R. Kilroy, January 3, 1937, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP.

¹⁴² Letter from John Anson Ford to Manchester Boddy, April 12, 1939, Folder SS, Box 43, JAFP.

¹⁴³ Fred W. Viehe, “The Recall of Mayor Frank L. Shaw: A Revision,” *California History* 59, no. 4 (December 1, 1980): 290–305.

¹⁴⁴ “Proposed Shore Line Parkway Development Visualized,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1944.

The eventual defeat of Kinney Corporation interests exemplified a clear waning in the power of developers to define the social character and visual landscape of their coastal fiefdoms. Developments along the Pacific built through the 1920s often created neighborhoods in landscapes without recent residential, industrial, or mercantile pasts. Built on unincorporated land, some communities escaped municipal oversight. As the residential boom waned and coastal populations grew, decisions related to zoning and infrastructure became far more contentious. Sacrosanct neighborhoods of single-family homes had economic lines blurred by necessity during the Great Depression. Local newspapers increasingly functioned independently from community builders. Some developers including Fritz Burns, pivoted their focus from the coast to the open expanses of the San Fernando Valley, Orange County, and beyond beginning in the 1940s.

This protracted rejection of unneeded infrastructure construction also implicitly underscores that greater coastal mobility and correlated “beach consciousness” had long become an actuality for most by early 1940s. Additional boulevards no longer had transformative power to remake the experience of automotive travel. While the highway would have undoubtedly decreased travel time along the coast, socially constructed notions of coastal mobility would likely have remained unchanged. The saturation of beach clubs, boulevards, and comfort stations created a new set of priorities in the public’s mind. Beach goers and public officials felt a mix of public stewardship and personal entitlement towards the familiar landscape and worried about immutable shifts to the coast. When the beach was a place apart, physically separated by fields and an unpracticed part of daily life, there was little public dialogue about the expansion of transportation infrastructure. When the beach became a practiced place in a familiar urban environment, however, residents and officials fiercely protected the status quo.

In 1926, Los Angeles Mayor George Cryer declared, “In the not far distance [sic] future Los Angeles will be built solidly to the sea and we must plan accordingly.”¹⁴⁵ This statement is perhaps less prescient than a recognition of inevitable trends. The rapid growth of Los Angeles’ population and quick evolutions in transportation technology accelerated infrastructure development along the Santa Monica Bay. Construction was omnipresent during this era as houses and streets replaced fields and pastures. A network of roadways bound the beach to the sprawling metropolitan area. The amusement districts and tourist attractions remained as distant shadows of a past era, subsumed by residential and industrial demands of the modern era. The new beachfront landscape produced by automotive mobility was replete with beach clubs, changing facilities, and parking lots. Near the sands, a new crop of developers built communities that emphasized a new form of coastal living near work, play, and urban amenities.

The successive increases in mobility from buggy to trolley to car also changed the way Angelenos understood and interacted with the coast. The beach had long been recognized as a regional icon and tourist destination, but it was largely inaccessible and thus invisible from residents as they experienced the city during their everyday lives. In a very short time span, the increases in coastal accessibility provided residents across southern California a new “beach consciousness.” The term “beachwear” first appeared in 1928.¹⁴⁶ Regular visits to the beach were a practiced part of the regional lifestyle. This new residential coast, however, refracted the restricted realities of Los Angeles as asphalt brought not only residents, but stricter cultural norms. Residential covenants, beach club policies, and other forms of de facto segregation largely circumscribed the beach as space for white, middle-class Angelenos. Despite this, across

¹⁴⁵ “City Building Solidly to Sea,” *Palisades Del Rey Press*, May 15, 1926.

¹⁴⁶ Löfgren, *On Holiday*, 226.

the Southern California, ever more residents cruised down to the familiar, urban shoreline to frolic, swim, and tan.

Chapter 3: Building a Better Beach

During the summer of 1941, the *Los Angeles Daily News* published a series of full-page articles that worried that the city's iconic beaches were in danger of becoming a figment of history. While the popularity of the coastline grew as a destination for surf bathing, commercial amusement, and physical culture, its sandy shores had shrunk. The region's beach profile was losing thousands of cubic yards of sand each year. Southern California's "[s]adly eroded beaches, once broad but [now] scooped out by the waves in defiance of man's attempt at building" had rapidly shrunk. In the article, journalist Kenneth Elliott bemoaned that the region's poor beaches were inferior to New York's "Jones Beach, [a] super public resort on the east coast."¹ An article in the *Saturday Evening Post* proclaimed that there is "nothing of its kind as fine as Jones Beach anywhere else in the world," stirring the ire of Pacific boosters.² Kenneth Elliott continued his series of articles on the beach, worrying that heavy winter storms would "bring new destruction to our beaches" and homes would yet again take a "beating from the waves."³ The final article in the series questioned why Los Angeles "has only bleak and barren stretches of shore instead of fine playspots, landscaped and provided with recreation centers and parking areas."⁴ The articles contrasted photographs of popular beaches and happy bathers with alarming photographs of storm damage and beach erosion. The images depicted residents peering down from their roofs at the raging tides.

¹ Kenneth Elliott, "Super public beach of east puts southland to shame with its mediocre facilities," *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 28, 1941.

² Edmond S. Fish, "New Swimmin' Hole," *Saturday Evening Post* 214, no. 1 (July 5, 1941): 14–52.

³ Kenneth Elliott, "Will next Winter Bring New Destruction to Our Beaches? Yes, Unless We Act Quickly," *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 29, 1941.

⁴ Kenneth Elliot, "Improperly built sand dams figure prominently in ruination of L.A. Beaches," *Los Angeles Daily News*, July 30, 1941.

Storms were not the cause, however, of the dwindling shoreline. As the City of Los Angeles grew in population by almost 400% between 1920 and 1950, its rapid expansion taxed the physical environment.⁵ Ever more residents lived near and played on the sands. Along the iconic Santa Monica Bay's shoreline, erosion, overuse and ineffectual planning threatened the very existence of the beaches of Malibu, Santa Monica, and Venice. For decades, dams waylaid the transfer of new sediment from mountain streams to estuaries, starving beaches of sediment. Amongst the tides, poorly designed breakwaters trapped sand and prevented longshore drift, eroding wide stretches of beach. The widely popular seascape seemed under assault.

Politicians, planners, and the public all wanted increased beach acreage for their booming, modern metropolis, but were initially unable to enact the sandy expansion. During the first few decades of the 20th century, municipalities and real estate developers' haphazard efforts to grow private property had disastrous consequences. The power balance increasingly shifted towards public forces with increased legislation. During the late 1930s and early 1940s, planners, engineers, and citizens' committees presented reports with sweeping visions of coastal transformation. These plans envisioned a multitude of changes predicated on tidal stasis, greater acreage and a contiguous shoreline. They received elite adulation and media attention with their ambitious scope, yet the beach kept shrinking.

Finally, in the postwar period between 1945 and 1960, almost nineteen million cubic yards of sand was placed on Los Angeles beaches. Strands finally grew by over five hundred feet and residents flocked to swim and tan along the Pacific. Human forces arrested and tamed environmental dynamics to make way for sand. Beach widening projects of this era were site-

⁵ California State Data Center, California Department of Finance, "Historical Census Populations of Counties and Incorporated Cities in California, 1850–2010," http://www.dof.ca.gov/research/demographic/state_census_data_center/historical_census_1850-2010/view.php

specific expansions of funded projects. They were not the results of much-ballyhooed 1930s and 1940s planning efforts, which ignored political and environmental realities. Along the coast, postwar public works took precedent over ambitious recreational plans, yet savvy policymakers nonetheless successfully finessed projects to build a better beach.

While historians largely overlook the physical transformations of the Southern California coast, oceanographers, geologists, and geographers have carefully documented its evolution. These studies have measured variations in beach width and the efficacy of human interruptions of littoral cycles.⁶ Unsurprisingly, most of this scholarship fails to address the underlying motivations behind the alterations. Oral histories by regional planners and institutional histories largely see the vagaries of “public interest” or “greater good” as a catchall justification for extensive changes.⁷ A history of the Los Angeles district of the United States Army Corp of Engineers briefly concluded that forty years of shoreline protection was “to preserve the beaches...of southern California for the rapidly growing population of the area.”⁸ These studies recognized the mutability of landscape; yet failed to acknowledge shifts in popular conceptions of coastal space

The magnetic pull of the confluence of land and water had long captivated locals. The actuality of eroded beaches clashed with the cherished cultural vision of an ever-beautiful

⁶ Gary B. Griggs, Kiki Patsch, and Lauret E. Savoy, *Living with the Changing California Coast* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005); William J Herron, “Artificial Beaches in Southern California,” *Shore and Beach* 48, no. 1 (1980): 3–12; Linwood Pendleton et al., “Size Matters: The Economic Value of Beach Erosion and Nourishment in Southern California,” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 30, no. 2 (April 1, 2012): 223–37; James G. Zoulas, “Beach Changes in the San Pedro Littoral Cell, Southern California, 1930-2007” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 2008).

⁷ William J Herron, *An Oral History of Coastal Engineering Activities in Southern California 1930-1981* (Los Angeles: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Los Angeles District, 1986); Damon Manders, *Research and Development in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: Improving the Common Stock of Knowledge*, Improving the Common Stock of Knowledge (St. Louis, Mo.: Ordnance and Technical Services Branch, St. Louis District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 2011); Anthony F. Turhollow, *A History of the Los Angeles District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1898-1965* (Los Angeles: U.S. Army Engineer District, Los Angeles, 1975).

⁸ Turhollow, *A History of the Los Angeles District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, 1898-1965*, 143.

landscape. Through much of the early 20th century, depictions of the shoreline defied physical realities. Magazines, movies, and city boosters all waxed enthusiastically about the wide beaches and crystal waters. Compelling imagery naturalized the permanence of sandy beaches in the minds of residents, eschewing the environmental necessity of continuous human intervention.⁹ Cultural forces continued to construct and embellish the iconic landscape as a space of sunshine, accessibility, entertainment, and recreation. The environmental history of the beach is fundamentally tied to broader sociocultural histories of the region.

Residents throughout Southern California desired wide, sandy beaches that corresponded to popular notions. From the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce to Hollywood film, boosters often presented the region's beaches as a swath of land with limitless potential. Sandy beaches evoked visions of tropical islands and a romanticized lifestyle of leisure and plenty. Similar beaches in the United States could only be found in California, Florida, and Hawaii. Their presence was always a regional source of pride and advertised feature by boosters. Local newspapers heralded Santa Monica "building a wide, soft, smooth strand that seems destined to become a bather's paradise."¹⁰ Beach clubs often advertised the length of their fenced-off, private beaches' frontage or total acreage. The Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce boasted of the city's "miles of wide beach sand" in advertisements.¹¹ Promises of private expanses of sand even attracted home buyers to suburban real estate developments far outside Los Angeles County.¹²

⁹ Richard O. Eaton, "Littoral Processes On Sandy Coasts," *Coastal Engineering Proceedings* 1, no. 1 (May 12, 2010): 15.

¹⁰ "Waves Made To Build Bathers' Paradise: Harnessed By Man, Sea Returns Beach It Pilfered," *Los Angeles Times* October 8, 1916.

¹¹ Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, Advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, October 26, 1922.

¹² For example, in the 1920's, both Oceano in Ventura County and Del Mar in San Diego County repeatedly described beach acreage in newspaper advertisements.

The desire for spacious seashore not only conformed to a visual ideal of wide, sandy beaches, but also had practical implications. Greater acreage meant increased attendance capacity. Extra beach real estate also meant more space for beach umbrellas and towels as well as greater personal privacy on crowded days. Greater bathing space near the waves allowed for more beachfront amenities including scenic drives, parking, bathhouses, and recreational facilities. Like Santa Monica, the Los Angeles Playground and Recreation Department promised “a series of bath-houses containing only dressing and storage facilities; frequent comfort stations; equipped places at various places for cooking picnic lunches with wood fires and gas plates; numerous segregated areas for the exclusive use of small children; designated places for older boys and girls playing beach ‘ball’ and other games.”¹³

Residents of Los Angeles needed expansive beaches, too. Between 1920 and 1950, the population of the metropolitan region of Los Angeles grew exponentially. Los Angeles County more than quadrupled in size from 936,455 to 4,151,687.¹⁴ Prosperity from oil, aerospace, manufacturing, and motion pictures financed the development of suburbs across the San Fernando Valley, the South Bay, and the Westside of Los Angeles. Miles of new residential communities dramatically outpaced the growth of parks and recreational space. The popularity of the beach kept pace with the burgeoning metropolis. Residents and tourists visited the shoreline in increasing numbers. Easier coastal access, growing commercial spectacles, and the lure of tanned physiques drew visitors to the shore year-round. A City of Los Angeles report estimated

¹³ “Beach Project Outlined: Redemption of Venice Shore and Development of Water-Sports Facilities Proposed by Hjelte,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1926.

¹⁴ U.S. Census Bureau, “Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900 to 1990,” <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/ca190090.txt> (Accessed December 5, 2014).

1925-1926 beach attendance at 2,752,000, but by 1938 attendance had reached 9,150,041.¹⁵ Peak attendance on a single, crowded summer day in 1946 exceeded 1.1 million people.¹⁶

Despite a public need for expansive beaches, private interests purchased significant portions of the shoreline. Cities and municipalities were slow to recognize the long-term civic interest in public shoreline. With few zoning restrictions and desires of regional prosperity, most of the shoreline was sold by the 1920s. In 1926, approximately half of the 125 miles of Los Angeles county coastline was already privately owned. Individuals and corporations owned large stretches of coast. Real estate developer George Peck owned almost six miles of coastline near San Pedro and Manhattan Beach. Of the remaining 60 miles publically owned, more than half was either unsuitable for recreation or used by the harbor in San Pedro. Just five miles of the Santa Monica Bay in Santa Monica, Ocean Park, Venice, and Del Rey represented the majority of the available recreational beaches.¹⁷ Roughly four percent of the Southern California coastline was serving millions of annual visitors. By 1928, the *Los Angeles Times* wrote “if every available foot of public beach lands, suitable for bathing and swimming, were pressed into service, only 9 per cent of the county’s population could be accommodated at any one time, leaving the other 91 per cent to fill the role of spectators.”¹⁸ The culprits responsible for denying public access to the region’s coast were residential, industrial, and commercial interests intent on profiting from the scenic shore.

¹⁵ “Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles,” 1926; Department of Playground and Recreation, “Annual Report 1937-1938” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, 1938).

¹⁶ “Lifeguards Kept Busy at Crowded Beaches,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1946.

¹⁷ The City of Santa Monica owned one mile of beachfront. The City of Los Angeles owned 3.5 miles of frontage in Venice and .75 miles between Ocean Park and Venice. See Richard Ungren, “County’s Beach Playgrounds Passing Into Private Hands,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1926.

¹⁸ “Public Beaches Decrease: Ocean Frontage of County Suitable for Use Owned Largely by Private Interests,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1928.

Residential developments along the coast grew in size and density. Increasingly, developers privatized beach frontage at the north and south ends of the Santa Monica Bay for exclusive use. Seaside cabins or tents once dotted the communities of Malibu and Palos Verde, as well as Orange County communities like Newport Beach and Laguna Beach, but were now the foci of rapid residential growth and skyrocketing land value. During the 1930s more elaborate beachfront homes designed by Roland Coates or Winchton Risley increasingly dominated these real estate markets.¹⁹ Mass-developed communities like Del Rey and Palos Verdes attracted thousands of new residents with promises of “an all-year round, week-end and vacation play-place for outdoor enjoyment.”²⁰ In Santa Monica, developers built over 105 oceanfront homes on thirty-foot lots.²¹ Angelenos enjoying the surf and sun increasingly concentrated in the remaining sections of the coast in Santa Monica, Ocean Park, and Venice.²²

Industrial interests apportioned the remaining sections of coast. Drilling for oil along the coast and in the tidelands, particularly in Torrance, Wilmington-Belmont, and Huntington Beach, was extremely profitable during the 1920s and 1930s. Unsightly oil derricks, industrial contamination, and sprawling oil fields ate away at available or desirable beachfront for public use. Oil production slowly moved closer to growing coastal communities. Along the Santa Monica Bay, the Ohio Oil Company began pumping oil in Venice in 1930. This spawned an oil boom as drilling and hundreds of derricks abutted the neighborhood’s popular beaches. The City of Los Angeles even briefly considered leasing a section of Venice’s beaches to oil corporations

¹⁹ Kevin Starr, *The Dream Endures: California Enters The 1940s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 10.

²⁰ “New Beach Colony to Rise in Coastal Locality,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1936.

²¹ Ungren, “County’s Beach Playgrounds Passing Into Private Hands.”

²² As explained in Chapter 2, limited beach access also helped funnel visitors to a select few beaches along the Santa Monica Bay until increased automotive access.

to capitalize on the rush.²³ Various restrictions eventually slowed the oil boom, but the lands remained in private hands and unavailable for recreational development.

Elsewhere along the coast, the newfound commercial success of beach clubs in the 1920s enabled privatization of even more sections of the sands. While beach clubs popularized coastal leisure and drew ever more westward, exclusive clubs purchased prime stretches of shoreline and barred public access. Clubs fenced off frontage and charged for admission charged an hourly fee for tent or umbrellas, or entirely refused the public. Owners denied racial minorities access. In Santa Monica and Venice, near the majority of clubs, the beachfront was an alternating mixture of public and private acreage. For example, the Jonathan Club, Casa Del Mar, the Breakers Club, the Edgewater Club, and the Westport Beach Club all interrupted public coastline. Casa Del Mar segmented public beach space into a 580-foot and a 625-foot beach on either side of the club.²⁴ These pocket beaches quickly became crowded and certainly did not match the public ideal of wide, sandy strands.

Despite increasing public agitation, ever more coastline was transferred into private hands. In many of the relatively new coastal cities, community builders eagerly capitalized on premium coastal property. In Venice and Manhattan Beach, real estate tycoons like Abbott Kinney and George Peck attracted residents and tourists with coastal amusements. As municipal leadership took over, most beach cities had little economic flexibility to repurchase beachfront property. Many cities had reached their maximum tax rate or high levels of bonded indebtedness. Municipalities eventually began to try to purchase public shoreline through concessions and

²³ The city felt slant drilling was exploiting the public's mineral rights and that the city should use profits to purchase more pristine beachfront elsewhere. See Jason Arthur Cooke, "The Fossil Fueled Metropolis: Los Angeles and the Emergence of Oil-Based Energy in North America, 1865-1930" (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2014); Elkind, *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy*; Sabin, *Crude Politics*.

²⁴ Ungren, "County's Beach Playgrounds Passing Into Private Hands."

bond measures, but much of their efforts came after decades of inaction. Beach frontage was now a valuable commodity. In 1926, according to Robert Wygant, deputy Los Angeles County counsel, beachfront real estate was conservatively estimated to be increasing in value at the rate of ten percent each year.²⁵

Despite concerns of feasibility, the City and County of Los Angeles each made inchoate efforts to acquire shoreline. Throughout the 1920s, city officials only purchased or condemned a few stretches of beach for the public, representing a small fraction of the coastline.²⁶ After the City of Los Angeles annexed Venice in 1925, a City Council-appointed committee recommended the purchase of almost all available beach frontage. The report's authors proposed increased taxation and bonds to fund the expensive reclamation. Just the purchase of less than two miles of poor, narrow beaches between Venice and Hyperion was forecasted to cost the city \$3.25 million.²⁷ Also in 1926, the Association of City Planners of Los Angeles County urged the County Board of Supervisors to act because "the beaches are used by all...it is no more than fair that all should help pay for them."²⁸ Municipal leaders responded by placing two bonds on the ballot totaling \$9.5 million for beach purchases. Despite passing with a simple majority of voters, neither received the necessary two-thirds and both failed. With over \$23 million in just city and county bond measures on the 1926 ballot, regional voters rejected almost every bond as the electorate was simply unwilling to pay for the repurchasing of shoreline.²⁹ Even before the

²⁵ "County Beach Buying Asked: Frontage Being Purchased by Private Interests," *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1926.

²⁶ For example, in 1924, the County condemned 1080 feet of beach frontage at the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon. In 1926, the County purchased roughly 1800 feet of frontage in northern Manhattan Beach. For more, see Coastal Frontiers Corporation, *Historical Changes in the Beaches of Los Angeles County: Malaga Cove to Topanga Canyon: 1935-1990* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbors, 1992).

²⁷ "City Buying Of Beaches Urged: Committee Wants Frontage at Venice Purchased," *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 1926.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ "All Ready For Ballot Battle: Los Angeles to Case Third of Total Vote Local County Due to Roll Up Third of Total Republicans Predict Victory Throughout State," *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1926.

economic constraints of the Great Depression, local leaders recognized that much the region's beachfront property would forever be in private hands. Increasingly, city planners looked to expand and improve the popular yet overtaxed beaches already in public ownership.

How to End Erosion

As much as Angelenos desired picturesque, sandy beaches, the chunks of shoreline still publically owned in Southern California diverged from littoral dreams. Los Angeles' beaches were increasingly caught between expanded coastal development and an eroding shoreline. The tides reclaimed public beaches and boardwalks at a growing rate. In Santa Monica, high tide occasionally submerged the beach as waters nearly reached nearby railroad tracks.³⁰ The coastline was notched with "cuts" into the shore as tidelands replaced sandy beaches. Beachfront used for picnics, recreation, commercial amusements, and boardwalks visibly shrank each year during winter rains.

Erosion was not a new phenomenon. The region's shoreline was fluid long before Los Angeles was a growing urban center. Rough weather beat steep cliffs near Malibu and Palos Verde to form coves and pocket beaches. Sand along the flatlands of Santa Monica, Venice, and Manhattan Beach continually ebbed away from the shoreline. These changes generally occurred over hundreds or thousands of years. Analysis of the geomorphology of the 19th century Southern California coast reveals it slowly receded due to violent storms and bioerosion caused

³⁰ "Public Spirited Resident Speaks Before Council," *The Daily Outlook* (Santa Monica), February 9, 1915.

by rock-boring clams and abalone.³¹ More noticeably, violent floods in 1825 caused the terminus of the Los Angeles River to shift from near the Ballona Wetlands in Playa Del Rey to its current location in Long Beach. This abrupt change had long-term impressions on the beach profile because it ceased a principal flow of sediment to the Santa Monica Bay.³² Nonetheless, the transformations of coastal topography were not immediately obvious.

Unsurprisingly, coastal erosion of this era did not prompt an immediate or vocal public outcry. Southern California suffered periodic bouts of erosion from the earliest periods of settlement. During winter storms, *Los Angeles Times* articles routinely described how “old ocean has again developed an enormous appetite for beach sands...and late last night became even more ravenous.”³³ *The Daily Outlook* (Santa Monica) decried that “old Neptune is [a] grand larcenist” or that “hungry tides chew the sand.”³⁴ Initially, this seasonal erosion did not worry most residents. Public attention was often fixated on damage to beachfront property. Newspaper articles primarily focused on piers, homes, and boardwalks. During one winters storm, “[r]ight to the very doors of the cottages at Short Line Beach have come the voracious waves, biting out great chunks of sand and undermining broad sidewalks, porches, and in some cases the very house foundations themselves.”³⁵ While sand is mentioned, early attention primarily focused on damage to the built environment.

The cause of the erosion was also a scientific mystery during the early 20th century. Many people believed in the incorrect “subsidence theory” that stated North America was slowly

³¹ Wayne N. Engstrom, “Nineteenth Century Coastal Geomorphology of Southern California,” *Journal of Coastal Research*, July 1, 2006, 847–61.

³² William J Herron, “Artificial Beaches in Southern California,” *Shore & Beach* 48, no. 1 (1980): 3–12. For more information, also see John W. Handin, *The Source, Transportation, and Deposition of Beach Sediment in Southern California*, Technical Memorandum 22 (Washington: Beach Erosion Board, US Army Corp of Engineers, 1951).

³³ “Ocean Tears Shore Away: Handsome Homes On Strand In Danger,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1906.

³⁴ “Old Neptune is Grand Larcenist,” *The Daily Outlook* (Santa Monica), December 22, 1905. “Hungry Tides Chew the Sand,” *The Daily Outlook* (Santa Monica), December 28, 1905.

³⁵ “Ocean Tears Shore Away”

sinking, allowing waves to reach ever further.³⁶ In 1905, during a year of bad winter storms and coastal damage, erosion was attributed to the “freakish conduct of the surf” and “the peculiar combination of wind and tide.”³⁷ Many of the residents of coastal Southern California during this period were recent migrants, often from the Midwest and unfamiliar with tidal patterns. The region generally has “decades of relatively mild, dry weather are typically interrupted by shorter periods of severe storms.”³⁸ Winter storms caused substantial erosion, but during the warmer periods, the beaches slowly accreted. Residents, however, falsely assumed that these seasonal imbalances resulted in a long-term homeostasis. In short, coastal erosion was seen as a cyclical fluke.

The public was unaware that sandy beaches were and are not indefinite landscapes. Officials did not keep yearly records about the width of the shoreline in part because it was seen as a fixed parameter. During this period, land surveys of beach-adjacent property primarily concerned municipalities and the County of Los Angeles.³⁹ After an initial study by the United States Coast and Geodetic Survey between 1871 and 1876, only several surveys of the Southern California coast occurred between the late 19th century and the 1930’s. It is hard to rely on the surveys as indicative of any shoreline changes because they utilized different mean high tide lines and the Santa Monica Bay is largely absent of prominent geological features.⁴⁰

As oceanographers and engineers eventually learned, wide stretches of sand are rarely found in nature. The profile of most beaches is in a state of flux. Many beach-goers are unaware

³⁶ Mary-Louis Quinn, “The History of the Beach Erosion Board, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, 1930-1963,” Miscellaneous Report (Virginia: Department of the Army, Coastal Engineering Research Center, August 1977), 13.

³⁷ “Venice: Sea Rends the Beach,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 22, 1905.

³⁸ Coastal Frontiers Corporation, *Historical Changes in the Beaches of Los Angeles County*, 10.

³⁹ In an important lawsuit regarding mean high tide line in 1929, the City of Santa Monica was forced to rely on 1870s survey data. See *Muchenburger vs. Santa Monica* (1929).

⁴⁰ Chief of Engineers, United States Army, *Appendix II, Coast of California, Point Mugu to San Pedro Breakwater, Beach Erosion Control Study* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1954), 42.

that modern beaches around the world are extensively engineered to preserve their existing topography and prevent erosion. Sand is cycled through tidal action in a semi-contained geographic area called a littoral cell.⁴¹ Along the coast of California, as sand ebbs and flows with the waves, it also slowly downdrifts in a southwardly direction towards Baja California, Mexico or is lost in the deep waters of the Redondo Submarine Canyon.⁴² South of Monterey, there are no natural impediments to the shifting sands as it moves down the state's coastline. As sand drifts south from adjacent littoral cells, it is washed ashore and replenishes beaches. This tidal mechanic, called longshore transport, is the primary means of accretion needed to create and maintain sandy beaches. Sediment transfer from rivers and streams to estuaries also enriches beaches. When sand lost to longshore transport exceeds coastal deposits, beaches begin to erode. Typically, changes to beach profiles due to the availability of sedimentary sources are measured on a geologic time scale.

Coastal erosion along the California coast was unknowingly exacerbated and accelerated as a result of man-made alterations to the regional ecosystem during the late 19th and 20th century. Damming and rerouting rivers as Los Angeles grew was detrimental to the health of the shoreline. Beaches along the Atlantic and Gulf coast are often nourished with sand from offshore, barrier islands, but such sources are less common along the California coast. Instead, a principal source of new sediment for Southern California beaches comes from nearby mountain ranges, transported downstream via coastal rivers.⁴³ Estuaries, like Ballona Creek or Malibu Creek, historically provided sand to the Santa Monica Bay littoral cell. Dams along Santa Maria

⁴¹ In southern California, there are two principal littoral cells. The cells roughly align with the two bays created by the Palos Verde peninsula. The Santa Monica Cell runs approximately 30 miles between Point Dume and Malanga Cove, bounded by the underwater Redondo Canyon. The San Pedro Cell runs between Palos Verde and Newport Beach and is bounded by the San Pedro Basin.

⁴² Department of Boating and Waterways and California State Coastal Conservancy, *California Beach Restoration Study* (Sacramento, 2002), 6–16.

⁴³ Griggs, Patsch, and Savoy, *Living with the Changing California Coast*.

River, Santa Ynez River, Ventura River, and Malibu Creek, however, have prevented sediment from reaching the Southern California coast. The Malibu watershed was dammed in 1926 local landowner Mary Rindge.⁴⁴ One report estimates that historic sediment production in the Los Angeles area over a fifty year, pre-settlement period yielded almost 82 million cubic yards of coastal nourishment, yet because of development, 20th century beaches only received 28 million cubic yards.⁴⁵ A loss of over 50 million cubic yards of sand without additional replenishment would have eventually resulted in narrow shores fronted by steep beach scarps.

Most coastal structures jutting into the tides are intended to mitigate tidal action, but also unintentionally inhibit the flow of sand to Southern California beaches.⁴⁶ Efforts to tame the tides primarily come in two forms. Groins (or groynes) are walls of rock or cement extending perpendicularly from the shoreline into the ocean. They arrest longshore sand transportation, accreting sand above the groin. By building a series of groins, a section of beach can be substantially widened. Downdrift of the newly created beach however, other beaches will erode, denied of new sediment. Alternatively, jetties or breakwaters are underwater walls built parallel to the shoreline. Tidal action is blocked from reaching the shoreline, creating a calmer beach and limiting potential storm damage. Similar to groins, though, sand accretes behind the breakwater and is prevented from nourishing the shoreline. When groins and jetties became a common

⁴⁴ More specifically, the dams include “Twitchell Dam on the Santa Maria River, Bradbury, Jameson, and Juncal Dams on the Santa Ynez River, Casitas and Matilija Dams on the Ventura River, Piru, Pyramid, Casitas, and Bouquet Dams on the Santa Clara River, and Sherwood, Westlake, Malibu, Century and Rindge Dams on Malibu Creek.” See Mark H. Capelli, “Damn Sand Rights: Removing Rindge and Matilija Dams,” in *Sand Rights '99: Bringing Back the Beaches* (Sand Rights '99: Bringing Back the Beaches, California Shore and Beach & Coastal Zone Foundation, Ventura, CA, 1999), 233–44, <http://cedb.asce.org/cgi/WWWdisplay.cgi?123159>.

⁴⁵ Department of Navigation and Ocean Development, “Study of Beach Nourishment along the Southern California Coastline” (Sacramento: State of California - The Resources Agency, 1977).

⁴⁶ With minimal underwater footprint, the open pile pleasure piers common in southern California have little impact on longshore transport.

feature on modern shorelines during the 1960s, their placement was carefully engineered to make a preferred beach profile.

Through the early 1930s, coastal development in Southern California was largely unchecked, causing inevitable erosion. Engineering projects were more often based on supposition than experience or fact. Initial construction projects in Southern California intended to protect shorefront property and reinforce protection provided by existing but expensive bulkheads had dubious success. Much of the existing knowledge about coastal engineering developed in New Jersey and New England where weaker ocean tides pounded the shorelines. Even along the Atlantic, most coastal knowledge was only derived from limited trial-and-error.⁴⁷ The lack of understanding of littoral forces had damaging consequences.

Each new storm tore away wooden and stone bulkhead walls as landowners became increasingly desperate to stem the tides. Wind and rain destroyed expensive beachfront homes and the iconic pleasure piers suffered tens of thousands in damages. Real estate developers, like the Abbott Kinney, suffered over \$50,000 in damages to his Windward Avenue pier during the storms of 1905. Kinney's Ocean Park Improvement Company responded by attempting to buffer the waves with a new \$100,000 breakwater, but had little awareness or understanding of coastal engineering. Built in the summer of 1905, Kinney's Venice breakwater was a "600-ft long shore parallel structure" intended for shore protection. The placement of the structure, however, was "sufficiently far offshore that it did not form a complete barrier to the passage of littoral material."⁴⁸ In 1914, less than a decade later, the pier again suffered and needed costly repairs. The poor design of the breakwater also caused damage to neighboring beaches. A year later, "the

⁴⁷ Quinn, "The History of the Beach Erosion Board, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, 1930-1963," 12-13.

⁴⁸ Chief of Engineers, United States Army, *Appendix II, Coast of California, Point Mugu to San Pedro Breakwater, Beach Erosion Control Study*, 80.

currents seemed to pound with terrible force upon the shore line south of Venice. Last spring the sands were eaten away for fully fifty feet.”⁴⁹ A decade later, the permanent cut in the beach profile remained.⁵⁰ Even when placed properly, bulkheads, piers, and groins were often poorly reinforced and unable to withstand storms. Storms destroyed jetties built by Kinney “as if they had been heaps of soft sand.”⁵¹ Rebuilding coastal buffers was expensive, but the cost was insignificant relative to the eventual expenses of repairing eroded beaches.

More municipalities built often ill-designed groins, jetties, and breakwaters to protect their beachfronts and to prevent erosion. During the early part of the 20th century, damaging storms ravaged the coastline in the winters of 1905, 1906, 1912, 1914, and 1915. In many cases, damage to coastal properties was the result of construction too close to the mean high tide line, providing a lack of space seaward of the properties for fluctuations. Landowners and improvement companies quickly raced to protect their investments by trumping the newest fortifications. Each new project, however, had a halting effect on longshore transport in the littoral cell and forced the construction of ever more structures to protect and preserve the coastline. For example, the lack of downdrift sediment caused by the 1905 Venice breakwater brought severe erosion to Redondo Beach.⁵² Henry Huntington, who had recently purchased the Redondo Beach Improvement Corporation, responded by building his own 700-foot long breakwater to protect beachfront property now denuded of sand.⁵³

⁴⁹ “Sea Fenced Out At Venice: Bulkhead Reinforcement Is To Begin Today,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1906.

⁵⁰ Leeds & Barnard, “Final Report on Shore Protection at Venice.”

⁵¹ “High Tides Rip Venice Shores: Jetties Recently Built Torn Out By Breakers” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1914.

⁵² Chief of Engineers, United States Army, *Appendix II, Coast of California, Point Mugu to San Pedro Breakwater, Beach Erosion Control Study*, 80.

⁵³ For more information, see Galen Hunter, “Epic Footprint of the 1909 Huntington Breakwater – Report,” Old Salt Lake Virtual Museum, <http://www.oldsaltlake.org/>.

Others tampered with the coastal sand transportation hoping to maintain or widen some beaches at the cost of others nearby. While the technicalities of erosion remained a mystery, some Angelenos increasingly recognized that breakwaters and jetties impacted sand distribution at nearby beaches. Developers paid little heed to this practical logic as the potential for profit motivated “sand grabs,” when neighbors sabotaged each other and hoarded accretions. In 1910, Lycurgus Lindsay, owner of the Hollister Avenue Pier in Santa Monica, applied to the federal government for permission to build a series of jetties to protect his property. The City Council of Santa Monica objected that the project would cause erosion on beaches to the south, but lacked the regulatory or zoning power to prevent him. Lindsay nonetheless received federal permission because the United States War Department was only concerned with potential impediments to navigation.⁵⁴ Local leaders were unsatisfied and threatened further action, but Lindsay took advantage of the courts being closed during a holiday weekend and constructed the jetties without fear of an injunction.⁵⁵ Most coastal engineering projects in the region through the 1920s were the work of individuals seeking to protect and expand beachfront private property.

Coastal engineering projects in the city of Santa Monica had the most dramatic and lasting impacts on the future of the region’s beach profile. The city’s beaches were wide and sandy south of the Santa Monica Municipal Pier, but the beach to the north was narrow and filled with sharp pebbles. Unsurprisingly, the beach stretching from the Pier to Santa Monica Canyon was not particularly popular with residents or tourists. Seeking to boost land values and attendance at the adjacent bathhouse, Frank Bundy, manager of the Santa Monica Land Company, installed a series of wooden groins extending into the bay in April of 1916. After a profitable career in the oil industry, Bundy became a major landowner in Santa Monica and had

⁵⁴ “Protest Does Not Stop Work: Santa Monica Man Begins To Construct,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 21, 1910.

⁵⁵ “Lindsay Steals March On Protesting Officials Santa Monica,” *Los Angeles Herald*, May 30, 1910.

much to gain by expanding and improving the shore. The five groins caused substantial accretion, transforming a length of five hundred feet of rocky beach by a one hundred-foot wide, sandy beach to the frontage. The newly created strand was valued at over \$20,000.⁵⁶ At first glance, the project was a success. The groins expanded the beach, raised real estate values, and caused minimal erosion. The City of Santa Monica was eventually forced to sue to ensure public access, but property owners and beach clubs had already benefitted.

The success of the groins also spurred Frank Bundy's aspirations for an even grander transformation of the coastline. By the early 1920's, Bundy owned much of the property along Santa Monica Canyon and the beach property stretching north of the Santa Monica Municipal Pier.⁵⁷ From his hillside ranch overlooking the Pacific, Bundy dreamed of enhancing the coastline near his properties with a pleasure craft harbor, tranquil water for bathing, and expanded sands. While Santa Monica had long ago lost the fight for a commercial harbor, a marina would provide similar, long-term economic benefits. Creating the extensive, sheltered bay, however, required a big breakwater and a bond measure to fund its construction. Bundy declared:

'[o]ur big attraction is the ocean. Are we never going to use it? Or are we going to wait until such improvements are all established farther up the Coast and Santa Monica be to that district like many little places I can think of are to a more prosperous adjoining town. In my opinion, a small break-water..., when completed, will increase the value of our real estate to the extent that it will offset the extra tax this project will cost the city.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ "Makes The Sea Build A Beach: Santa Monica Man Is Creating Strand For Bathers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1916.

⁵⁷ Some of this property was sold to actor Will Rogers and eventually become Will Rogers Beach in Pacific Palisades. See Jerry Person, "Civic Promoter Struck Black Gold On July 4, 1926," *Huntington Beach Independent*, July 5, 2007, http://articles.hbindependent.com/2007-07-05/news/hbi-lookback05_1_santa-monica-canyon-frank-s-father-purchased.

⁵⁸ While there had been calls for the construction of a yacht harbor since 1909, Bundy's local stature and extensive real estate holdings finally encouraged the city forward. See "Seawall For Bathers Urged Santa Monican," *Los Angeles Times*, September 5, 1925.

Bundy was not only concerned about nearby municipalities hoarding sand, but the success of his previous groins had convinced him that “with a structure built in the right manner the city will have many times more beach than it ever had.”⁵⁹ After five years of advocating, the Santa Monica City Council approved the sale of the breakwater franchise with substantial support from local real estate and business organizations.

Engineering failures created a coast far from Frank Bundy’s dreams when the Santa Monica breakwater was finally built in 1933. While the breakwater would become one of the nation’s largest at 610 meters, much of the plan was not as successful. Initial efforts to construct the breakwater used concrete caissons designed by harbor engineer Taggart Aston and Santa Monica City Engineer Howard B. Carter.⁶⁰ After floating the caissons all the way from San Pedro, the first unit immediately cracked upon being deployed. With bond funding dwindling, engineers eventually built a conventional rubble mound barrier.⁶¹ The 1933 Santa Monica Breakwater was the last major change to the Santa Monica Bay’s tides causing unintended erosion. Despite dissenting advice, local engineers hoped that the large breakwater’s opening on each end would prevent shoaling and did not predict that the breakwater would so substantially inhibit longshore drift.⁶² Over the next fifteen years, the sheltered harbor filled partially with sand and required dredging. Sand accretion was a secondary goal to a profitable harbor for expensive yachts. The harbor was never a popular success and closed when the nearby Marina Del Rey opened in the 1960s. The breakwater did cause updraft accretion, eventually widening the

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ “Yacht Harbor Franchise Let: Santa Monica Project Near Actual Construction,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1930.

⁶¹ Herron, *An Oral History of Coastal Engineering Activities in Southern California 1930-1981*, 6–13.

⁶² Charles T Leeds, “California’s Beach Erosion and Development Problems,” *Shore and Beach* 4, no. 4 (October 1936): 167.

roughly 3.5 miles of beaches north of the Santa Monica pier by approximately 240 meters.⁶³ Beach clubs and residential property dominated this section of beach however, leaving little space for public access. Worse, over fifteen miles of southerly beaches in Ocean Park, Venice, Del Rey, and the beach cities, outside the Santa Monica city limits, experienced dramatically worsened downdraft erosion. The net impact on the coast was a clear loss of publically accessible beach.

Coastal engineering along the Southern California coast through the first three decades of the twentieth century was presumptive, reactive, and ineffective. Amidst a white-hot real estate market, real estate moguls longed to capitalize on their investments at the cost of their neighbors and competitors. Developers emulated existing groins, jetties, and bulkheads, but often failed to recognize or adhere to local specificities. Newspapers and elected officials often clothed these efforts in a language of technical expertise and wonder at the futuristic feat despite untested methods and dubious results. During this era, these patterns in engineering extended more broadly throughout the region with the construction of similarly problematic breakwaters and jetties in Coronado (early 1920's), Santa Barbara (1929), Seal Beach (1936), Redondo Beach (1936), and Hueneme (1939).

Pause and Plan

In spring of 1928, silent film star Mae Murray finished constructing a new beachfront home. The \$55,000, eleven room, pink stucco mansion was constructed north of the Del Rey

⁶³ By the 1960's, the Santa Monica Breakwater had also deteriorated and sunk into the sands to an extent it no longer prevented wave transmission. See William Dally and Joan Pope, "Detached Breakwaters for Shore Protection" (Vicksburg, Mississippi: United States Army Corp of Engineers, January 1986), 18–19.

lagoon and was surrounded by property owned by other Hollywood stars including Douglas Fairbanks, Mary Pickford and Louis Mayer.⁶⁴ The home was host to extravagant, multi-day parties with famous celebrities. Shortly after she moved into her new abode, the City of Los Angeles filed suit against Murray and some of her neighbors. The City alleged that Murray's house was built below the mean high tide line and therefore on public property. A 1917 land grant by the State of California had given Venice control of its tidelands and submerged lands.⁶⁵ Gradual accretion from 1909 shore protections for the Duncan Wharf had inadvertently created a much wider strand. Concerned about the precedent, representatives from the Los Angeles Department of Playground and Recreation requested the mayor and City Council "obtain for the city all artificial accretions on the Venice waterfront."⁶⁶ Councilmembers responded by passing an ordinance clarifying the Department's control of both the beach and tidelands. By 1929, the Department's annual report proclaimed "[t]his ordinance marks a very definite forward step in the preservation of the public beaches for public use, and opens the way for the comprehensive planning of beach development by the Department."⁶⁷ The suit for public lands dragged on until 1936 with new defendants, long after officials cleared Murray and her husband.⁶⁸ The Murray lawsuit exemplified the beginning of a more proactive period for local municipalities.⁶⁹ Cities and the County of Los Angeles recognized that preserving and promoting beaches was a municipal necessity.

⁶⁴ Michael G. Ankerich, *Mae Murray: The Girl with the Bee-Stung Lips* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2012), 207–8.

⁶⁵ A similar law was initially passed in 1911 to grant the City of Los Angeles control of its tidelands. When Venice was annexed in 1925, regulatory authority transferred to Los Angeles.

⁶⁶ "City Moves To Save Beaches: Commissioners Ask Council To Act Quickly," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1928.

⁶⁷ "Annual Report of the Department of Playground and Recreation of the City of Los Angeles," 1926, 7.

⁶⁸ "Tidelands Suit Opens: City Launches Legal Battle for Disputed Property in Playa del Rey," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 1936.

⁶⁹ The City of Los Angeles was not only concerned about residential construction, but also oil wells. A 1928 report by the Los Angeles City Attorney that confirmed the Council had the authority to protect the beaches was the result of the Council's efforts to curb oil-related pollution.

Beachfront along the Santa Monica Bay was intended to be managed to transform the beach to provide for leisure and recreation while slowing the construction of works of coastal engineering. However, the economic climate inhibited local governments from realizing a bigger, better beach. In the early 1930's, the City of Los Angeles and other municipalities could do little other than publish studies and reports. Paltry budgets and limited government aid kept beaches open to the public. Nonetheless, bureaucrats and engineers called for increasingly ambitious and costly coastal improvements. Some public officials naively hoped beaches would regenerate sands with proper stewardship. The principal coastal visionaries worked in Los Angeles' Bureau of Engineering and wielded tremendous authority over urban development and growth. Engineers' extensive control over the built environment elsewhere contributed to the confidence needed for endless proposals with sweeping changes. Tracing the evolution of these administrative visions through official planning documents is useful because it reveals clear disconnects between the published dreams of bureaucrats and the unfunded realities.

When the Great Depression hit Southern California, the rate of built additions to the littoral environment dramatically slowed. Beach clubs, bathhouses, hotels, and amusements went bankrupt. The economic boom ended as oil and land speculation all but ceased. The ambitions of real estate developers stalled. Fritz Burns, developer of Del Rey, went bankrupt and was forced to camp on the beach. The economic rationale for bulkheads and breakwaters waned as property values declined. While the coastal real estate market cooled, migrants from across the country still arrived in large numbers. Los Angeles grew by six hundred thousand residents during the decade. The city was one of the few places in the country with both a rising population and a growing economy. Newcomers found industrial jobs in manufacturing and aerospace.⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Avila, *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles*, 25–26.

With an eye to serving an ever-larger population, local governments along the most popular stretches of the coast took a more active and assertive role in shaping the sands. Even before the economic downturn, municipalities became more interested in securing regulatory authority from the state, private citizens, and improvement corporations. In Los Angeles, the city's 1925 charter empowered the newly created and semi-independent Department of Playgrounds and Recreation under the leadership of Supervisor George Hjelte. Progressive-era legislative reforms aimed at curbing corruption had granted these new "charter departments" independent sources of funding and limited mayoral oversight.⁷¹ Only a few years later, the Department's authority was reinforced by the Council's 1929 ordinance. In 1930, the California Attorney General and the Los Angeles District Attorney sued millionaire developer Alphonzo Bell's Los Angeles Mountain Park Company and other landowners because of constructed erosion-causing groins. Lawsuit participants and other local officials formed an Advisory Board on Beach Protection. The Board suggested best practices in groin construction and encouraged more active coordination with the Division of State Lands.⁷² With newfound coastal authority, officials began regulating miles of shoreline with increasing environmental logic. Officials recognized that the first step to expanding the beach for public use was to halt poorly planned or illegal groins.

Engineers and officials hoped to use this more stable shoreline for extensive public works projects, but too often plans depended on fiscal schemes that rarely came to fruition. Similar to an earlier era, Los Angeles voters hesitated in approving bond measures to facilitate the purchase

⁷¹ Raphael J. Sonenshein, *The City at Stake: Secession, Reform, and the Battle for Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 32–33.

⁷² Advisory Board on Beach Protection, "Report of Advisory Board on Beach Protection, Los Angeles County to U. S. Webb, Attorney General, State of California and Buron Fitts, District Attorney, Los Angeles County" (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County, December 15, 1930); Chief of Engineers, United States Army, *Appendix II, Coast of California, Point Mugu to San Pedro Breakwater, Beach Erosion Control Study*, 118.

of coastline. Both city and county bond measures in the mid-1930s for public recreation failed to gain approval from local voters. In 1934, the Los Angeles City Engineer recommended artificial beach nourishment to the Los Angeles City Council, but it was indefinitely tabled due to Depression-era budgetary restraints. Throughout the 1930s, local municipalities applied for funding from government relief and public works programs. Limited public works money was often spent on necessary resources to maintain existing beaches. In 1931, the department of Playgrounds and Recreation used funds allocated from an unemployment relief bond to improve beaches at Venice, Playa Del Rey, Cabrillo, and Terminal Island by building rest centers, benches, and picnic benches.⁷³ Funding often came in small amounts. In 1939, the City received \$11,600 in Works Project Administration (WPA) funding for a lifeguard station at Del Rey. Limited resources kept the beaches functioning, but there was little to spare for noticeable improvements. Beyond the beaches, however, Los Angeles and particularly its Bureau of Engineering received millions of dollars for other public works projects. The engineers grew increasingly confident in their ability to shape the built environment. Officials had big plans for the beaches, but the dramatic rise in surf bathing and recreation during the 1930s necessitated small-scale improvements to the infrastructure to cope with the rising crowds.

Denuded shorelines became more noticeable as the decade progressed, prompting an outcry by the public and city officials, whose visions of their urban beaches had been schooled through the proliferation of often idyllic promotional representations. Throughout the decade, officials from the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation and engineers in the Bureau of Engineering continued to draft possible coastal transformations. When the 1933 Santa Monica Breakwater and its record length inevitably caused downdrift erosion, the Los Angeles City

⁷³ "City Undertakes Huge Beach Improvements: Program For Years Calls For \$315,568," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1931.

Council tasked the City Engineer to complete a series of studies on erosion. In January of 1934, the “Venice Yacht Harbor Report” acknowledged the inevitable erosion and suggested shore protection, but admitted, “it is impossible to predict the extent or rate of the erosion.”⁷⁴ Similar statements by the City Engineer in 1935 and 1938 called for action to preserve beaches whenever funds became available.⁷⁵ Engineers and bureaucrats were aware of the issue, but generating any action was difficult.

In 1935, the City of Los Angeles received \$7,000,000 from the WPA for the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant at Hyperion beach (now Dockweiler beach), south of Playa del Rey. The public works project was the only substantial federal funding devoted to the Los Angeles County beaches during the 1930s. The existing sewer systems in Los Angeles ran beyond capacity and City Engineer Lloyd Aldrich requested WPA funding for improvements.⁷⁶ An experimental plant was built at the site of the existing outfall sewer, hidden amongst sand dunes to obscure the structure from public view. The placement required extensive excavation beginning in 1936. By 1938, city workers unceremoniously dumped 1,800,000 cubic yards of sand into the tides on adjacent Hyperion beach. While the idea of using the publically owned sand hills for artificial nourishment was not a new idea, but it had never gained substantial traction. The fill was simply a matter of convenience. City employees told Playground and Recreation Commission members that four million cubic yards of sand would be sluiced, but far

⁷⁴ A.G. Johnson, “A Report on Erosion of Beaches in the Venice District” (Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works: City of Los Angeles, April 1940), 19, A728, Los Angeles City Records Center.

⁷⁵ “Report On Extending Roosevelt Highway Through The Santa Monica-Venice District” (Los Angeles: Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, February 1935), LACRC; “Joint Report of the County of Los Angeles Engineer, Chief Engineer of the Los Angeles County Flood Control District And the City Engineer of Los Angeles On Groin Construction For the Venice Beaches” (Los Angeles: Bureau of Engineering, Department of Public Works, June 8, 1938), LACRC.

⁷⁶ Anna Sklar, *Brown Acres: An Intimate History of the Los Angeles Sewers* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2008), 94–96.

less sand was actually excavated.⁷⁷ Members struggled to convince officials to eventually build a groin at the Los Angeles-El Segundo border to prevent sand from drifting southward, out of the municipality and eventually into the Redondo Submarine Canyon. While bureaucrats trumpeted the success of the fill as the beginning of broad change, there would be no more fills for almost a decade.⁷⁸ Hyperion was not a particularly popular beach nor was it suffering from severe erosion found further north. It was less convenient to visit than other beaches and lacked similar commercial amusements. The incomplete sewage plant initially prevented the public from using the new, wider beach. By the time it opened, there was little public excitement as erosion still plagued much of the coastline.

Despite the limited success of this initial experiment in artificial beach fill, planning large-scale transformations piqued the interest of officials and engineers. Bureaucrats hoped to reshape miles of beach with grandiose vision of building a coastal paradise. The long stretch of beachfront between Venice and Hyperion that included the Ballona wetlands was the largest stretch of prime beachfront in Los Angeles' possession and seemingly called for development. In 1933, the Los Angeles Department of Playgrounds and Recreation proposed building a large, inland saltwater lake in the Del Rey lagoon.⁷⁹ Subsequently, through the mid-1930s, the Department sought \$1,483,000 from the federal government for a dramatic transformation of the Playa del Rey coastline into a destination beach. Officials proposed space for twenty millions visitors annually with 3760 parking spaces and four municipal beach clubs featuring "modern bathhouses, tennis, volleyball, and horseshoe courts, glass-sheltered picnic tables, children's playgrounds, and facilities for almost every popular beach game and sport."⁸⁰ By 1938, plans had

⁷⁷ "Sand Mountain Moves to Shore To Form Larger Beach Area," *Los Angeles Times*, July 5, 1936.

⁷⁸ "Sand From Hills Increases City's Recreation Beach," *Los Angeles Times*, October 18, 1937.

⁷⁹ "Urge Saltwater "Hole" At Beach," *Eagle Rock Advertiser*, October 12, 1933.

⁸⁰ "Great Coastal Project Urged: Playa Del Rey Plan Told In Requested Study," *Los Angeles Times*, May 27, 1934.

evolved into a \$10,000,000 recreational yacht harbor with space for more than 7800 boats.⁸¹ The federal government denied each of these proposals. The documents repeatedly stress the necessity of planning for the inevitable economic rebound, but the exorbitant sums required for these projects far exceeded any previous recreational expenditure by the City or County. Even nationwide, through 1937, the WPA only spent about \$4,000,000 total on beach improvements.⁸² Plans continuously grew more elaborate with rising recreational demands amidst nagging fiscal realities.

The ambitious dreams of the Department of Playgrounds and Recreation and other coastal visionaries are not unique during this period. The 1920s and 1930s are famous in Los Angeles history for grand civic visions in planning documents. Fredrick Law Olmstead and Harland Bartholomew developed multiple ambitious urban transformations. The City of Los Angeles' 1924 *Major Traffic Street Plan* envisioned a traffic-free "autopia." In 1930, a report by Olmstead and Bartholomew, "Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region," imagined a future for Los Angeles replete with extensive public space and a complex vision for land use. The plan was shelved, however, due to various economic concerns.⁸³ These modernist visions of urban utopias neglected to consider the economic and political climate of the era.

While officials dreamed, the 1930s brought substantial advances to coastal engineering and oceanography. Local reports and planning documents benefitted tremendously from relevant scientific research into littoral processes and shore protection. In the 1926, the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association (ASBPA) was founded in New Jersey by a meeting of

⁸¹ "Yacht Harbor Action Urged: City Council Asked to Form Policy on Playa Del Rey Project," *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1938.

⁸² Information Services, Works Progress Administration, "America's Beaches Are Given a Face-Lifting by W.P.A.," *Shore & Beach* 5, no. 2 (1937): 39-41.

⁸³ Deverell and Hise, *Eden by Design*; Roth, "Concrete Utopia."

representatives from Atlantic and Great Lake states to investigate erosion and advocate for shore protection. Yearly conferences gathered planners, engineers, and scientists to discuss and collaborate. The ASBPA was crucial in lobbying for the 1930 Rivers and Harbors Act to authorize the Army Corps of Engineer's Beach Erosion Board (BEB) to oversee and study coastal erosion. Similar efforts also passed 1936's Act for the Improvement and Protection of Beaches Along Shores of the United States, to help with more extensive studies.⁸⁴ The BEB gathered data from local districts and wrote reports offering suggestions on coastal development. Narrow interpretation of legislative language stopped the BEB from financially assisting the construction of shore protections.⁸⁵ Along the Pacific, the board appointed University of California, Berkeley Professor Morrough O'Brien to survey resulting in a seven-volume title, *A Report on Sand Movement and Beach Erosion Along the Pacific Coast of the United States*.⁸⁶ It confirmed for the first time "littoral drift is essentially a stream of sand which moves in a rather narrow belt close to, and generally parallel with, the shore."⁸⁷ Officials now had tools to quantify and predict coastal erosion.

Within Southern California, local engineers began to take a more proactive approach to learning about beaches and tides. Through extensive observation, the County of Los Angeles and the City of Los Angeles' Bureau of Engineering developed a better understanding of coastal processes during the 1930s. During the 1910s and 1920s, few paid systematic attention the coast. Wilkie Woodard, a consulting engineer, built a series of experimental groins and took daily high

⁸⁴ Orrin H Pilkey and Katharine L Dixon, *The Corps and The Shore* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1996).

⁸⁵ Quinn, "The History of the Beach Erosion Board, U.S. Army, Corps of Engineers, 1930-1963," 37-38.

⁸⁶ Morrough O'Brien, "A Report on Sand Movement and Beach Erosion Along the Pacific Coast of the United States" (Washington, D.C.: Beach Erosion Board, United States Army Corp of Engineers, 1931), Engineers Research and Development Center Library, United States Army Corp of Engineers.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

tide readings.⁸⁸ He is believed to have turned over his records after his death in 1929 as part of the lawsuit against his former employer Alphonzo Bell.⁸⁹ In 1933 the County began yearly measurements of beach profiles from Ventura to Long Beach using shoreline-perpendicular transects. By the end of the 1930s, the County had measured over four hundred profiles.⁹⁰ Similarly, between 1933 and 1937, the City's Bureau completed numerous beach surveys and offshore studies of beach profiles. In 1936, the bureau used markers on pier pilings to measure wave height. In 1938, the City and County of Los Angeles cooperatively set up a weather observation station on a Venice pier. While the reality of erosion was easily visible even to the untrained eye, these surveys revealed varied beach profiles extensively segmented by littoral impediments. Dramatic contrasts in accretion and erosion existed in close proximity. Increasingly comprehensive surveys of the littoral zone allowed engineers to more effectively evaluate and quantify future changes to local specificities.

Officials made some progress in halting erosion despite lofty dreaming and limited budgets. By the end of a decade, advances in coastal engineering plus the success of the fill experiment frustrated local engineers and bureaucrats. Beach erosion could be dramatically reduced with sufficient funding and a concerted effort. In a 1940 report, A.G Johnson, beach design engineer for the Bureau of Engineering of the City of Los Angeles, lamented "reports were made as long as six years ago, in which the present serious erosion was predicted and a program outlined which... would ... have prevented the erosion."⁹¹ Over the course of the decade, including the sand from the Hyperion fill, the average width of the beaches increased by

⁸⁸ Leeds, "California's Beach Erosion and Development Problems," 165; "Experiment with Groins at Santa Monica Beach Successful," *Engineering Record* 75, no. 13 (1917).

⁸⁹ Herron, *An Oral History of Coastal Engineering Activities in Southern California 1930-1981*, 6-13.

⁹⁰ Coastal Frontiers Corporation, *Historical Changes in the Beaches of Los Angeles County*, 17-20.

⁹¹ Johnson, "A Report on Erosion of Beaches in the Venice District," 3.

about 50 feet. Some beaches however, particularly in the ever-popular Venice and Del Rey districts, continued to erode at alarming rates. Beachfront just north of the Venice Breakwater and south of the Santa Monica Pier shrank by almost ten feet per year.⁹² Overall, public beachfront narrowed despite a net increase in beach width as proximity to poorly planned shore protections determined shores' fates.

Wartime Holding Pattern

By the early 1940s, the region was enjoying a strong economic upturn from growing wartime industries, but little changed along the coast. During the war years, beaches remained overcrowded and sand continued to drift away. The grand scale of earlier coastal visions resulted in their undoing, yet new planners optimistically assumed that a rebounding economy and growing population would support their goals. Proposals reached an apex of ambition and cost. Increasingly, urban planners replaced engineers as the primary coastal visionaries for the City and County of Los Angeles. In the 1930s powerful developers managed to keep relegating planners in the City of Los Angeles to the sidelines, helped by the repeated corruption scandals of Mayor Frank Shaw. Planners benefited from the election of reformist Mayor Fletcher Bowron and the 1941 passage of charter amendments to strengthen the planning department.⁹³ A national trend towards shoreline planning further accelerated local power shifts.⁹⁴ Unlike the engineers

⁹² "Beach Volume Changes Above Mean Sea level – Division 4," in Coastal Frontiers Corporation, *Historical Changes in the Beaches of Los Angeles County*, 75.

⁹³ Tom Sitton, "Private Sector Planning," in *Land of Sunshine*, ed. William Deverell and Greg Hise (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2006), 154–58.

⁹⁴ After the passage of Los Angeles' plan, a 1941 appropriation bill (AB1327) for beaches required a master plan for eligibility, resulting in the sudden adoption of master plans. Orange County, Ventura County, San Luis Obispo County, City of San Francisco, and Santa Barbara County adopted plans in 1941. By 1942, 11 of 15 shoreline counties had passed a master plan. The success of master plans largely dissolved by the 1960s as local municipalities demanded local control and the protection of beachfront residential real estate.

who dominated coastal visions in the 1930s, urban planners in the early 1940s trumpeted the solution to a lack of recreational space was the purchase of private land. Their plans often obscured the impact of coastal erosion and hoped further losses could be avoided through the intelligent management of the shoreline.

On September 18th, 1940, with an eye to post-Depression growth, the County of Los Angeles approved “The Master Plan of Shoreline Development”, presenting a sweeping vision of all incorporated and unincorporated shoreline in the county. The county’s plan received support from the cities of Los Angeles, Redondo Beach, Santa Monica, Manhattan Beach, Long Beach, El Segundo, and Torrance. It stressed expansion of recreational areas of the coast through a priority schedule of shoreline purchases. Along the Santa Monica Bay, the plan called for an extensive waterfront park bisecting private property and various municipalities. A revision of the original 1941 plan sought to transform the beach into a recreational destination with facilities including a continuous boardwalk, scenic drives, large parking lots, bathhouses, picnic and play areas, an amusement zone, a massive yacht harbor, and even small basins for model yacht sailing.⁹⁵ The new beachfront park would be a recreational mecca for residents throughout the region and tourists across the country. Planners saw this as an opportunity to leapfrog over the well-known resort beaches of New York, New Jersey, and Florida. This elaborate dream, however, required far more acreage than was currently available to planners. At the time, the public still only owned 27% of beach frontage in Los Angeles County. The plan proposed increasing public coastline from 18.1 miles to 62.4 miles.⁹⁶ Los Angeles City’s version of the promotional vision tacitly addressed the challenges of continuing erosion on the first page with a

⁹⁵ T.H. Abell, “A Shoreline Master Plan for Los Angeles,” *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 12, no. 3 (1946): 25–27.

⁹⁶ Los Angeles Regional Planning District, “Master Plan of Shoreline Development.” (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles, 1941).

brief disclaimer that the plan hinged on widening, but no substantive, further mention was made.⁹⁷ As newspapers continued to bemoan coastal erosion, it is surprising that erosion was given such a flippant treatment.

The visual logic of planning documents during this era confirms the shift. Quantitative assessments of beaches dominated engineering reports, often evaluating space as total acreage or beach width using measures of beach volume or changes in mean sea-level. Maps usually depicted the littoral zone looking towards the ocean. Alternatively, planning reports largely overlooked the specifics of beach width to emphasize continuous lengths of shoreline. The master plan and other similar documents used maps with colored bands to emphasize important beaches to acquire. Privately owned segments were boldly marked in red. At first glance, there is no way to know if the strand suggested for purchase was even suitable for recreation. The maps also look landward, emphasizing changes to beachfront property, removed from the tides. The public's desires for a wide shoreline seemed to be lost in the ambitious plans for urban redevelopment.

During the war years, proposed plans for shoreline development also came from outside government and had great influence on coastal planning. Citizens' commissions and private foundations dreamed of overarching coastal makeovers and pushed the city to "act now and be prepared for postwar construction."⁹⁸ The Regional Planning Commission and the City of Los Angeles' planning department were happy to receive private assistance in its efforts to control the approach to the built environment. In the introduction to a 1944 shoreline plan, the

⁹⁷ "Development Plan for the Santa Monica Bay Shoreline Topanga Canyon to El Segundo" (Los Angeles: City Planning Commission, August 1945).

⁹⁸ Carl C McElvy, "Shoreline Development Study, Playa Del Rey to Palos Verdes" (Los Angeles: Greater Los Angeles Citizens Committee, Inc., 1944). For more on the creation of this study, particularly the role of associate architect Ruth Shellhorn, see Kelly Comras, *Ruth Shellhorn, Masters of Modern Landscape Design* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2016).

commission thanked the “splendid work” done by the Greater Los Angeles Citizens’ Committee that “greatly stimulated the work.”⁹⁹ Like the city planners, private parties largely overlooked issues of shoreline erosion. The Haynes Foundation, a legacy of progressive reformer John Randolph Haynes, published numerous plans for the modernizing city. Through the early 1940s, the Haynes Foundation employed L. Deming Tilton, a former consultant for the California State Planning Board, who repeatedly advocated the needs for a coastal master plan. Prioritizing coastal purchases was critical. Tilton’s replacement, Charles Eliot, also emphasized coastal acquisition, and a 1945 Haynes Foundation report’s section on coastal purchases repeatedly emphasized “closing gaps” and “long stretches of beach,” while only briefly calling for “investigation” into erosion.¹⁰⁰ Most groups seemed to agree on the broad strategy.

Despite the seemingly responsible tone of rational planning and evocations of the modern metropolis, these reports presented a grand landscape oblivious to environmental, jurisdictional and financial challenges. Some reports dismissed shore protection as a problem for engineers. When planners did offer genuine solutions to erosion, they were rarely practical. The ease of the 1938 Hyperion sluicing had convinced some of the ease of artificial fill. It is hard to believe plans actually called for the now-environmentally outrageous strategy of bulldozing coastal bluffs in Westgate (now Pacific Palisades), an affluent part of Los Angeles immediately west of Santa Monica, to provide “space for parking and recreational facilities.”¹⁰¹ While city workers leveled some sections of the bluffs in the 1920s and 1930s to build the Roosevelt Highway,

⁹⁹ Tom Cooke, “Shoreline Development, County of Los Angeles 1944: Report on the Revised Master Plan” (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, 1946).

¹⁰⁰ It is unsurprising that the Haynes Foundation’s recommendation largely aligned with the Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission’s goals for shoreline development. The Haynes Foundation employed the same members. See Los Angeles County Citizen’s Committee on Parks, Beaches, and Recreational Facilities, “Parks, Beaches, and Recreational Facilities for Los Angeles County: Report” (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1945).

¹⁰¹ A.G. Johnson, “A Report on Protection and Development of Beaches in the Westgate Addition and the Santa Monica Additions” (Los Angeles: Department of Public Works, City of Los Angeles, 1940), Box CC-A728, LACRC.

proposals called for using 2,500,000 cubic yards of sediment to widen beaches. No reports mention the potentially catastrophic seismic instability of bluffs, lost ecological habitats, or ruined coastal backdrop. Planners may have given erosion occasionally lip service, but rarely proposed genuine solutions.

Lurking behind this sudden shift towards the purchasing of coastal real estate was another private organization, the Shoreline Planning Association of California, Inc.¹⁰² Six Los Angeles-area Chambers of Commerce and similar groups formed the group in September of 1935.¹⁰³ Its members were local power brokers and it often held meetings at exclusive beach clubs. From its inception, the organization urged the acquisition of beachfront property for public recreation. Organization President Geoffrey Morgan repeatedly touted, “the beaches must belong to the people.”¹⁰⁴ Later, the organization targeted the oil industry’s plans for tidelands drilling, wanting to preserve the shoreline. Despite the seeming public benefit in their actions, Association members were key figures in local real estate and business that profited greatly from increased coastal commerce and development. The Association sparred with the oil industry over not just the blight of oil wells, but also potential decreases in property value.

The influential members of the Shoreline Planning Association successfully lobbied for the passage of local and statewide legislation. Throughout the 1940s, the Association was the leading private voice on coastal development. Department of Playgrounds and Recreation head George Hjelte was closely involved, serving on committees for the Association. As its members pressed for the approval of the master plan, officials increasingly adopted the organization’s

¹⁰² Elkind, *How Local Politics Shape Federal Policy*, 40–43.

¹⁰³ Members included West Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Palos Verdes, Redondo, Venice, Hermosa, Manhattan Beach (Lion’s Club), and Playa Del Rey (Civic Union).

¹⁰⁴ George Larsen, “The Beaches Must Belong To The People California’s Statewide Program,” *Shore and Beach* 14, no. 2 (1946): 69.

emphasis on connection between beaches and regional growth. Discussing the plan, Supervisor Oscar Hauge emphasized that beaches “bring untold thousands of tourists and millions of dollars to these areas.”¹⁰⁵ The Association was able to push through a series of beach bills in Los Angeles County and Chairman George Larsen took responsibility for the passage, republishing the adopted plan and selling additional copies.¹⁰⁶ Supervisor Ford privately told the editor of the *Illustrated Daily News* that the Association had “[s]ome of the City Hall’s best lobbyists . . . most active in promoting this whole project with the Board of Supervisors.”¹⁰⁷ A city report proposes a coastal committee consisting of representatives from thirteen government agencies and the Association.¹⁰⁸

Despite the failures in realizing a grand coastal park during World War II, the Southern California coastline expanded for the first time in decades. The majority of the increase came from land acquisitions, not beach nourishment. Local municipalities were able to secure or purchase some sections of shoreline. Officials ceased some leasing of public land leased for commercial purposes, like the Kinney Pier, while also purchasing discounted properties (like land from Hearst Sunical Land & Packing Corporation) and received celebrity donation (notably Will Rogers). A few bankrupt beach clubs even had their property seized.¹⁰⁹ However, these small coastal sections provided insufficient acreage for the growing population and failed to provide the dream of a contiguous coastline.

¹⁰⁵ “Beach Saving Help Sought: Supervisors Will Ask Congress Action to Aid Fight Against Erosion,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 4, 1940.

¹⁰⁶ George Larsen, “Remarkable Progress in California: Shoreline Planning Association Obtains Passage of Series of Public Beach Bills in Legislature,” *Shore and Beach* 9, no. 3 (July 1941): 99–101; “Los Angeles County Master Shore Plan: Supervisors Adopt Nine-Point Plan to Acquire and Develop Almost Entire County Shoreline for Public Use,” *Shore and Beach* 9, no. 1 (January 1941): 3.

¹⁰⁷ John Anson Ford to Manchester Boddy, October 13, 1937, Box 43, Folder SS, JAFP.

¹⁰⁸ Johnson, “A Report on Protection and Development of Beaches in the Westgate Addition and the Santa Monica Additions,” 3.

¹⁰⁹ Los Angeles County, “Map of Proposed Shoreline Purchases,” Box 17, Folder E, JAFP.

While new beaches opened, elsewhere popular shorefront still shrank. The City of Los Angeles' Bureau of Engineering did repeatedly attempt to secure outside funding for preventing coastal erosion, recognizing the cost was "greater than can be borne by local agencies."¹¹⁰ Unfortunately, benefactors denied most proposals. When Los Angeles did receive funds from the State Parks Commission in 1941 to pump sand from the silted Santa Monica Yacht Harbor, after two public calls the state was still unable to find any firms to bid on the contract.¹¹¹ No construction firms bid because the military had already requisitioned all suitable dredging equipment.¹¹² Coastal engineering supplies were in high demand during the war. The War Production Board repeatedly denied requests from the City of Los Angeles for labor and sand because of a lack of strategic importance. In 1945, a joint agreement between the State, County, City of Los Angeles and the City of Santa Monica provided funding to replace sand lost in the last ten years.¹¹³ Municipalities resorted to hauling sand from Hyperion to the eroded beach and dumping sand along the foreshore, hoping the tides would distribute the sand. The stopgap solution was not realistic for long-term maintenance.

In a familiar story, during the early 1940s, more pressing concerns yet again trumped more lavish visions. Planners' dreams of a massive public works project to build a waterfront park near Venice never materialized. Wartime industries, infrastructure and housing projects continued to be the top budgetary priorities. With the lobbying assistance of the Shoreline Planning Association, local and state budgets provided planners funding for land acquisitions and increasingly supported the development of recreational beaches. As governmental forces

¹¹⁰ Lloyd Aldrich to Board of Public Works, June 7, 1940, City Council File 5519, Box A-758, LACRC.

¹¹¹ Alfred Jones to County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, October 23, 1944, Box 43, Folder SS, JAFP.

¹¹² Council Motion by Harold Harby, August 17, 1944, City Council File 10201, Box A-798, LACRC.

¹¹³ Technically, the yardage was "the equivalent of the net loss by erosion between Venice Pier and Ballona Creek Outlet during the eight-year period from 1935 to 1943, inclusive, as determined by surveys made by the County and the City." Alfred Jones to County of Los Angeles Board of Supervisors, October 23, 1944, Box 43, Folder SS, JAFP.

seemed to be aligning towards improving the shoreline amidst record erosion, a more pressing concern arose.

Saved by Sewage

During the early 1940s, pollution clogged beaches along the Santa Monica Bay. A majority of the city's sewage was untreated and flowed out an old submarine outfall sewer and into the Pacific Ocean, coating the shoreline with bacteria, sewage grease, feces, and other particulate matter. Excess sewage was dumped directly into the Ballona Creek. Doctors diagnosed swimmers with typhoid fever and enteric disease. Sewage grease, in cold water, congeals around bacteria and feces and often clung to the bodies of swimmers. Sewage grease was so "revolting and difficult to remove" that some visitors resorted to "gasoline baths" after swimming.¹¹⁴ The sewage crisis in Los Angeles festered for decades. Both the 1920s outfall and the 1938 experimental plant were far too small to treat the City's wastewater. The sewage system in Los Angeles was operating beyond capacity, yet voters were hesitant to approve funding for the construction. In 1941, the State Department of Health began exploring pollution on the coast and published a report the following year. The report featured chilling photographs of children playing amidst sewage grease on the sands and blamed Los Angeles officials for "procrastination and inadequate planning."¹¹⁵ In 1943, as the beach became associated with the odor of sewage, the California State Department of Health issued a quarantine order for over twelve miles of beach between Venice and Hermosa. The order mandated the closure of beaches

¹¹⁴ Bureau of Sanitary Engineering, "Report on A Pollution Survey of Santa Monica Bay Beaches in 1942" (Sacramento: California Department of Public Health, 1943), 37.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

in Del Rey, El Segundo, and Manhattan Beach. Much of the coastline that local municipalities purchased under the master plan was no longer available for public recreation. Ambitious wartime planning was potentially outdated. The future appeared grim for the beach.

Pollution, not erosion or recreational desires, finally galvanized attention in 1945. While the massive beach closures prompted a public outcry, The State Department of Health convinced the California Attorney General to require municipalities using the existing sewage outfall at Hyperion to abate the nuisance by building a new plant.¹¹⁶ In 1945, the City Council allocated two million dollars for the initial phase of the construction project from appropriations from the Post War Public Works Fund.¹¹⁷ Beaches remained closed as the city finalized plans for construction, but officials hoped that the new plant would result in beaches quickly reopening. Before the city could begin excavation for the future site of the high-rate-activated sludge plant, controversy arose.

Despite the legal ultimatum, the seeming consensus regarding the location of the sewage plant was in jeopardy during 1945. While the sand dunes at Hyperion were seen as a potential resource for a fill operation, the construction of the sewage plant did not necessarily mean that sand would be excavated for beach nourishment. As early as 1935, Lloyd Aldrich had recommended using the dunes for artificial nourishment. Playgrounds and Recreation's George Hjelte was eager for fill operations, but his department lacked funding to facilitate or supervise the transfer. A 1940 study by the Bureau of Engineering dictated that 12,000,000 cubic yards of sand would be needed to fully develop Los Angeles' beaches. Perfectly placed coastal expansion, however, was not simply happenstance. The City initially considered a few inland

¹¹⁶ A.G. Johnson, "Santa Monica Bay Shoreline Development Plans," *Proceedings of First Conference on Coastal Engineering, Long Beach, California, October, 1950*. 1, no. 1 (1950): 275.

¹¹⁷ Johnson, "A Report on Erosion of Beaches in the Venice District," 5.

sites. The “easterly site,” today the Los Angeles International Airport, would have cost an extra one to two million dollars to construct.¹¹⁸ The site’s topography would have required the construction of a long sewer pipe to connect with the existing outfall sewer at Hyperion.¹¹⁹ Despite additional costs, consulting engineers Metcalf & Eddy stated, “both sites are feasible from an engineering standpoint.”¹²⁰ Residents in the coastal area telegraphed their City Council members with pleas to begin construction at either location.

The primary advocate for the inland location was the little-known United Beach Protection Association. This organization seemingly appeared out of nowhere in 1945 and loudly clamored for the easterly location, ostensibly claiming that the sand dunes at Hyperion should be used as a recreational beach as originally suggested by the Haynes Foundation and the Greater Los Angeles Citizens Committee.¹²¹ The Association, with its laudable name, was actually the work of politician John B. Elliott, an independent oil producer and partial owner of Pauley Petroleum, who had repeatedly advocated against state regulation of the oil industry.¹²² Elliott, a power broker in the local Democratic Party, allied himself with real estate moguls like William Workman, Bowron supporters including Clifford E. Clinton, and labor affiliates of the Los Angeles CIO Council. He promised union officials the inland site offered more opportunities for construction jobs. He then convinced the Los Angeles Planning Commission to vote against the

¹¹⁸ The engineering firm responsible for drafting the plans estimated that the cost would be \$1 million. Aldrich and his Bureau of Engineering estimated the cost to be over \$2 million. Carl Staahl to Harold Harby, September 19, 1945, Council File 20528, LACRC.

¹¹⁹ Aldrich estimated that the 2300-foot pipeline would cost at least \$400,000.

¹²⁰ City Planning Commission, “Study of Alternative Proposals For A Site for the Sewage Treatment Plant For The City of Los Angeles” (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles, April 13, 1945), City Council file 16063, Box CC-A835, LACRC.

¹²¹ Division Engineer, Pacific Division, Corps of Engineers, United States Army, *Transcript of Proceedings: Inspection Trip of Pacific Coast by the Sub-Committee on Beach Erosion of the Committee on Rivers and Harbors of the House of Representatives, U.S. Congress, July 1945*, vol. 1: Los Angeles Engineer District (San Francisco, 1945), 165.

¹²² Sabin, *Crude Politics*, 149.

Hyperion site. The Commission's report included personal attacks against Lloyd Aldrich, intended to discredit his Hyperion plan.¹²³ While Elliott proclaimed that an inland site would allow a recreational beach, coastal observers widely expected that the city would instead lease the lands as an oil field.¹²⁴

Lloyd Aldrich unequivocally refuted the possibility of an inland site. A 1946 Bureau of Engineering study claimed placement on "the beach is the cheapest, feasible method of disposal."¹²⁵ This bland, bureaucratic rationality obscures the reality of the decision. The excavated material was used to fill in erosion along the most popular stretch of the Los Angeles coast centered on Venice Beach. Survey data from numerous studies in the previous had confirmed that the greatest number of visitors of in Southern California used beachfront between the Santa Monica Pier and Del Rey. Sluicing fill matter directly in front of the plant, as was done in 1938, was the cheapest option, but the expanded shoreline would have had inevitable proximity to sewage, limiting recreational potential. Sand disposal just north of the plant and east of the dunes between Century Boulevard and Imperial Highway might have blocked the new municipal airport's runway visibility.¹²⁶ Fill to the south of Hyperion would likely have caused sand to overwhelm the groin at the city border with El Segundo, causing undesirable accretion and lost sediment downdrift.¹²⁷ Aldrich was not interested in filling the beaches of neighboring municipalities. He called on his allies, including the Shoreline Planning Association and City Councilman Harold Harby, for aid. The public backlash against the closed beaches led to

¹²³ "Sewage Site Causes New Row," *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1945

¹²⁴ Carl Staahl to Harold Harby, September 19, 1945, Council File 20528, LACRC.

¹²⁵ City Engineer to Board of Public Works, February 27, 1946, City Council file 16063, Box CC-A835, LACRC.

¹²⁶ While more sand would not block runways, after beach fill operations, the possibility of the construction of oil derricks on the site would have inhibited the approach visibility for aircraft. The city would have then been obligated to purchase the oil rights for the area at the cost of \$960,000.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

overwhelming pressure against Elliott's obstructionist tactics.¹²⁸ Eventually, Frank Gillelen, chairman of the Board of Public Works, convinced the planners to capitulate by granting a few minor concessions.¹²⁹ Aldrich knew that while the Hyperion site might remove some land from future recreational development, the site's excavation would also provide a veritable wealth of sediment for transforming the shoreline. Finally, the Hyperion site would allow the construction project to begin sooner and appease residents frustrated with the current, unusable beach.

With the construction site debate settled, the Board of Public Works executed a contract for the construction of a new, one-hundred-fifty-acre sewer facility in August of 1946.¹³⁰ Funding for the project came from two ten-million-dollar bond measures in 1945 and 1946, as well as from the state, to aid with construction costs. The sluicing project finally began in March of 1947 and was largely completed by July of 1948. In less than eighteen months, sluice guns ate away at the dunes, pumping between fifteen hundred and two thousand cubic yards of sand each hour. Using mining techniques, the pumps combined sand with salt water for efficient transportation. Approximately 14 million cubic yards of sand was hydraulically transported up the coast in twenty-eight or thirty inch pipes through a series of pumping stations and sprayed along the shoreline.¹³¹ The spray from the pipes dwarfed engineers and contractors in photographs of the project. The beach was located up to six miles away from the sewage plant and required the construction of an extensive system to transport the sand. The technical wonder was the feature of numerous multi-page newspaper articles. The ambition of the project was groundbreaking and was "the first time placer methods and eductors have been used on such a large scale."¹³² The fill

¹²⁸ W. Wayne Brown to City Council, August 31, 1945, City Council file 16063, Box CC-A835, LACRC.

¹²⁹ "Council Approve Site of For Sewage Project," *Los Angeles Times*, June 8, 1945.

¹³⁰ Lloyd Aldrich to Los Angeles City Council, January 5, 1948, City Council file 30429, Box CC-01-946, LACRC.

¹³¹ Herron, *An Oral History of Coastal Engineering Activities in Southern California 1930-1981*, 6-31.

¹³² "Beach Saved by Dredging: Pump Sluice 50,000 Cubic Yards Daily to Eroded Strand," *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1947.

widened six miles of prime beachfront by an average of 600 feet, growing by up to 800%. In Venice, the strand grew from just seventy-five feet to 675 feet.¹³³ The sand was evenly spread across the most popular and eroded beaches, stretching from the Santa Monica to the El Segundo city limits.¹³⁴ With their “seemingly inexhaustible source of sand,” the city even began to fill the less desirable beaches of Hyperion closer to the sewage plant.¹³⁵ By September of 1947, after just one summer of pumping, the State Board of Health lifted the quarantine on some of the beaches, including Venice.¹³⁶ By 1950, when the Hyperion plant became operational, the public was able to fully take advantage of the widened strand along the Santa Monica Bay.

With a transformed coastline, public praise for the expansion of the beach was effusive. The project had provided over 350 acres of sand for recreation. Politicians and proclaimed that this beach widening was an important step in fulfilling the master plan for shoreline development. With the increase in beach acreage, scenic highways, spacious parking, and shoreline parks would shortly follow. Councilman Harby asserted that the expansion would rejuvenate the Venice economy hurt by the eight-year quarantine. The beaches’ new width prompted local newspapers to note the new Venice beach was “twice the length of New York’s famed Jones Beach and of equal width” and speculated it would restore the beach’s fame.¹³⁷

On a crowded Sunday in July, the city organized a grand reopening with a 13-hour program of celebrity-filled parades, sports, dancing, fireworks, and music. Hollywood star Eddie

¹³³ Johnson, “Santa Monica Bay Shoreline Development Plans,” 275.

¹³⁴ The fill operation deposited 3.4 million cu/y in Del Rey, 5 million cu/y up north to Ballona Creek, 4.5 million cu/y between Ballona and Venice Pier, and 1.2 million cu/y between Venice and Ocean Park piers. See “Sand Moved to Beaches,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1947.

¹³⁵ Tom Cameron, “Six-Mile Beach Forms as Pumping Nears End at Site of Sewage Plant: Two Years’ Work Shows Results at Hyperion Project,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 19, 1948.

¹³⁶ The quarantine remained effective closest to Hyperion, between Del Rey to Manhattan Beach. “Beach Strip Reopened; Six Miles Stay Closed,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1947.

¹³⁷ “New Venice Beach to Restore Fame: City Expects to Regain Popularity as Fun Center as Result of Shore Rehabilitation,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 9, 1950.

Bracken was the master of ceremonies.¹³⁸ The volleyball, handball, tumbling, and wrestling competitions took place on the sands and at the just-opened Muscle Beach recreational center. Organizers held the competition on recently submerged beachfront, utilizing the new width to sensational effect. By the late afternoon, water skiing and paddle boarding competitors took to the waves. The evening was highlighted by the state's biggest outdoor ball, an electrical parade and a beauty contest for married women.¹³⁹ Thousands of Angelenos turned out to enjoy the performances and challenges on the Sunset Pier and stroll the boardwalk. The widening had not only reversed decades of coastal erosion, but created a beach far wider than before. Officials celebrating the reopening of the strand were in actuality christening an entirely new beach.

Newspapers also celebrated the quartz-dominant, white-colored sand used in the fill. Oil drilling along the coast had discolored sand and left patches of tar. Beaches in Del Rey turned black "from oil residue from the tankers off the El Segundo pier."¹⁴⁰ While beach visitors could gaze at the ocean with their backs to the derricks of the ever-present oil industry, bits of oil in the sand clung to clothing and feet. Fill from the dunes, however, was composed of clean sand that matched an idealized aesthetic of wide, tropical beaches. Measurements taken during the early 1940s confirmed that the grains were also smaller and more uniform than typical beach sand, resulting in a softer and more desirable material for fill.¹⁴¹ A local Manhattan Beach construction supplies company actually sold this same white sand to the developers of Hawaii's Waikiki Beach in the 1920s.¹⁴² The beach was again reborn. The sprawling expanse of white sand

¹³⁸ "New Venice Beach Set for Public Opening Today: 13-Hour Program of Parade, Sports and Music Will Celebrate Restoring of Recreation Center," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1950.

¹³⁹ "Pageant Opens Venice Beach," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1950.

¹⁴⁰ Charles Minore to Los Angeles City Council, August 18, 1944, City Council file 16063, Box CC-A835, LACRC.

¹⁴¹ Johnson, "A Report on Erosion of Beaches in the Venice District."

¹⁴² Rex Dalton, "Isle's Sandman," *The Daily Breeze*, October 13, 1973.

suddenly evoked a more exotic experience. Beach attendance soared as residents took advantage of the new space.

The tremendous success of the beach after decades of coastal planning falsely suggests the city had prioritized building a recreational utopia. The reality is that the sewage plant's necessity and a legal obligation drove the Los Angeles City Council to approve a then costly budget of \$3.5 million, not an engineering report or the master plan. Newspapers articles emphasized the serendipity, reporting that the beach was "a gift to the people" due to "interdepartmental planning and co-operation" and the cheapest way to dispose of the sand.¹⁴³ Yet, the architect of this strategic dispersal of sand was Lloyd Aldrich, who was a calculating politician and saw this as a prime opportunity to engender public popularity. Aldrich was City Engineer from 1933 to 1955, overseeing public works projects and entrenching his bureaucratic power base. His decision to use a costly method of paving public streets ensured him support by the construction industry. He was also a holdover from the Shaw administration's political machine and a target for Mayor Fletcher Bowron's reformist efforts. Aldrich responded with efforts via a failed charter amendment to dissolve the public works board.¹⁴⁴

The planning and construction of the Hyperion sewage plant came at the peak of the rivalry between Aldrich and the mayor. Almost every decision related to the project was mired in partisan politics and stall tactics. In January of 1948, Aldrich updated the City Council by submitting a report on the project that called for hiring a nationally recognized authority to evaluate the shoreline master plan. Aldrich wanted to build a marina at Del Rey that would be an even greater accomplishment, and hoped that the experts would confirm its necessity. Like many

¹⁴³ "New Venice Beach Set for Public Opening Today," *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 1950.

¹⁴⁴ Tom Sitton, *Los Angeles Transformed: Fletcher Bowron's Urban Reform Revival, 1938-1953* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 127-28.

recent coastal expenditures, Aldrich called for splitting the cost of the report with the Board of Supervisors. In March, Mayor Bowron vetoed the proposal, however, alleging the partnership would give the county eventual control of the marina.¹⁴⁵ While the feasibility of the City entirely financing a project estimated at seventy-five million dollars was impossible, Bowron nonetheless grandstanded, asking “should...beach frontage...be planned and developed as a city enterprise, to be managed and controlled by the City of Los Angeles?”¹⁴⁶ The petty politics were largely irrelevant when the next month the Board of Supervisors did not provide matching funds, forcing the Council to allocate the full amount. In the same year, Bowron opposed Aldrich’s efforts to allocate funds to publish a study critical of the mayor. These instances illustrate Bowron’s fear of Aldrich and the astonishing power of charter departments of this era.

In 1949, Lloyd Aldrich sought even greater control over his city and ran for mayor against his rival. Running for his third term, Bowron had the support of much of the establishment, receiving endorsements by all the key newspapers and eventually winning. Aldrich, nonetheless, mounted a serious challenge in the 1949 primaries, beating out a crowded field of candidates and forcing a run-off election. Aldrich spent much of his mayoral campaign focused on Bowron’s deficiencies, blaming him for organized crime and high taxes. He proudly pointed to Hyperion’s continuing construction as his signature achievement while calling for even more park space in the city.¹⁴⁷ The media proclaimed this beach widening was an important step in fulfilling the master plan for shoreline development; Aldrich was quick to take responsibility. Scenic highways, spacious parking, and shoreline parks would follow shortly with

¹⁴⁵ Political clashes between the City of Los Angeles and County of Los Angeles were nothing new. For more, see Tom Sitton, *The Courthouse Crowd: Los Angeles County and Its Government, 1850-1950* (Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 2013).

¹⁴⁶ Fletcher Bowron to Los Angeles City Council, March 2, 1948, City Council file 30429, Box CC-01-946, LACRC.

¹⁴⁷ The Watchman, "Accusations Hurling in Mayor Campaign: Bowron and Aldrich Start Banging Away in Warmup for Run," *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1949.

the increase in beach acreage. Newspapers and Bowron attempted to blame Aldrich for flaws in the outfall sewer and for willful delays in Hyperion's construction. Aldrich retorted by claiming Hyperion "could have been, and should have been, started 10 years ago, when the Mayor opposed it only because I recommended it."¹⁴⁸ Aldrich struggled pointing out his infrastructural accomplishments, yet had far greater success with Hyperion and beaches because of their visibility in the built environment.

Aldrich would unsuccessfully challenge Bowron again during a 1950 recall and the 1953 general election. He had far less success in these campaigns as Bowron emulated his strategy and took credit for coastal improvements. The opening ceremony of the new beach at Venice in 1950 was presided over by the mayor with numerous politicians present – Aldrich was absent. In 1953, the Bureau of Sanitation took over the operation of Hyperion. Aldrich would retire less than two years later. Claiming responsibility for a better beach did not win him elections, but it enabled a career civil servant name recognition perhaps otherwise impossible.

The struggle between Aldrich and Bowron is emblematic of other struggles to capitalize on the coast during this era of rapid redevelopment. As we saw, the decision to build the sewage plant at the Hyperion site was not a foregone conclusion. From 1942 to 1945, various factions in local politics struggled over two potential construction sites attempting to sabotage opponents while appeasing constituents and oil corporations. Shrewd policymakers looking to take credit for restoring the beach ensured the sand was placed to maximize its visibility. This locational skirmish illustrates the awareness of the political value of the coast. Wily lobbyists proclaimed that their sites would benefit the beach. Some argued construction at an inland, easterly location would have preserved a wide swath of recreational coastline, while others suggested Hyperion

¹⁴⁸ "Mayor Rivals Strive for Heavy Vote: Three-Day Holiday Seen as Obstacle, but Record Possible," *Los Angeles Times*, May 30, 1949.

would be cheaper and faster, abating pollution sooner. No one was particularly interested in the current iterations of master plans for shoreline development. Their persuasive language aroused a passionate reaction as City Hall was inundated with telegrams. This public outcry exemplified the sort of political capital the factions used to support their agenda and grease future elections.

By the end of the 1950s, public beach space in Southern California had dramatically increased. Along the Santa Monica Bay, wide, sandy beaches stretched for miles between Santa Monica and Palos Verde. Other public works projects that resulted in beach fills included the Scattergood steam plant adjacent to Hyperion and sections of the Pacific Coast Highway during the 1950's. Around half the sand replenishment along the coast of Southern California was the result of shoreside construction.¹⁴⁹ After decades of inattention, slowly but surely, Los Angeles beaches from Venice to Dockweiler grew wider. Engineering reports and master plans had presented a plethora of unfunded infrastructural mandates with record price tags. Public adoration of the beach was simply insufficient to overcome the impracticality of wartime dreaming. Instead, amid a rapidly modernizing city, officials occasionally approved specific nourishment projects viewed as practical and politically expedient. Local officials clamored to take credit for these expansions.

The transformation of the Los Angeles coast during the postwar years offers an instructive and somewhat unique narrative in the city's development. Midcentury dreaming manifested shoreline plans, parks plans, and other sweeping visions of urban transformation that remained unfulfilled. Public green space grew increasingly unpopular with suburban Angelenos and their backyard pools. Rapid urban growth dramatically outpaced stagnating park space

¹⁴⁹ William Herron, "Sand Replenishment in Southern California," *Shore and Beach* 55, no. 3-4 (1987): 87.

during the era.¹⁵⁰ Nonetheless, public beach acreage grew. As the ratio of park acreage to population in Los Angeles declined, the ratio of beach acreage increased.¹⁵¹ Shoreline nourishment projects reveal that this expansion of public space was in part due to the result of the popular resonance of the coast. The beach was far more than a sandy recreational space. It was a place of civic pride and necessary space for the practiced coastal lifestyle. Despite little regional agitation for green space, residents wrote letters and telegrams bemoaning the decrepit state of the coast during the 1930s and 1940s. When the postwar boom finally arrived, the promise of a better beach loomed as a valuable political capital for policymakers.

The ability of this cultural landscape to influence public works projects affirms the evocative potential of the beach as an important political stratagem during the postwar period. The coast was the metropolis' premier leisure destination and a pivotal place for the Southern California good life, the regional economy, and the national popular culture. The beach had popularity with locals, tourists, and the business community. Despite this tremendous appeal, the concept of "public interest" was highly malleable. While some recent scholarship suggested business interests like the Shoreline Planning Association drove local and federal coastal public policy, this episode of beach widening also underscores the shrewd political machinations of experienced political actors. The Association had little interaction with the public and it is hard to tell if it carried much public favor. Instead, its success was measured by the profits of its members.

¹⁵⁰ Culver, *The Frontier of Leisure*; William Deverell, "Dreams Deferred: Parks and Open Space," in *Overdrive: L.A. Constructs the Future, 1940-1990*, by Wim De Wit and Christopher James Alexander (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 2013), 22–23.

¹⁵¹ "Volume 3: The Impact of the Growth of the Los Angeles Metropolitan Region on the Demand for Outdoor Recreation Facilities in Southern California - 1976 and 2000," ORRRC Study Report, *The Future of Outdoor Recreation in Metropolitan Regions of the United States* (Washington, D.C.: Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962).

In conclusion, the transformation of coastal engineering from its roots in real estate development is not surprising. Coastal goals in 1915 and 1950 were markedly similar as both developers and bureaucrats attempted to capitalize on the allure of the coast. The beach was a powerful image with distinct political benefits. With its cherished place in Los Angeles culture, the littoral became an exception to overly ambitious urban renewal plans. Despite this piecemeal approach, the physical landscape of the beach along miles of coastline was transformed through extensive engineering resulting in its current, treasured form.

Chapter 4: Before Disneyland

An ambitious new attraction joined the coastline of the Los Angeles area on August 28, 1954. At the southern tip of the Santa Monica Bay, Marineland of the Pacific opened as the region's first modern amusement park and oceanarium on sixty-five acres of bluffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean. Perched on Long Point in rural Palos Verdes, the \$3,500,000 "mansion of the deep" featured seal stadiums, arenas for porpoise shows, and over one million cubic gallons of water filled with a jumble of local marine life.¹ The park dwarfed existing pleasure piers and small-scale amusements along the coast. Disneyland was still in the planning phases. Jutting into the Pacific, the scenic plateau offered visitors panoramic views of the ocean, nearby beaches, and Santa Catalina island in the distance. The oceanarium, designed by prestigious local firm Pereira & Luckman, featured a modernist look typical of the region's postwar architectural style. In addition to the tanks and views, the park also included carnival rides, coastal cruises, gift shops, restaurants, a post office, a hotel, and walking paths with access to the beach. Park owners designed their modern mecca to be a complete experience for the whole family. An instant success, Marineland attracted over 15,000 visitors opening day. The Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors declared August 30th through September 5th, 1954 "Marineland of the Pacific Week." Socialites and celebrities flocked to the park, fueling publicity in gossip columns while college students told a local newspaper Marineland "has it all over dancing at the campus

¹ "Fish to be Moved Into Marineland," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1954.

hangout.”² Attendance reached over 350,000 in the first six months of operation as residents across Southern California began to reconsider their regular beach plans.³

Marineland of the Pacific departed from typical leisure establishments along the coast as owners intended the large-scale enterprise to usher in a new period of development along the bay. By building from the ground up, creators fully reimagined the beach experience to embody the middle-class values and dreams of postwar California. The park embraced the automobile with its expansive parking lots ready to welcome thousands as advertisements touted the park’s convenient drive “through the beautiful rolling hills” and “acres of free parking.”⁴ Marineland also offered a safe environment for families prototypical of suburban life. Developers had hoped that locals had grown weary of aging coastal attractions and saw public beaches as passé or overcrowded. At Marineland, private attractions embraced growing middle class affluence: admission and fees limited attendance and visitors did not fear packs of teenagers or vagrants. This economic delineation also reinforced racial exclusivity for white families at the park along an increasingly diverse coast. The park also offered family friendly amusements. Advertisements proclaimed a visit was “thrilling, fascinating, [and] educational.”⁵ Shows introduced the public to dolphins and whales with a blend of factoids and flare. Upon entry to the park, visitors also learned about the fabled history of the region’s “Spanish Conquistadors...early-day whalers, crafty smugglers, and even pirates who had little regard for fellow humans.”⁶ The relatively new

² Barbara Cox, “Younger Set Sees Bubbles: Only Whale in Captivity Happy Actor,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1957.

³ “Four-Lane Highway Rushed For Popular Marineland,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1955.

⁴ “Marineland of the Pacific Visitor Booklets,” *Marineland of the Pacific Historical Society*, accessed April 18, 2017, <http://web.archive.org/web/20160420134646/http://www.marinelandofthepacific.org/booksvisitorbrochuresvisitorbooklets/visitorbooklets.html>.

⁵ Sam Gnerre, “The Origin and Early Days of Marineland of the Pacific,” Blog, *South Bay History*, (August 9, 2014), <http://blogs.dailybreeze.com/history/2014/08/09/the-origin-and-early-days-of-marineland-of-the-pacific/>.

⁶ Marineland of the Pacific, “Visit Southern California’s Marineland” (Palos Verdes, 1961).

concept of “edutainment” seemed to be a hit with a wide demographic. Marineland embodied the midcentury California dream for children and adults, offering idealized cultural norms rooted in exclusion amid an era of rapid change. It was no surprise it quickly becoming one of the premiere leisure destinations in Southern California.

The growth of a vision of a land of fun and sun hinged on continued efforts to replicate white, middle-class suburbia while commoditizing coastal property. When the developers of Marineland began searching for coastal real estate, few would have expected their choice of the Palos Verdes peninsula. While the site met strict engineering requirements for aquarium salt water intake, the location was somewhat remote and had no history of popular amusements. Aerial photos from the 1950s reveal a deserted coastal landscape. New York financier Frank Vanderlip led a consortium that purchased over 16,000 acres in 1913 and retained ownership of much of the peninsula. During the 1920s, the consortium partially developed the area as an affluent community with eventual dreams of an exclusive golf course on Long Point. Stalled by Vanderlip’s failing health and the Great Depression, only 6,500 residents lived throughout the area in 1950.⁷ Japanese farmers used much of the land in Palos Verdes for small-scale agriculture. The families of Atsushi Sakamoto and Tsutomu Takenaga farmed the future site of Marineland before their dispossession and internment in 1942.⁸ During World War II, the United States Navy and Army constructed temporary artillery outposts that they quickly abandoned after the war. Amidst the postwar boom of Southern California and particularly the South Bay, the peninsula seemed primed for further expansion for white Angelenos fleeing racialized fears of

⁷ Thomas Gates, “THE PALOS VERDES RANCH PROJECT: Olmsted Brothers’ Design Development For A Picturesque Los Angeles Suburban Community Of The 1920s,” *Architronic* 6, no. 1 (May 1997), <http://corbu2.caed.kent.edu/architronic/v6n1/v6n1.03a.html>.

⁸ Marjeanne Blinn, *40 Families Story*, Palos Verdes Library District, 2011, accessed August 8, 2016, <http://www.40families.org/>.

urban life. Kelvin Vanderlip, son of Frank Vanderlip and then president of Palos Verdes Inc., sought to sell the land and accelerate the area's development. Capitalizing on the coast was a logical first step.

Local officials and the business community, eager to raise the profile of the beach, extensively aided Marineland's efforts to privatize the beach and build a middle class coastal destination. The park's general manager, Ray Smith, was a well-known face in local politics as a leader in the Los Angeles Airport Commission, Downtown Business Men's Association, and Greater Los Angeles Plans Inc. He quickly convinced municipal officials on the idea that a successful amusement park would raise nearby property values and stimulate renewed interest in a rarely visited stretch of coast. Kelvin Vanderlip also personally advocated for the project as president of the influential Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce.⁹ Officials responded and rushed to construct a four-lane highway for the opening of Marineland. Before the park opened, an inaugural Marineland beauty pageant was judged by none other than Los Angeles County Supervisor and coastal booster Burton Chace.¹⁰ Chace was heavily involved with organizations lobbying state officials for increased coastal funding. These connections helped Marineland become an economic and political juggernaut committed to selling a vision of beach life.

The development of the midcentury Los Angeles area continued to reflect a growing desire to transform the shoreline into a middle class coastal destination that embodied the California dream of sun-kissed coastal leisure.¹¹ Residents, embracing the region's postwar

⁹ Bruce Megowan and Maureen Megowan, *Historic Tales from Palos Verdes and the South Bay*, 2014, 60.

¹⁰ "Alice in Marineland Contest Judges Named," *Los Angeles Times* 6/10/54

¹¹ For a general overview of the 1950s in Los Angeles, see Kevin Starr, *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). More specific works on the decade include: Shana Bernstein, *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*; Michelle M. Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism: Women and the Postwar Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009).

affluence, wanted beaches that resembled an ever growing number of magazine, newspaper, and television advertisements extolling the seemingly picture perfect coastal lifestyle. Youth swarmed the shores.¹² Developers and members of the business community hoped to continue capitalizing on skyrocketing real estate values and public-private funded megaprojects. Officials attempted to commoditize and sanitize the sands while extensively lobbying for funds to fulfill the new coastal California dream. As magazines described Angelenos' worship of the sun and waves, residents nonetheless feared the potential corruption of such a cherished landscape. Despite the beach's potential for wholesome recreation for the family, the 1950s period brought fears of juvenile delinquency, concern about possible declines in property value and tourism, and even some anxiety regarding rioting on the beach. Residents wanted a beach that made them feel secure about the future as Cold War era anxieties crept into daily life and wholesome spaces seemed ripe for corruption. The influence of dreams and fears drove the physical and cultural transformation of the coastline as beaches came to embody a leisure culture of proscribed consumption and recreation. Race continued to preoccupy Angelenos, but class also became increasingly salient during this postwar era.

This popular shift in beach development during the 1950s mirrored broader racially and economically exclusionary changes nationwide. Collectively, many of these changes reflected a developmental pattern labeled "coastal capitalism" by historian Andrew Kahrl. He describes the pattern as an economic system "characterized by the commoditization of the beach as a commercial asset, exploitation of natural resources and environmental engineering of coastal zones and bodies of water for aesthetic and recreational purposes, and the transfer of public lands

¹² For more on youth culture, see Ides, "Cruising for Community: Youth Culture and Politics in Los Angeles, 1910-1970"; May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*.

to private entities.”¹³ In Southern California, many people increasingly recognized the skyrocketing economic value of the coastline for its familiar charms of real estate, tourism, and self-promotion. Amidst postwar affluence and cultural imperatives, the financial potential of the coast multiplied rapidly. Public-private partnerships conceived large-scale construction projects. Ambitious new amusement parks, sleek modernist beach amenities, and family-friendly landscapes transformed the landscape. Like automobiles and suburbanization, coastal leisure became integrally linked to the middle-class aspirations of Angelenos during the economic and demographic boom of the 1950s.

This chapter explores the transformation of Southern California beaches during the prosperous period of the 1950s. At the beginning of the decade, popular culture stoked and refracted various dreams and fears that drove Angelenos to clamor for coastal changes. These issues often functioned as a mere pretext for an increasingly complex network of corporations and developers working in tandem with lobbyists and politicians to capitalize on the coast. Despite previous cooperation between the public and private sectors along the coast, collaboration and communication reached new heights amidst postwar prosperity and growth. The Shoreline Planning Association (described in the previous chapter) embodied this practice as its members sought to commoditize and develop Southern California beaches to capitalize on growing home ownership and population. Fears also drove Santa Monica officials to sanitize the popular and egalitarian recreational facility Muscle Beach in 1958. Dreams of constructing a small boat harbor for the Santa Monica Bay also began in the 1950s as postwar affluence expanded the scope of Angelenos activities along the beach. By the end of the decade, *Gidget*

¹³ Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours*, 16–17.

and the Beach Boys reached national acclaim as they frolicked on a physically and culturally transformed shoreline.

Studying places of leisure and recreation offers important insight into the intersectionality of place, popular culture, race, and class. Nationally, historians of the Gulf Coast and Eastern United States have extensively studied the interplay between race, recreation, and capitalism along their shores.¹⁴ In addition to the work by Andrew Kahrl, other scholars have explored how a mix of shoreline privatization and racially exclusionary policies defined the development of beaches from Connecticut to Atlantic Beach to Galveston.¹⁵ Jim Crow laws created a dramatically different political climate along parts of the Atlantic. Many African Americans who ventured to the shores came from middle-class backgrounds that afforded vacations and leisure time, yet faced extensive discrimination from whites with similar economic status. Particularly along the Gulf Coast where the shoreline was extensively privatized and segregated, a bevy of white resort communities dominated the shoreline. Creating these idealized landscapes, however, required expelling African American farmers, landowners, and businesses further and further from the shores. Eventually in the 1950s and 1960s, local activists, federal mandates, and public pressure integrated municipal and state recreational facilities. Legal suits argued that segregated beaches for blacks represented unequal facilities. Resort communities also became increasingly dependent on federal funds to prevent erosion and armor the shoreline, forcing greater federal oversight and eventual concessions. Statewide policies of segregating recreational facilities

¹⁴ For general overviews of the mixing of race and recreation in the United States, see Belinda Wheaton, *The Cultural Politics of Lifestyle Sports*, Routledge Critical Studies in Sport (New York: Routledge, 2013); Wiltse, *Contested Waters*; Wolcott, *Race, Riots, and Roller Coasters*.

¹⁵ For more race and beaches, see Connolly, *A World More Concrete*; Goldberg, *The Retreats of Reconstruction*; Kahrl, *The Land Was Ours*; King, *Sombreros and Motorcycles in a Newer South*; Carol McKibben, *Racial Beachhead: Diversity and Democracy in a Military Town* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011); Phelts, *An American Beach for African Americans*; Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis*.

found in Louisiana and elsewhere in the Deep South were overturned in 1964. Decades of Jim Crow policies nonetheless defined the development of its beaches.

For the first quarter of the 20th century in Southern California, racial restrictions and discrimination regularly haunted the shoreline.¹⁶ Unlike other parts of the country, however, California never established de jure segregation at beaches or passed other Jim Crow laws related to the shoreline. The sands were absent of ropes used to segregate beaches elsewhere in the country. Nonetheless, these policies of de facto segregation contributed to a largely white residential population around the coast in the 1920s. Concerns about racially policing the sands faded from the public consciousness beginning in the 1930s. While African Americans continued to face harassment from white beach goers, city officials and local homeowner organizations became less focused on race as erosion and pollution blighted the shoreline. No municipality attempted to emulate the actions of Manhattan Beach. Amidst increasing pool facilities and public outcry, the City of Los Angeles officially abandoned their policy of segregating swimming pools in 1931. The growing infrastructure of streets also allowed Angelenos greater flexibility in their choice of beaches. If a beach seemed crowded or existing patrons inhospitable, a minute or two drive on the Pacific Coast Highway conjured an entirely different social landscape. Further, beachfront property in Southern California was now almost entirely owned by white individuals or the government. Along the coast, California's history of land grants and higher real estate prices next to beaches restricted coastal ownership to a far greater extent than elsewhere in the city or along the Gulf Coast. Beaches remained places of white power and privilege, but increasing diversity on the sands challenged popular constructions of exclusivity.

¹⁶ For the only detailed study on the subject, see Jefferson, "Leisure's Race, Power and Place."

Visiting the beach became increasingly common for Angelenos who previously faced harassment. Discrimination faced by Japanese Americans was less overt than for African Americans. Growing numbers of Nisei social organizations organized regular beach outings in Santa Monica, El Segundo, or Huntington Beach.¹⁷ Photographs from the 1930s in the Los Angeles Public Library's *Shades of Los Angeles* collection depict a wide range of beach visitors of Armenian, Jewish, Filipino, Korean, Mexican, and Japanese descent. One image shows a patriotic July 4th beach outing to Venice Beach by a large Korean American family in 1931. Their willingness to visit the beach on likely the most crowded day of the year suggests a degree of comfort in their surroundings. Despite potential harassment or limited options, many Angelenos of all backgrounds regularly visited the beach. The popularity of the "Inkwell" slowly decreased as African Americans felt more comfortable at a wider range of Los Angeles beaches. The diversity of the faces on the sands continued to increase throughout the next decade and beyond.

Beginning in the 1940s, constructions of class increasingly supplanted race in defining visions of beach leisure on Southern California beaches. While "coastal capitalism" was originally used to describe racialized patterns of Gulf Coast development, class and real estate values most influenced public services and development in coastal Los Angeles. Decades of highly effective racially restrictive residential covenants had created largely white coastal neighborhoods. At the beach, racism was certainly present but a more complex racial milieu and a lack of discriminatory legislation stunted its power. Municipalities did not privatize coastal land to exclude minorities.¹⁸ Rising real estate values of exclusive communities like Pacific Palisades,

¹⁷ Valerie J. Matsumoto, *City Girls: The Nisei Social World in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

¹⁸ While arguments could be made that the development of private housing communities in the South Bay, for example, were intended to create bastions of white culture, the existing density of development along the Santa

Del Rey, and Santa Monica along largely white-owned shoreline sufficiently preoccupied and placated officials. Beaches needed to be ready to serve all Angelenos. Amidst this environment ripe for coastal commoditization, beaches blossomed as public-private cooperation attempted to fabricate California's middle-class playground.

Dreams and Fears

In the 1950s, Los Angeles' prodigious growth and growing economic clout increasingly redefined the city as a global metropolis. Population boomed and the region's geographic footprint grew. Over twenty new cities in the county were founded during the decade. Along the coast, smaller municipalities flourished at unprecedented rates and transformed from sleepy beach communities to rapidly growing suburbs. Santa Monica, El Segundo, and Redondo Beach matured into popular coastal communities. In addition to real estate, the Cold War military buildup ensured further growth for the region's aerospace industry that overflowed into Orange County. A series of construction projects throughout the decade indelibly altered the urban landscape. In 1953, golden arches crowned the first franchised McDonald's Hamburgers in Downey. In 1955, Disneyland opened in Anaheim. In 1957, the Brooklyn Dodgers moved to Los Angeles as a baseball stadium began to replace the community of Chavez Ravine. The same year, construction on the Santa Monica Freeway (Interstate 10) slowly snaked from Downtown towards the Pacific. The city's physical and economic expansion seemed indefatigable.

Monica Bay limited these sorts of patterns. Much of coastal Orange County was built amidst the fears of white flight and typifies this more prototypical pattern of residential segregation. For more on Orange County, see Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

Beaches served as the primary and premiere public space across Southern California to sun, play, and swim. Recreation and leisure became increasingly important components of life in a modern metropolis. In the postwar period, residents had far more time and income for leisure than previous generations. Technology, shorter work weeks, and longer paid leave all contributed to the growth of free time for residents. The federal largesse of the Federal Housing Authority, Veterans Administration, and the G.I. Bill allowed Angelenos to focus energy and funds on more pleasurable pursuits. Family beach visits and vacations became increasingly regular. Despite the growing need, public parks and green space remained inadequate as the region's population surged. Private swimming pools were too expensive for all but the most wealthy Angelenos until the end of the decade.¹⁹ The enjoyment of a carefree, family trip to the beach increasingly affirmed the glorified middle-class identity.

The idealized vision of this coastal lifestyle benefitted from a symbiotic relationship with American's growing love for consumerism. Postwar prosperity, personal material wants, and the politics of patriotism merged to create a potent mandate for consumption.²⁰ The landscape of the beach was used to sell everything from 1952 Ford Victoria to Malibu Tan, "summer's most flattering face shade." In this modern era, beach visits not only required a car to traverse the new freeways, but also new swimsuits, recreational gear, and more. In 1929, Americans spent just \$10 billion on leisure activities, but by 1953, they spent more than \$30 billion.²¹ Surfing is perhaps most emblematic of Southern California's beaches role as a site of consumption. When *Gidget* appeared in theaters in 1959, the film introduced many Americans to surfing for the first

¹⁹ Wiltse, *Contested Waters*, 182–84.

²⁰ Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic*.

²¹ Nels Anderson, *Work and Leisure* (London: Routledge, 1961), 99.

time. In Southern California, though, surfing had been steadily growing in popularity for years.²² The region's aerospace industry helped make better, cheaper surfboards that captivated the crowds and could even be found in chain stores and malls. Swimwear manufacturers designed suits for surfers and divers. Surfers along the Santa Monica bay became a common sight as their numbers continued to grow in the postwar decades. Many years after the decline of Coney-esque amusements, conspicuous consumption by the masses returned to the beaches of Southern California. Commodities marked participants in the region's leisure-centric lifestyle. Seemingly every teenage surfer wanted a woodie station wagon to drive their new foam surfboard to the beach in style.

A bevy of representations of Southern California beach life in popular culture further mythologized the sands and surf as the domain of middle-class family leisure. While *Gidget* created the mass popularity of beach party films in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Los Angeles' shoreline served as a backdrop for a range of television shows and more. Nationally-popular and family-friendly television shows like *The Lawrence Welk Show* and *The Spade Cooley Show* broadcast music from waterfront ballrooms in Venice and Santa Monica. An Academy Award-nominated *Looney Tunes* short featured Sylvester and Tweety lounging and "playing" on a beach that would have looked familiar to many Angelenos.²³ In comics, the archetypal middle-class characters of *Dennis the Menace* visited the beach in multiple issues.²⁴ Marineland of the Pacific proved particularly popular with Hollywood as a backdrop for the beach. While its beaches first

²² Surfing long in Los Angeles long predates the film and has a well-established history back to George Freeth. See Verge, "George Freeth." For more on surfing, see Westwick and Neushul, *The World in the Curl*. When filming *Gidget*, production had to be shifted north of Malibu because the crowds of surfers already at the beaches. The film was actually based on a 1957 novel by a Malibu resident describing his daughter's experiences at the beach. See Frederick Kohner, *Gidget* (New York: Putnam, 1957); Paul Wendkos, *Gidget*, 1959.

²³ Friz Freleng, "Sandy Claws," *Looney Tunes*, 1954. In a highly similar clip from the Paramount Pictures *Noveltoons* universe, see Izzy Sparber, *Surf Bored* (Paramount Pictures, 1953).

²⁴ Fred Toole and Al Wiseman, "Dennis at the Beach," *Dennis the Menace*, November 1954.

appeared in a science fiction film, *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (1957), Lloyd Bridges' action television series *Sea Hunt* featured Marineland in its introduction and filmed in the park for years.²⁵ By the 1960s, television viewers across the nation were familiar with the park after episodes of *The Beverly Hillbillies*, *The Lucy Show*, and others depicted comedic introductions to beach living in Southern California.²⁶

Cinematic depictions of Southern California's shoreline during much of the 1950s however presented a less optimistic cultural vision of middle-class life. The beach also represented potentially ominous landscape as not only a deserted and dangerous, but also the metaphoric end of civilization. Los Angeles' shoreline had long been used as a backdrop for science fiction, horror, and noir films. Panning shots of cliffs abutting the waves and empty stretches of the Pacific Coast Highway were accompanied by tense music. The routine presence of armed troops on the beaches during World War II had inspired Hollywood to consider the beaches as potentially sinister. In 1955's *Rebel Without a Cause*, James Dean played a suburban Los Angeles teen struggling against parental authority and societal institutions. The film was part of a trend of juvenile delinquency films produced by Hollywood during the middle of the 1950s and is recognized as the most iconic. In its climactic scene, Dean is challenged in a fatal game of "chickie run" along oceanfront cliffs next to the Pacific Ocean. The film tracks Dean's competitor and his plummeting sedan in slow motion as he falls to his death amidst the roaring waves. This western landscape of personal rebellion and violence was the antithesis of the tightly controlled suburban household. Before heading to the race, Dean even changes out of his

²⁵ Roger Corman, *Attack of the Crab Monsters* (Los Altos Productions, 1957).

²⁶ David Friedkin, "Night Dive," *The Aquanauts* (United Artists Television, November 16, 1960); Walter Grauman, "Poor Little Kangaroo Rat," *Route 66* (CBS Television Network, November 23, 1962); Joseph Depew, "Back to Marineland," *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS Television Network, November 4, 1964); Richard Whorf, "The Clampetts Go Fishing," *The Beverly Hillbillies* (CBS Television Network, February 26, 1964); Maury Thompson, "Lucy at Marineland," *The Lucy Show* (Desilu Productions, September 13, 1965).

stereotypical proper school clothing and into a more working-class attire of a t-shirt and jeans.²⁷ The ensuing moral and legal drama in the film reinforced audiences' fears that juvenile delinquency could fracture the sacrosanct, traditional family. While the beach sustained aspirant dreams of leisure, the flipside of undeveloped shoreline seemed to portend trouble.

Along the beaches of Southern California during the 1950s, authorities grappled with the purported plagues of juvenile delinquents wreaking havoc on the sands at all hours. Officials claimed the changing behavior of youth seemingly demanded more supervision and management, but they offered only isolated examples and circumstantial evidence. The growing lifeguard service watched ever more beaches during the day, but patrolling the miles of coast at night was close to impossible. Officials saw ever more teenagers' access to automobiles as further portending trouble. In 1949, Manhattan Beach authorities warned of an "influx of irresponsible juveniles" to the beach.²⁸ By the early 1950s, municipalities responded with a series of beach curfew laws. Malibu, Santa Monica, Los Angeles County, and elsewhere instituted strict hours at the beach citing broken glass, late-night revelry, and confounded bongo drums. The *Los Angeles Times* sensationally reported on a teen beach club in Laguna Beach shuttered because of disorderly behavior, marijuana and liquor use.²⁹ Throughout the 1950s, teenagers from Los Angeles headed to Newport Beach for spring break in an event called Bal Week on Balboa Island. In Newport, officials proposed a family holiday program in lieu of teenage

²⁷ Nicholas Ray, *Rebel Without a Cause* (Warner Brothers, 1955). For more analysis about the film and teenagers in the 1950s, see Thomas Doherty, *Cold War, Cool Medium: Television, McCarthyism, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Thomas Doherty, *Teenagers And Teenpics: Juvenilization Of American Movies* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 187; May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*.

²⁸ "Beach Curfew Law Enforced," *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1949.

²⁹ "Curfew Law for Malibu Studied," *Los Angeles Times* July 11, 1951; "Beach Revel Bring Curfew," *Los Angeles Times*, August 2, 1951; "Santa Monica Seizes 21 in Curfew Crackdown: Police Chief Orders Enforcement of Law Barring Youths on Streets After 10 p.m.," *Los Angeles Times*, March 15, 1953. In Laguna Beach, see "Teen-agers' Beach Club Closed in Dope Inquiry," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1951.

parties. A resident declared “Easter week must become known here as ‘Holy Week,’ not ‘Hell Week.’”³⁰ These fears often turned out to be overblown or misplaced. Newport Beach Police Department arrest results eventually published in local newspapers revealed that adults comprised the majority of arrests drunkenness and brawling. These articles summarizing the aftermath of Bal Week often took a more contrite tone and described law-abiding youth, adult-chaperoned parties, and miraculously better-behaved youth every year.³¹

Underlying the fears of teenage indiscretions on the sands was the centrality of youth to the middle-class vision of Southern California’s Edenic life in the sun. After the war, the average age of Californians decreased in response to the baby boom and children became the hallmark of a new generation. Popular magazines like *Harpers*, *Life*, and *Look* published articles about the teenage boom in the region, often glamorizing the hip doings of youth around the city. Real estate developments carefully noted their proximity to schools and parks. Youths had ever more free time thanks to the region’s growing affluence and some theorized that a lack of chores was contributing to delinquency. The beach proved to be a fertile ground for public anxiety about family and the ever-problematic teenage desire for unsupervised leisure.

As rambler station wagons and ranch-style homes assumed a traditional family of parents and children, visits to the beach also presumed parental leisure time spent playing with children. Gendered norms carefully scripted the recreational excursion. The limited number of public parks in Los Angeles meant that the beach was the principal landscape for parental performances of fatherly athleticism or maternal concern. Building sand castles and swimming easily hewed to the broader televised tropes of proper family fun seen. Municipalities took on the paternal

³⁰ “Beach Cities Map Drive on Easter Week Rowdies,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1954

³¹ “Adults Face Charges in Beach Row,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1954; “20,000 Teenagers Give Little Trouble at Balboa,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1955; “Youths, Better Behaved Than in Past, Await Easter Week: Youths Set for Easter Week Fun,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1958.

responsibility of instructing teenagers in the art of angling.³² The desire for the beach to be a bastion for the family reflected broader conservative domestic ideologies that focused on youth culture, social change, and geopolitical concerns threatening the status quo. Fears about the fate of the family shaped debates about the potential of the California Dream and fears about the nation's future amidst the Cold War were mediated through the family.³³ The beach served as a lightning rod for the fears and dreams of the middle-class family in Southern California. Despite a clear goal of replicating white suburbia, actualizing this idealized landscape proved a lengthier process.

Lobbying for the Shoreline

Through much of the 1940s, the Shoreline Preservation Association actively lobbied for a substantive transformation to the California coastline. Pollution, erosion, and World War II had inhibited beach attendance and adjacent development. During the prewar decades, local officials responded slowly to the rapidly shrinking shoreline. The SPA repeatedly sounded a clarion call for proper planning and funding, hoping to expand the scenic and recreational potential of the beach. Committed political lobbying during the war eventually edged politicians towards action. By the late 1940s, the SPA had seemingly succeeded with many of its goals. Southern California

³² "1949 Experiment: Redondo Plans Fishing School for Teen-agers," *Los Angeles Times*, April 25, 1949.

³³ For more on middle-class gender roles in the 1950s, see Beth Bailey, *Sex in the Heartland* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York: Basic Books, 1992); Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 20th Anniversary (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Joanne Meyerowitz, ed., *Not June Cleaver: Women and Gender in Postwar America, 1945-1960* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Nickerson, *Mothers of Conservatism*. For more on the linkages between family and patriotism in United States history, see May as well as Linda K Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (Chapel Hill: Published for the Institute of Early American History and Culture by the University of North Carolina Press, 1980); Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2012); Arlene S. Skolnick, *Embattled Paradise: The American Family in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home: The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

municipalities recognized the problem and created departments and jobs focused on beaches. Republican Governor Earl Warren appointed state commissions. Coastal counties throughout most of California adopted masterplans for shoreline development. Officials allocated thousands of dollars for beach purchases. Public beach acreage increased and new facilities opened, encouraging more residents to recreate along the coast.

Support for this democratic program of beach purchasing and expansion by the Shoreline Preservation Association seems incongruous given the affluence of its membership. In reality, these Los Angeles-area power brokers in banking, real estate, and commerce stood to profit from the continued growth of this landscape. The core of the SPA's membership came from independent coastal municipalities within the County of Los Angeles, including Santa Monica, Manhattan Beach, Hermosa Beach, and Redondo Beach. Often members of the local Chambers of Commerce, these communal advocates recognized the disproportionate importance of the coast to the success of these beach towns. Residential growth and beach tourism provided the foundation for the local economy. Two early SPA leaders and founders from Santa Monica, Geoffrey Morgan and Morton Anderson, exemplified this sort of recreational boosterism. Both Morgan and Anderson moved from the Midwest before settling in Santa Monica as their adopted home. Morgan parlayed a career in education and public speaking into a political position, serving as an Assemblyman for the 60th District (Santa Monica) throughout the 1930s after a failed congressional campaign. He involved in local politics of the Rotary Club of Santa Monica, the Community Chest, the Salvation Army, the Council of Social Welfare, and was chairman of the recreation commission.³⁴ Anderson for his part, was a fixture of Santa Monica society,

³⁴ Morgan was also an eccentric character and wrote a series of librettos and operettas, including *The Belle of Baghdad*, *Rose of the Danube*, and *Daniel Boone; a Romantic Light Opera*. See "Geoffrey Morgan, Noted Civic Leader And Orator Dies After Long Illness," *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, March 3, 1952.

earning the title “Santa Monica’s busiest man” after his retirement from Bethlehem Steel. Anderson served in numerous civic organizations while advocating public symphonies, salons, and Santa Monica schools.³⁵ Both men hoped to raise the civic profile of Santa Monica in an era of rapid regional growth, increasing property values and attracting new business. Promoting beach development was just part of their vision for the future of their community as the SPA hewed closer to a model of coastal capitalism.

By the 1950s, the Shoreline Planning Association grew increasingly restless with its staid--but effective--legislative agenda of incremental budgetary increases. With each political and financial success, the organization looked to move beyond its early goals of master planning and beach acquisitions. Association leaders looked elsewhere for new projects and ever more coastal funding. Between 1950 and 1959, the SPA’s efforts at democratic beach property purchasing were all but forgotten in the pursuit and promotion of a new vision of midcentury coastal development. The Association hoped to improve existing beaches to better serve and reflect the needs of the rapidly growing region. Geoffrey Morgan called for “parking areas...together with rest rooms, eating places, dressing rooms, showers, tables, benches, barbeque pits, and similar facilities.” Newly refurbished urban beaches with a bevy of facilities could offer a safe and scenic landscape for fun in the sun. The SPA advocated this improvement of existing beaches and the expansion of small boat harbors along the Santa Monica Bay through a retooled funding model. With sufficient funding the SPA hoped to realize this coastal transformation.

³⁵ Anderson was a member of seventeen organizations, including Santa Monica War Chest, General Trades Advisory Committee for National Defense, Symphonies-by-the-Sea, Santa Monica School District Personnel Board, Citizens Manpower Committee, County War Chest, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Community Chest, and Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce. “Busiest Retired Man Title Won by Ex-Steelman,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1944.

The Association decided to change the existing formula for beach funding from a geographic distribution to prioritizing Southern California. In 1945, Earl Warren and the California legislature passed a ten-million-dollar beach purchasing bill (initially AB1810) with the support of the Shoreline Planning Association. Its passage was a notable victory for the SPA and the state's largest beach-related appropriation yet. The bill provided funding to each coastal county in California to purchase private shoreline to convert to public beaches. The bill granted counties up to ten years to create a mandatory masterplan of tiered purchases based on need and environmental conditions in order to receive funding. The SPA not only secured substantial funds, but also helped its largely Southern California-based constituency to the lion's share of the appropriation. Funding for the eighteen counties focused on the three Southern California counties of Los Angeles, Ventura, and Orange, collectively giving them over 63% of the total funding.³⁶ Officials in these counties submitted ambitious requests from appropriators, drawing on years of coastal planning and shelved ideas. After years of inaction, legislators and their aides in Sacramento eagerly gave out appropriations with haste. Years of coastal dreaming by the Association paid significant dividends.

The funding package not only facilitated physical transformation, but also represented a political ascendancy of the Southern California's urban beaches. The SPA and its allies now held far more political and financial clout than they expected. The generous funding for local officials made some state bureaucrats jealous. Seeing limitless future potential, SPA President Geoffrey Morgan stepped down after this victory. This accomplishment forced the organization to retool

³⁶ These numbers reflect the subsequent appropriation of \$650,000 for three counties on the San Francisco Bay. Despite this extra funding, Southern California was the clear winner. Los Angeles received \$4,186,730, Ventura received \$945,250, and Orange received \$650,000 of Chapter 1422 – Statutes of 1945 funding. For funding information for all counties, see Natural Resources Administration - Director, Subject Files, Shoreline Planning Assoc., California State Archives (NR-SPA).

its political agenda to find new ways to support the beach, but did little to quell the Association's aspirations. The SPA would continue to try to receive greater percentages of matching funds for beach development. Association leaders also tried to change funding structure from oil royalty money to redirect more funding to urban beaches. State bureaucrats later regretted granting Southern California counties such an influential role in beach development.³⁷ The SPA hoped its aggressive success portended continued ascendancy.

As the Shoreline Planning Association sought to justify the necessity of its lobbying amidst dwindling purchasable shoreline and changing norms, a new economic model was needed. Maintaining the momentum of the immediate post-WWII beach purchasing became challenging amidst high taxes, high prices, and the Korean War.³⁸ In Los Angeles County, many of the properties identified for purchase had been bought with the 1945 beach purchase bill years before. Slowly, the Association began to distance itself from the idea of beach purchasing. In the SPA's mailings and quarterly newsletter, the tone of articles dramatically shifted away from calls for increased public beach ownership. Mailings from 1945 included information on the SPA's plan of "acquisition of all available beach land" and "public ownership of all suitable littoral land."³⁹ These goals literally disappeared from mailings. Instead, the SPA clearly emphasized infrastructural improvement as the defining feature of an ideal beach, including "ample parking space, clean toilets, good life guard service, fine rings for climbing, a good clean beach and fine surf for swimming."⁴⁰ They lauded "the entrance [parking] charge is reasonable considering all

³⁷ State official Newton Drury bemoaned, "I say 'unfortunately' because the state already had its plan based on long experience and observation, and to some degree that proviso slowed things up, and it also introduced what I consider the erroneous principle of subjecting state authority to veto by local authorities." See Newton Bishop Drury, Amelia R Fry, and Susan R Schrepfer, *Newton Bishop Drury, Parks and Redwoods, 1919-1971* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1972), 528.

³⁸ Shoreline Planning Association to Newton Drury, June 13, 1952, NR-SPA.

³⁹ "Beach & Shoreline Development," Parks and Recreation, Subject File, Randolph Collier Papers, California State Archives.

⁴⁰ B. Maas to Geoffrey Morgan, November 29, 1951, NR-SPA.

services available.” Extensive facilities and parking fees marked a new phase in coastal development. With ahistorical myopia, the SPA ignored its past calls and cried out for the need for beach improvements as the solution to save the shoreline. Tourism, real estate values, and the dream of a middle-class recreational mecca hung in the balance.

The Shoreline Planning Association began to focus almost exclusively on guaranteeing funding for the improvement of existing beaches. After a brief absence, Geoffrey Morgan returned as SPA president in 1948, initiating the earliest traces of this policy shift. Throughout 1948 and 1949, Morgan corresponded with Governor Warren about the need to develop recreational beaches with amenities, parking lots, and changing facilities.⁴¹ Morgan was able to convince Southern California legislators to introduce \$15 million beach development bills, but despite his gubernatorial link and a Republican state legislative supermajority, the bill was cut to \$3 million dollars before failing.⁴² Many inland politicians saw the bill as a pet project by their coastal peers instead preferring to fund state level agencies.⁴³ Minutes from the SPA Executive Committee meetings reveal an increasingly agitated organization. The SPA proposed amending legislation to ease the requirements to establish beach development districts.⁴⁴ At the annual SPA convention in late 1949, there was a discussion whether the Association should improve beaches

⁴¹ Morgan wrote Governor Earl Warren on January 24, 1948 almost immediately after he returned to the SPA. See NR-SPA.

⁴² California’s 1949 Assembly Bill 272 and Senate Bill 237. Similar legislation was also introduced in 1951 (SB1729 and SB1743), but never made it beyond committee.

⁴³ SPA Executive Committee meeting minutes reveal that Senator Benjamin Hulse of Imperial County and Senator George J. Hatfield of Merced strongly opposed beach funding. They successful organized opposition while advocating for a similar program instead for inland parks. Minutes of the Shoreline Planning Association Executive Committee Meeting, March 30, 1950, Folder 31, Box 37, Willis H. Warner Papers MS-R02, Special Collections and Archives, University of California, Irvine Libraries, Irvine, California.

⁴⁴ Minutes of the Shoreline Planning Association Executive Committee Meeting, May 4, 1949, Willis H. Warner Papers.

via existing acquisition funds or new appropriations. Some questioned the fairness to smaller counties, but little consensus was reached.⁴⁵

In 1950, the leaders of the SPA renewed their efforts and began a more aggressive campaign to secure funding for the improvement of Southern California beaches. Stymied by legislative gridlock, the group began to search for alternative sources of funding. Some members called for an elimination of the matching fund requirement for purchasing beach land. The SPA had moved beyond a goal of purchasing, but hoped that the change would in essence push the state towards more beach funding. Further, despite tepid enthusiasm among members during the previous year, SPA leaders decided to urge the legislature to amend the Chapter 1422 acquisition funds of 1945 to allow beach improvements. Their largest objection was that the majority of the funds remained unspent as counties struggled to plan or find matching funds. By 1952, half of California's coastal counties had yet to spend a single dollar of the \$10 million allocation. Despite potential benefits to real estate and tourism, local municipalities neglected to complete the required surveys and planning.

Much of the frustration felt by the members of the Shoreline Planning Association stemmed from their desire to extensively develop public property into a beach for the urban masses. Morgan explained that his "group strongly believed that the State should develop property which they acquire."⁴⁶ Outside of Southern California, officials in Northern California and along the Central Coast had far less interest in the costly development of public infrastructure, instead preferring the scenic charm of a wilder coast. Far fewer beachgoers visited rockier and colder coastline found the less crowded areas of the state. By predicating funding on

⁴⁵ Minutes of the Shoreline Planning Association Annual Convention, September 22-23, 1949, NR-SPA.

⁴⁶ Minutes of the Joint Convention of the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association and the Shoreline Preservation Association, September 28-30, 1950, NR-SPA.

a statewide model, the Association hatched a lingering problem. When they pushed elected officials into approving beach funding in 1945, the largely urban organization gave little thought to the physical environment of Monterey, Mendocino, or Eureka. Morgan and other SPA leaders dramatically overestimated the appeal of recreational beach development outside of Southern California. The SPA repeatedly sent Newton Drury, head of the California Division of Beaches and Parks, confidential letters that bemoaned the existing funding model to little avail. They petulantly blamed counties in Northern California for essentially halting the flow of income, while internally seething at funding restrictions they helped to create.⁴⁷ These almost childish antics did not get them very far as Drury and other elected officials largely glossed over the most outrageous claims in written responses. The SPA's blueprint for urban, leisure beaches was predicated on a cultural vision rooted in the topography and daily life of millions of Angelenos. The potential profit for developers or politicians from extensively developed less urbanized coastline was far lower. Widespread popularity for the Santa Monica Bay did not portend public will for its replication outside of the Los Angeles area.

The Shoreline Planning Association's influence in Sacramento began to wane at seemingly the worst time. Geoffrey Morgan's return to the SPA was supposed to help facilitate greater political influence and a return to the earlier glory days. Yet despite Morgan's close relation with Governor Earl Warren, actuating a policy shift towards greater appropriations and the development of beaches proved difficult. During his extended tenure, Governor Warren passed a variety of environmentally friendly legislation, battled big oil, and expanded park space. Nonetheless, Warren was more of a progressive conservationist and outdoorsman.⁴⁸ His records

⁴⁷ George Lindsay to Newton Drury, June 26, 1952, NR-SPA.

⁴⁸ Kevin Starr, *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 269; G. Edward White, *Earl Warren, a Public Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 335.

reflected far more of an interest in preserving the coastline than in developing its recreational potential. Other politicians were less friendly to the SPA's desperate tactics and disinterested in building recreational beaches along the coast. Until 1961, the California Division of Beaches and Parks was under the Department of Natural Resources. Many of its leaders were professional engineers or preservationists. General Warren Hannum, California's Director of Natural Resources and a former district engineer for the Army Corp of Engineers in San Francisco, was more interested in hydraulic mining and dam building than recreation. After persistent letters from the SPA, he wrote to Newton Drury that, "[The SPA] seem[s] to me to be at a loss for a definite program. They should not try to alter Chap 1422 and expenditures under appropriations."⁴⁹ A few officials were blunter. A letter to Newton Drury from his engineering department warns, "sporadic bills appropriating large sums of money for project which have not been thoroughly studied and reported upon inevitably result[s] in waste."⁵⁰ Drury was sympathetic to their complaints. He rose to prominence through his work leading the Save-the-Redwoods association during the 1920s and 1930s and became Chief of the National Park Service before returning to work in California. Drury had "less interest in recreation per se than he did in preservation."⁵¹

The Shoreline Planning Association's undoing came as its boosterish sales pitches found less resonance with power brokers. Both elected officials and SPA members were Republicans yet the Association's preoccupation with recreational beaches in Southern California was just too narrow for continued electoral success. General political support for funding for beaches did not translate into a willingness to appropriate millions of dollars for a municipally owned stretch of

⁴⁹ Newton Drury to General Warren Hannum, July 11, 1951, NR-SPA.

⁵⁰ Edwin Kelton to Newton Drury, August 22, 1951, NR-SPA.

⁵¹ DeWitt Nelson et al., *Management of Natural Resources in California, 1925-1966* (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, University of California, 1976), 203.

sand hundreds of miles from an elected official's district. A closer look at SPA also reveals a growing power shift. In 1949, the majority of the SPA's funds came from the City and County of Los Angeles. Early corporate sponsors and funds from smaller Orange and Ventura County municipalities waned over time. Efforts to recruit new corporations proved increasingly difficult as industrial and petroleum companies shunned overtures for membership. Paying for the organization's full time staff required most of the collected organizational dues. Not surprisingly, the Association's board became increasingly composed of Los Angeles area municipal and county bureaucrats, including Planning Director Werner Ruchti of Long Beach, Director of Planning and Zoning Leslie Storrs of Santa Monica, City Councilman J. Win Austin, City Engineer Lloyd Aldrich, County Supervisor Raymond Darby and Director of Parks and Recreation George Hjelte of Los Angeles. At a 1950 joint meeting of the SPA and the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association, a speaker from the San Francisco planning commission warned that the organization's increasingly exclusive focus on recreation would cost them friends in Northern California. The Association paid little heed.

The Shoreline Planning Association finally faded into the sunset during the middle of the 1950s. In theory, the only continuous source of state revenue devoted to beach funding came from approximately twenty percent of the state tideland oil royalty fund (Section 6816, California Public Resource Code). The federal government, however, impounded these funds amidst the so-called "tidelands controversy" and a protracted lawsuit with the State of California and Texas. When President Eisenhower reauthorized state control of submerged lands, the SPA quickly attempted to defend the exclusive source of funding. With waning influence, this was an impossible challenge. The City of Los Angeles neglected to send a representative to the 1953

SPA conference on the subject.⁵² Funds continued to accrue and in 1955 Governor Goodwin Knight proposed a sweeping state parks and beaches budget using the funds. After a scramble to “on the basis of local pressures and the desire to distribute it on a geographical basis,” beach monies remained at a state level in accordance to a new five-year masterplan.⁵³ None of the money would go to SPA-member municipalities or counties as allocations or matching funds.⁵⁴ In 1957, a consolidated State Beach and Park Fund (via AB1063) replaced the separate State Beach and Park Funds when oil royalty funds began to run short of expectations.⁵⁵ Beach programs statewide waned. Defeated, the SPA offered gratis membership to Los Angeles City and County in 1958.⁵⁶ The SPA was finally dismissed when their request for \$350 dues from the City of Los Angeles in 1959 was denied.⁵⁷ The organization dissolved shortly afterwards.

While this switch away from acquisition in less than a decade represented a new yet ultimately unsuccessful tack for the organization, more importantly it reflected the underlying cultural shift towards a vision of the beach as a middle-class landscape for families near and far. Efforts by the Association and its members to sculpt the shoreline coincided with the rising cultural fear of juvenile delinquency and a desire to bolster the idealized, white American family. The chronic dearth of recreational space in Southern California made the beach a particularly important symbolic landscape for urban renewal. Members hoped a properly developed shoreline

⁵² Los Angeles City Council Minutes, August 11, 1953, Los Angeles City Archives and Records Center, Los Angeles, California (LACRC).

⁵³ The plan was California and Division of Beaches and Parks, *California State Park System, Five Year Master Plan, July 1, 1956 to June 30, 1961*. (Sacramento, 1956). See Drury, Fry, and Schrepfer, *Newton Bishop Drury, Parks and Redwoods, 1919-1971*, 271–78.

⁵⁴ The SPA staged a surprisingly robust campaign in 1955 to influence state senators and assemblymen to not divert oil royalty funds from the beach. This sort of campaign had worked throughout the 1940s, yet they gain almost no traction. See March-June 1955, John Anson Ford Papers, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

⁵⁵ This funding crisis would reach a peak in 1959 when the State began backtracking on its beach purchase schedule due to insufficient income. (Parks and Rec - Shoreline Planning)

⁵⁶ Shoreline Planning Association to Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, October 6, 1958, LACRC.

⁵⁷ Shoreline Planning Association to Los Angeles City Council, File #89632, Los Angeles City Council Minutes Index, , June 26, 1959, LACRC.

could attract the right kind of residents and tourists for the burgeoning metropolis of Santa Monica or Manhattan Beach. A well-maintained shoreline could offer juveniles wholesome recreational activities. The interest of the Shoreline Planning Association's membership of boosters, planners, and politicians in public space put them at the vanguard of conversations on reimagining the beach during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Its members regularly attended conferences and weekly meetings related to recreation, tourism, planning, and commerce. As the popularity of the beach and its potent cultural mélange of surfing, film, and music grew rapidly during the second half of the 1950s, the importance of developing beaches became increasingly part of popular consensus.

Stratifying the Shore

When the Shoreline Preservation Association called for shift from state-wide, egalitarian beach purchasing to a narrower program of beach improvement, the Association became hyper-focused on just a few sections of shoreline. This shift also represented a financial emphasis on a vision of beach building intended for a white, middle-class audience. These beaches received far greater fiscal and infrastructural attention as local officials appropriated funds for parking lots, lifeguard stations, expanded roadways, and changing facilities.⁵⁸ For example, during the first half of the 1950s, the City of Los Angeles paid particular attention to Will Rogers Beach and Playa Del Rey. Both beaches had recently grown with land acquisitions from the 1945 funds. Will Rogers Beach is located rough two miles north of Santa Monica, near the neighborhood of Pacific Palisades. The almost two-mile long beach was part of actor Will Rogers' ranch until its

⁵⁸ Almost all of these funds came from the City and County of Los Angeles. Local officials' more elaborate plans hinged on state funding that never materialized.

donation to the State of California.⁵⁹ Playa Del Rey Beach, officially known as Venice-Hyperion Beach State Park (and later Dockweiler State Beach), is located south of Venice and dramatically expanded from infill sluicing during the end of the 1940s. Both beaches possessed a similar landscape aesthetic. They offered a tranquil and less crowded setting somewhat removed from concessionaries, boardwalks, or urban development.⁶⁰ Sand dunes or chaparral covered hillsides provided a backdrop to the shoreline. In these beaches, officials saw a blank canvas to create a modern beach for Angelenos of today.

The Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation, under the directorship of SPA board member George Hjelte, proposed improvements designed to appeal to suburban families. In 1950, Hjelte's department hired noted architect Paul Revere Williams to design a new beach facility at Will Rogers Beach. Williams was well-known in Los Angeles for his designs from celebrity mansions to municipal buildings over a long career. He was a traditionally trained architect, but became increasingly influenced by newer designs by midcentury.⁶¹ For the city, he designed a sleek, single-story building that drew from celebrity residential work, but also clearly evoked the region's ubiquitous ranch-style homes. Palm trees and a wide grass lawn framed the entrance. A wide carport beckoned drivers into its even wider parking lots. The facility was intended to feel like a second home for Angelenos from the prototypical postwar, middle-class

⁵⁹ Both beaches are owned by the State of California, but were operated by the City of Los Angeles. The state leased Will Rogers Beach to the City of Los Angeles in 1945 for a period of fifty years to manage and operate. Venice-Hyperion Beach State Park was leased to the City in 1946. The County of Los Angeles took over operations at both beaches in 1975-1976 after Los Angeles and Santa Monica contracted with the County and ended their lifeguard programs.

⁶⁰ Playa Del Rey is admittedly near the Hyperion Sewage Treatment Facility, Scattergood Steam Generation Plant, Chevron's sprawling El Segundo refinery, and Los Angeles International Airport. Despite this proximity, most of the development is hidden from beach goers by extensive sand dunes. Loud jet airliners would not become a common sight over the sands of Dockweiler State Beach until the 1960s.

⁶¹ Paul Williams perhaps most famously helped design the 1961 LAX Theme Building. For more on Williams, see Alan Hess, *Forgotten Modern: California Houses 1940-1970* (Layton: Gibbs Smith, 2007), 36-45; Karen E Hudson and Paul R Williams, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993).

suburbs. The facility was supposed to open during the summer of 1951, but adjacent freeway expansion and budget woes hamstrung the project. The city instead simply chose to focus on building over a mile of parking lots adjacent to the sands. Similarly, at Del Rey Beach in the Venice-Hyperion Beach State Park, Los Angeles Board of Recreation and Parks commissioners suggested the construction of a similar beach facility and parking lots in April of 1954. The City Council appropriated over \$150,000 for the work. Over nine hundred fire rings and broad parking lots created a space for a family picnics and bonfires. Their tremendous popularity forced an expansion just three years later.⁶² These new beaches appealed to the middle-class vision of a family-friendly space in the sun to enjoy the California lifestyle.

The allure of postwar modernity and consumerism also included a disdain for the simpler and aging facilities found locally along the coast. Words like aging or public often served a linguistic guise for the era's rampant discrimination. A 1951 *Los Angeles Times* article snubbed the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay, declaring that the region from Long Beach to San Diego possessed "the most delightful bathing beaches to be found anywhere in the world."⁶³ The article hints that beaches are for bathing, not amusements or commerce. A 1950 article in the Shoreline Preservation Association's newsletter *California Coast* touted the construction of Will Rogers, stressing its difference from existing facilities,

It must be admitted that the phrase "public beach" calls up in the minds of many peoples an unpleasant picture. Whatever the locale, many visualize the details as identical: overcrowded, littered up, inadequate parking, very noisy, small and unsanitary sanitary facilities, the whole nourished by smelly, ramshackle hot dog stands skilled in the preparation of dubious hamburgers, underdone wieners, stale coffee, and dispensing the most synthetic of soft drinks and tasteless "ice cream" consisting largely of air bubbles.⁶⁴

⁶² Los Angeles City Council Minutes, April 26, 1954, LACRC; Los Angeles City Council Minutes, June 19, 1957, LACRC.

⁶³ Lynn Rogers, "Delightful Beaches Attract Thousands," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, 1951.

⁶⁴ "Los Angeles Plans a Model Facility at North Beach," *California Coast*, May 1950.

This unflattering vision of the beach overwrought by tawdry concessions and poor conveniences was a far cry from the family and tourist friendly shores the SPA attempted to promote. Racially and economically exclusionary facilities like Marineland represented the new dream. The residents of the neighborhoods surrounding Will Rogers Beach were almost entirely white and affluent. Ironically, just years before, the Association had been active in the planning of those “unsanitary sanitary facilities” and “inadequate parking” lots. Like Angelenos, the SPA’s opinions on region’s shoreline had evolved amidst rapid midcentury changes.

Local officials had radically different visions Los Angeles’ beaches depending on the residents’ perceived socioeconomic status. Along the Santa Monica Bay, the City of Los Angeles owned or operated four primary beaches areas: Will Rogers Beach near Pacific Palisades, Venice, Playa Del Rey, and Cabrillo Beach in San Pedro. When the City chose to pursue development plans during the 1950s with SPA backing, officials conspicuously ignored Venice. Venice Beach lies roughly in the middle of the city’s shoreline and had always been the most heavily attended beach in the area. Venice was included in the City’s Masterplan for Shoreline Development, but few officials or councilmembers pushed for its improvement. Venice had become increasingly rundown during the 1940s as its three pleasure piers closed and the tourist industry waned. Blue laws banning dancing and drinking disrupted the night life. Angelenos more often visited the beach to tan and swim, not stroll the boardwalk. Cheap housing that once attracted tourists now housed blue-collar employees in the aerospace and petroleum industries in Santa Monica, Inglewood, and the South Bay. Hughes Aircraft, McDonnell Douglas, Shell Oil, and Standard Oil of California hired thousands of employees. A Home Owners Loan Corporation redlining map described that “crowded improvements in parts of the area constitute a distinct fire

hazard and give district a ‘slum’ aspect.”⁶⁵ By the 1950s, Venice has become even more dilapidated, leading Beat author Lawrence Lipton to label it “a horizontal, jerry-built slum by the sea.”⁶⁶ Thirty years after Venice’s annexation by Los Angeles in the 1920s, city officials had done little to improve the area.

Public perception of Venice as withering helps to explain the recalcitrance of city officials and Shoreline Preservation Association members to improve its beaches. Recreational officials also regarded Venice as blighted and an undesirable beach locale because of the aesthetic created by the staccato of oil derricks along the shore. Elsewhere in Los Angeles throughout the 1940s, public pressure, rising property values, and increased regulation reduced the number of wells. In Venice, however, official disinterest delayed the removal of all derricks until the 1960s. Despite its record beach attendance numbers, Venice was a cautionary tale of beach mismanagement and did not match the SPA’s cultural vision of fun in the sun. Perhaps most important to the Shoreline Preservation Association members, however, was real estate values in the communities surrounding the beaches. Even as local bureaucrats replaced developers in the SPA, the growing tax revenue from coastal areas and close ties to the Chamber of Commerce ensured a continuing commitment to developing certain areas. They wanted to preserve and enhance the cachet of living near the beach as part of a glamorous lifestyle. Coastal property in Los Angeles offered expansive views of the ocean, but prices and resident income wildly varied. In 1950 in Pacific Palisades, the median income for residents was \$4676 and the average home value was \$19,589. Similarly, near Del Rey, the median income was \$4063 and homes averaged \$15,133. In Venice, however, the median income was roughly 66% less at just

⁶⁵ Venice Area Description, Security Map of Los Angeles, March 3, 1939, "T-RACES: a Testbed for the Redlining Archives of California's Exclusionary Spaces" R. Marciano, D. Goldberg, C. Hou <http://salt.umd.edu/T-RACES>.

⁶⁶ Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Mesner, 1959), 17.

\$1320. Housing value was similarly depressed and the value of a single dwelling home was \$6872. Venice also had higher rates of rentership. There was no hiding the visual topography of Venice’s working class residents and unsightly wells.

Location	Population	White Population	Median Income	Value of One-Dwelling Unit
Pacific Palisades	14,197	13,937	\$4676	\$19,589
Venice	7738	7714	\$1320	\$6872
Venice-Washington	7045	6999	\$3094	\$8079
Del Rey	1619	1617	\$4063	\$15,133

Figure 9. 1950 Census Data for Southern California (All information from 1950 United States Census) ⁶⁷

Understanding the role of race in determining the actions of the Shoreline Preservation Association requires further analysis. Unlike other organizations in the American Shore & Beach Preservation Association, the SPA did not publically decry racial integration. SPA copy and board meeting minutes extensively discussed real estate values. The scant mentions of undesirable elements are likely racial tinged, but difficult to parse. In large part, coastal property in Los Angeles was almost exclusively white by 1950. Rates of residential segregation in Southern California were among the highest in the country. Coastal sections of Los Angeles in Pacific Palisades, Venice, and Del Rey were all over 98% white. In the 1950s, there was a growing African-American population in Venice as well as a small Jewish community. When Abbot Kinney founded Venice, he created the Oakwood neighborhood for a few African-American families to live. Oakwood did not have residentially restrictive covenants unlike much of West Los Angeles and other beach cities, attracting growing numbers with its potential for

⁶⁷ Neighborhood information is drawn from 1950 census tracts. Pacific Palisades is tract 48, Venice is tract 192, and Del Rey is tract 195. See *Census Tract Statistics, Los Angeles, California and Adjacent Areas*, 1950 Population Census Report, Volume III, Chapter 28, (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1952).

home ownership and employment. The African-American population in Oakwood grew from 4.3% in 1940 to 12.6% in 1950 to 38.8% in 1960, yet still represented less than 10% of Venice's overall population in 1960.⁶⁸ The changing demographics of Venice may have injured nearby property values, but race was secondary to the lack of financial potential in development that hindered the SPA's ability to sanitize and commoditize the sands. Coastal capitalism ruled the actions of developers and planners, not attendance or urban proximity.

After over a decade of ignoring the Los Angeles plan for shoreline development, city officials begrudgingly began to take bids for the proposed improvements to Venice Beach in December of 1959. The Recreation and Parks commission proposed building a large pavilion at Windward Avenue as an outdoor auditorium, band shell, and picnic area. This developmental strategy diverged from existing beaches and reaffirmed officials' skepticism about the possibility of wholesome, middle-class recreation in Venice. When the pavilion was finally constructed in 1961, concertgoers quickly realized "[t]he concrete slabs that served as seats were hard and uncomfortable, the brick walls frigid and uninviting and the acoustics abysmal."⁶⁹ The neighborhood's senior citizens, beatniks, and working class residents found it useless. Some accused the pavilion of hiding an oil well. Residents complained as soon as it opened with a litany of critiques. For most, it represented the city's continuing disinterest in developing Venice.⁷⁰ The built improvements to the shoreline were all wrong for officials reimagining the beach of tomorrow.

While the Shoreline Preservation Association may not have been able to actualize its dreams of a middle class coastal paradise, it left a lasting, pro-business legacy on municipal

⁶⁸ Andrew Deener, *Venice: A Contested Bohemia in Los Angeles* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 33.

⁶⁹ Tom Moran, "In Venice, a Sad End for a Seaside Mistake," *Los Angeles Times*, May 7, 2000.

⁷⁰ The Venice Pavilion remained a headache for the City of Los Angeles until its eventual destruction in 2000. After brief efforts at programming,

views of the beach. More pastoral coastline in affluent neighborhoods was routinely prioritized for funding. Los Angeles officials increasingly used the language of capitalism when describing beach operations. Supervisor of Beach Operations and frequent SPA speaker C.P.L. Nicholls often described the calculated the costs of cleaning each beach fire pit and parking fee systems. He wrote, “the principle...[of] beach operations is a business; big business...the product of the business of joyful activity.”⁷¹ Despite a vaguely humorous tone, officials approached seriously the project of transforming public beaches to appease and appeal to ever more middle-class residents.

The Original Muscle Beach

Elsewhere along the Bay, city officials in Santa Monica also took seriously the work of transforming the shoreline in a family-friendly destination. Located at the end of Route 66, tourists had long flocked to the city’s iconic pier and surrounding beaches. Tourism had slowed during World War II, but quickly rebounded. Many veterans rehabilitating or stationed in Southern California stayed. During the 1950s, Santa Monica grew into a fully mature municipality with a population over 70,000. Douglas Aircraft, the city’s leading employer, continued to grow as its business shifted from military planes to passenger aircraft. Pacific Ocean Park (POP or “pee-oh-pee”), a coastal amusement park operated by television network CBS and Santa Anita Park, opened in 1958 and attracted tens of thousands of tourists to leisurely enjoy the city’s coastline. Freeway construction made the city accessible to residents across Southern California.

⁷¹ C.P.L. Nicholls, “Los Angeles Beach Operations,” *Shore and Beach* 18, no. 2 (October 1950): 18.

In Santa Monica, the civic preoccupation with the beaches far exceeded that in Los Angeles. Beaches formed the lifeblood of the much smaller city and represented a far greater percentage of public space. City officials did not have the option to simply ignore unsightly beach development. During the second half of the 1950s, the city paid significant attention to redeveloping the area south of the Santa Monica Pier known as Ocean Park.⁷² The neighborhood consisted of many small and older housing units with lower property values, similar to neighboring Venice. With more expensive homes north of the Pier and a commercial cluster near the pier, this southerly neighborhood was chosen to be the city's middle-class neighborhood. City officials hoped when the newly-opened POP replaced the aging Ocean Park Pier, it would provide further economic stimulus to the neighborhood. They declared the surrounding area a redevelopment district, making it eligible to receive state and federal improvement funds.⁷³ The plan was supposed to prepare Santa Monica for the future and launch the city into a new era of prosperity and growth. Initial efforts at revitalizing began with a \$430,000 plan (actually \$724,000) for four large beachfront parks along Ocean Front Walk (the boardwalk) and over 2000 parking spaces.⁷⁴ In 1958, the City of Santa Monica embarked on an ambitious scheme for the beachfront between the pier and Venice, planning new parks and expensive apartments to

⁷² The neighborhood of Ocean Park is bounded by Pico Boulevard, Lincoln Boulevard, the Pacific Ocean, and Dewey Avenue.

⁷³ Redevelopment districts and urban renewal in California took off in the 1950s after the passage of the Community Development Law in 1951 and a state constitutional amendment allowing increased tax funding in 1952. Federal funds from the 1954 Housing Act accelerated the process. For more information on redevelopment and housing in California, see Stewart Black, "Redevelopment in California: Its Past, Present and Possible Future," *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 6, no. 4 (2014): 471–506; Brooks, *Alien Neighbors, Foreign Friends*; Laslett, *Shameful Victory*; Donald Craig Parson, *Making A Better World: Public Housing, The Red Scare, And The Direction Of Modern Los Angeles* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Pincetl, *Transforming California*; Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 139–44; Walker, *The Country in the City*. For more on redevelopment outside of California, see Jon C. Teaford, *The Rough Road to Renaissance: Urban Revitalization in America, 1940-1985*, Creating the North American Landscape (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990); Connolly, *A World More Concrete*; Andrew R Highsmith, *Demolition Means Progress: Flint, Michigan, and the Fate of the American Metropolis* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

⁷⁴ "Plans for New Park at Beaches OKed by Council," *Los Angeles Times*, February 17, 1957.

replace existing homes and businesses. City officials wanted to extend and expand the recreational environment while decreasing the density of development. Eventually in 1966, the luxurious Santa Monica Shores Apartments opened after over 300 families and 200 businesses were evicted, receiving little government support.⁷⁵ The transformation disproportionately hurt small business owners, the elderly, and working-class residents.

Efforts at urban renewal along the shoreline in Santa Monica also came up against a long-standing cultural institution near Ocean Park. Since the early 1930s, a designated space for gymnastics and body-building attracted a growing group of athletes and spectators to the sands just south of the Santa Monica Pier. The informal community grew rapidly as many Americans remained interested in fitness after World War II. Eventually titled “Muscle Beach,” this patch of the beach began attracting thousands of visitors and onlookers to impressive feats of strength and agility by the late 1940s. Over the years, the City of Santa Monica Department of Recreation installed a series of gymnastic platforms, high rings, parallel bars, balancing beams, and other equipment. Despite limited support, Muscle Beach produced a series of celebrities including TV fitness and juicing guru Jack LaLanne, Joe Gold of Gold’s Gym, and Steve Reeves of Mr. America and “Hercules” fame.⁷⁶ By the 1950s, weekend performances by athletes attracted over ten thousand spectators. In 1955, the *Saturday Evening Post* brought further national attention with an article entitled, “Body Worshipers of Muscle Beach.”⁷⁷

This spectacle of high-flying athletes and muscle-bound bodies became increasingly problematic for Santa Monicans staunchly committed to maximizing the middle-class potential

⁷⁵ Paula A Scott, *Santa Monica: A History on the Edge* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2004), 130.

⁷⁶ For more on Muscle Beach, see Harold Zinkin, *Remembering Muscle Beach: Where Hard Bodies Began : Photographs and Memories* (Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 1999); Marla Matzer Rose, *Muscle Beach* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2001); Tolga Ozyurtcu, “Flex Marks the Spot: Histories of Muscle Beach” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Texas, 2014), <https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/bitstream/handle/2152/26057/OZYURTCU-DISSERTATION-2014.pdf>.

⁷⁷ Joel Sayre, “Body Worshipers of Muscle Beach,” *Saturday Evening Post*, May 25, 1957.

of their shoreline. City officials frequently raised the ever-present Southern California scapegoat – parking. As ever more Angelenos drove to the beach, parking near the beach in Santa Monica became increasingly congested. The city conducted traffic studies and planned new parking lots in 1957, but also grew increasingly frustrated with the Muscle Beach regulars’ utilizing all the available parking spaces.⁷⁸ Underlying these complaints, however, was the shifting perception of the character of Muscle Beach and its patrons. In the aftermath of the 1933 Long Beach earthquake, the first beach athletes had primarily been locals interested in tumbling, adagio, and gymnastics. By the 1950s, a more adrenaline, hyper-masculine group focused on bodybuilding and weightlifting came to dominate the area. Many of these athletes lived a somewhat bohemian lifestyle, sleeping in small bungalows and spending their days at the beach. The Santa Monica City Council saw these people as “drifters with no means of support” and the Police Chief claimed Muscle Beach “attracted undesirable persons to the beachfront.”⁷⁹ The civically-minded *Santa Monica Outlook* voiced conservative resident desires to “clean up the area and eliminate the cheap beach apartments inhabited by undesirable Muscle Beach characters.”⁸⁰ The vague complaints suggest more taboo issues of race and sexuality remained problematic but unmentioned.

In December of 1958, the City of Santa Monica disassembled and bulldozed Muscle Beach in the middle of the night, closing the area. Officials initially stated that the closure was temporary, but made it permanent in early 1959. The official reasoning stemmed from moral charges brought against five weightlifters living near Muscle Beach.⁸¹ The arrests received

⁷⁸ “Bay City Survey Probes Parking Needs of Future,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 14, 1957.

⁷⁹ “Muscle Beach Flexes Biceps for Last Time,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1958.

⁸⁰ Rose, *Muscle Beach*, 128.

⁸¹ Details about the crime and charges remain murky. The rather biased *Santa Monica Outlook* suggests that the five weightlifters, including former Olympians, had shown pornography to two teenage African American “runaway” girls in their apartments. The *Outlook* focused on campaigning for Muscle Beach’s closure and largely ignored the subsequent criminal proceedings. Defendants received reduced charges and dismissals. No evidence suggests

publicity in the *Los Angeles Times* and *Santa Monica Outlook*. The tanned and toned bodies of the beach's denizens initially adhered to an ideal of recreation and leisure, but the hyper-masculinity of bodybuilders exceeded the relatively conservative norms of the era and incited rumors of homosexuality and deviance. Some of the athletes at Muscle Beach had previously posed in some more potentially risqué publications.⁸² The reality, however, was that the city had been planning against Muscle Beach for months. The Ocean Park beachfront park plan had omitted Muscle Beach from its designs. City councilmembers had already been advocating merging Muscle Beach with a children's playground. This plan called for eliminating all athletic equipment, potentially enforcing an age limit on the new playground, and ensuring a death for Muscle Beach in all but name.⁸³ In befitting finality, only three months after its closure, city officials announced that Muscle Beach would become a parking lot.

In the end, despite its overwhelming popularity and international acclaim, Muscle Beach no longer had a place amidst Santa Monica's rapidly modernizing, family-friendly beachfront. After the closure, City Manager Randall Dorton said, "I've felt for five years that Muscle Beach doesn't fit into the city's recreational picture."⁸⁴ Scandalous sexuality only accelerated the inevitable death of Muscle Beach. The frequently unemployed lifestyle of many of the bodybuilders caused further conflicts with the city's vision of a middle-class Ocean Park. The

anyone stood trial for the crime. For more, see Terry Todd, "The Fall of the Original Muscle Beach," in *Proceedings of the 39th Annual Conference* (North American Society For Sports History, University of Texas at Austin: North American Society For Sports History, 2001), 109–10; Ozyurtcu, "Flex Marks the Spot."

⁸² Beginning in the mid-1950s, Muscle Beach patron and leading bodybuilding publisher Joe Weider began releasing a series of magazines featuring nearly nude men with titles including *Adonis* and *Body Beautiful*. There is some debate about whether these publications explicitly targeted gay men, but conservative forces attempted to censor and confiscate some of Weider's publications. Weider address the subject in his biography. See Joe Weider, Ben Weider, and Mike Steere, *Brothers of Iron* (Champaign: Sports Publishing LLC, 2006). For analysis, see John D. Fair, *Mr. America: The Tragic History of a Bodybuilding Icon*, Terry and Jan Todd Series on Physical Culture and Sports (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015).

⁸³ Zinkin, *Remembering Muscle Beach*, 115.

⁸⁴ "Muscle Beach Flexes Biceps for Last Time," *Los Angeles Times*, December 21, 1958.

youthful participants from the 1930s and 1940s had been long crowded out by the bulging biceps of men. This playground for adults offered glimpses of an adrenaline-fueled, carefree coastal lifestyle that challenged conventional masculine ideal of father and breadwinner.⁸⁵ Equally problematic, local, POP-adjacent business owners did not like the competition of free entertainment while the posh Surf Rider Hotel nearby wanted more prototypical beachfront for its guests. This sort of free spectacle on the beach harkened back to an earlier era while the business community endorsed a vision of development resembling coastal capitalism. When former athletes repeatedly brought proposals to the Santa Monica City Council to reopen a recreational facility for adults, requests fell on deaf ears. Some bodybuilders began working out in small gym near Windward Avenue in Venice after the closing, eventually creating a second iteration Muscle Beach, yet they never achieved the mass popularity of the postwar period. The original Muscle Beach proved to be a casualty of urban redevelopment and a firm commitment to a family-friendly vision of progress.

A Modern Marina

Further south down the coast, local officials worked towards funding and facilitating a small craft harbor near Playa Del Rey, south of Venice, during the 1950s.⁸⁶ Yachting and boating

⁸⁵ For more on Cold War masculinity, see James Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); K. A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁸⁶ The project was initially titled the Playa Del Rey Inlet and Harbor, but was later changed to Marina Del Rey. See “Changing the Name of the Playa Del Rey Inlet and Harbor, Venice, Calif., to the ‘Marina Del Rey, Los Angeles, Calif.’,” Public Law 87–402, 87th Cong., 2d sess., February 2. For more information on the building of the marina, see George Park Schultz et al., “The Development of Marina Del Rey: Marina Del Rey Study, Coastal Zone Planning and Management Project” (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Sea Grant Program, 1972); Marsha V Rood and Robert Warren, “The Urban Marina: Managing and Developing Marina Del Rey” (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, Sea Grant Program, 1974); Marina del Rey Historical Society, *Marina Del Rey* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2014).

exploded in popularity during the era as affluence and leisure time again restructured recreation in Los Angeles. Boats and yachts were perhaps the epitome of conspicuous coastal consumerism with a high cost of ownership. A cruise along the coastline offered an activity for the whole family and was regularly a feature California life in the glossy photographs of *Sunset Magazine*.⁸⁷ Moorings for private boats existed in San Pedro, Long Beach, and Newport, but most Angelenos found the facilities overcrowded and too far away. Proposals for a marina had long existed, but in the postwar period, plans for the facility noticeably shifted away from initial proposals that emphasized a sprawling public park facility. Representatives from the City and County of Los Angeles as well as local Chambers of Commerce retooled the pitch to reflect changing spatial priorities while also acceding to financial necessities. The creation of a recreational harbor on the Southern California coast reaffirmed the imbrication of middle-class aesthetics and values into the built environment of the coast.

The idea of a harbor at the mouth of the Ballona Creek amidst the wetlands area between Venice and Del Rey dates back to the early 20th century. It was first significantly proposed by Abbott Kinney, founder of Venice, during the 1910s as a commercial harbor and an expansion of his canal system. The United States Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) was not interested and the idea was rejected.⁸⁸ Beginning in the 1930s, the USACE's responsibility was expanded to include engineering for recreation and pleasure craft, resuscitating discussions. Angelenos had agitated for a harbor for small boats and pleasure crafts. At the first official hearing in 1936, there was a big turnout by "realtors, commercial interest, chambers of commerce, and boat owners" to stress the importance of a marina for "jobs, flood control, recreation, national

⁸⁷ For example, see "California's Close Up," *Sunset*, June 1951; "A Unique Beach World, 107, 2, 31-35," *Sunset*, February 1952; "Southern California's Ocean and Desert...For A Family Christmas," *Sunset*, December 1958.

⁸⁸ United States Congress House Committee on Rivers and Harbors, "Playa Del Rey Inlet and Basin, Venice, Cal. Report on Preliminary Examination of Playa Del Rey Inlet and Basin, Venice, Cal."

defense.”⁸⁹ In 1938, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors and the Culver City Chamber of Commerce presented an ambitious, \$10 million plan to build a sprawling waterfront park to rival Griffith Park, Los Angeles’ largest park. In addition to a marina, the proposal called for a series of lagoons, hundreds of acres of park space, library, museum, aquarium, administration buildings, industrial facilities, and more, on over a thousand acres. While the Corps supported the initial survey and plan, they offered little funding.⁹⁰ Board of Supervisors’ attempts to sell local residents on a harbor assessment district met strong objection and was again shelved. Plans for a marina yet again surfaced during the second half of the 1940s with a price tag that had jumped to over \$20 million. Despite widespread political support across a range of local interests, the marina’s steep cost mired efforts to transform the coast.

After over a decade of being hamstrung by finances, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors commissioned a new engineering report to reconsider the proposed development. The report by George Nicholson and Company from 1956 made a series of substantive changes to the proposal that hewed closer to the changing coastal priorities of the 1950s.⁹¹ First, the proposal prioritized boating. Planners increased the number of berths for moorage while also decreasing the overall acreage and eliminating many of the land-based park features. In the final allocation, land space for recreation was restricted to one small beach, two parks, and two buffer strips of land.⁹² Broad statements about the importance of varied recreational activities for all Angelenos in surveys from the 1930s now stressed only boating. The elimination of the sailing lagoons shunned sailboats, kayaks, and canoes, ensuring that the marina was exclusively for

⁸⁹ Rood and Warren, “The Urban Marina,” 8–14.

⁹⁰ Tom Cooke, “A Report on the Economic Feasibility of Building a Yacht Harbor at Playa Del Rey” (Los Angeles: Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles, 1938); “Report on a Proposed Recreational Harbor at Playa Del Rey” (Los Angeles: Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles, 1938).

⁹¹ “Preliminary Study, Small Craft Harbors Plan, Los Angeles County” (Los Angeles: Regional Planning Commission, County of Los Angeles, 1958).

⁹² Rood and Warren, “The Urban Marina,” 53.

larger and more expensive recreational crafts. Despite a potentially smaller audience, planners proudly noted that the marina would provide “recreational benefits to reduce juvenile delinquency and for future Olympic Games.”

Once again, the lasting influence of the Shoreline Preservation Association was responsible for this reformulated coastal development. During the late 1940s, the Association and its members became increasingly preoccupied with yachting and recreational boating. In addition to the proposed marina in Playa Del Rey, members also called for new harbors in Redondo Beach, Long Beach, and San Diego. Its Yacht Harbor Committee repeatedly attempted to secure additional funding for the harbor from state officials through a variety of creative strategies. They succeeded in 1949 when the State legislature authorized aid for small boat harbors and continued to try to modify laws to include marinas and aquatic parks for funding. Two of the SPA’s staunchest allies, City Councilman Harold Harby and County Supervisor Raymond Darby, repeatedly voiced strong support for development during marina hearings in the early 1950s.⁹³ When County Supervisor Burton Chace was elected in 1953 to replace Darby, politics remained constant. Even as the Association’s influence faded, the social network created between a diverse set of municipal interests sustained the development of the marina. City and County officials regularly communicated with each other and officials in surrounding municipalities. Supervisors Chace and John Anson Ford sought extensive advice on harbor management from SPA member Wayne Allen, the Chief Administrative Officer of the City of

⁹³ The Shoreline Preservation Association in 1949 and 1950 specifically wanted, ““Park Commission will have authority to spend funds remaining from the \$10,000,000 for the purchase of land or water areas for small boat harbors, aquatic parks and marinas. Such action of course would be taken only at the request of counties or cities and county master plans would have to be amended accordingly.” See Minutes of the Shoreline Preservation Association Executive Committee Meeting, March 3, 1950, Willis Warner Papers; Geoffrey Morgan to Earl Hansen December 20, 1950, NR – SPA.

Long Beach.⁹⁴ The SPA left a legacy that envisioned building urban beaches for the growing population of middle-class Angelenos and their leisure-centric lives.

Beyond a myopic focus on boating, the reformulated plans for the marina at Playa Del Rey used financial and administrative strategies reflective of a closer relationship between city officials and the business community. Despite the initial support of local commerce during the 1940s, the assessment district strategy reflected an early failing of big government development and public funding. When George Nicholson and Company reimagined the funding mechanics for the marina, they put a much stronger emphasis on a continued revenue generation. An increased number of berths not only supported boating, but also offered greater rental profitability. More markedly, the plan called for leasing the majority of non-aquatic space to pay for revenue bonds to finance construction.⁹⁵ This commitment to using revenue bonds further distanced this plan from the once-common liberal largesse. Instead, this plan more closely resembled public-private partnerships found elsewhere in the country. The marina was never privatized to the extent of coastal capitalism other places in the Sunbelt, but it still redefined coastal space as a commodity. Many of the new leases proved quite profitable. This cozy relationship between the Board of Supervisors, Chambers of Commerce, and local business benefitted again from the SPA's social network as it was repeatedly tested by newspaper exposés and calls for independent oversight committees during the late 1950s and early 1960s.⁹⁶ This business-forward approach proved resilient and effective.

⁹⁴ There are multiple letters from the early 1950s in Folder SS, Box 43, John Anson Ford Papers.

⁹⁵ As opposed to general bonds which require a 2/3 majority to approve, revenue bonds only require a simple majority of Los Angeles County voter approval. This decision has remained a political issue for the Board of Supervisors for decades after the decision with repeated leasing boondoggles. For many years, the Marina has been one of the largest sources of revenue generation for the county and has attracted watchdog attention.

⁹⁶ The *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* ran a series of articles in 1961 focusing on recreation and Marina Del Rey. They revealed that only three of the thirteen leased properties received more than one bid. Many of the bond payers were outraged, but county official managed to escape accusations of favoritism.

The Los Angeles electorate largely embraced this new approach. The November, 1956 vote on revenue bonds received two to one support by voters. The large-scale developments of Marineland, POP, or Marina Del Rey defined a new era where the built environment of the coast drew on the ethos of middle-class suburbia. Massive enclaves of private space including sprawling housing development and sleek shopping malls increasingly dotted the urban space of the transforming metropolis. The new Marina Del Rey development was intended for boaters and tourists, featuring a nautical shopping area, tiki restaurant, hotels, and condominiums.⁹⁷ While the public and city officials had once considered pleasure piers and most beachfront businesses blight, the acceptability of large-scale, private enterprise at the beach was increasingly normal. Even as business opened at the marina, construction continued throughout the 1960s. Despite the lengthy saga, the final iteration of Marina Del Rey reflected the priorities of economic prioritization of boaters.

In 1959, Concord Pictures, in collaboration with the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, released a thirty-minute promotional video entitled, “Where the Mountains Meet the Sea.”⁹⁸ Narrated by Vic Perrin, the film presented an idealized vision of the coast that residents, officials, businesses, and lobbyists had worked so methodically to cultivate. Viewers are introduced to an expanding city of Santa Monica that combines beach-centric living and the

⁹⁷ Between 1961 and 1964, the following businesses opened at the Marina: Marina Fuels, Bora Bora Way (1962); Pieces of Eight (1962); Bay Club Marina, Tahiti Way (1962); Villa del Mar Apartments and Marina, Marquesas Way (1963); Marina del Rey Hotel and Anchorage, Bali Way (1963); Villa Venetia, Fiji Way (1964); Tahiti Marina, Tahiti Way (1964); Neptune Marina, Marquesas Way (1964); Del Rey Yacht Club, Palawan Way (1964); The Boat Yard, Fiji Way (1964); Catalina Yacht Anchorage, Bali Way (1964). This information was drawn from the Los Angeles County Department of Beaches and Harbor’s parcel maps. For more, also see Helga Gendell, “Looking back at how the Marina was created: Part VIII,” *The Argonaut* (Marina Del Rey, CA), May 20, 2010.

⁹⁸ Ed Woodworth, *Where the Mountains Meet the Sea* (Concord Pictures, 1959), <http://archive.org/details/Wherethe1959>. Scant information is available about the film. A 16mm archival copy stored at the Santa Monica Historical Society, however, is stored in a box address to the Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce. Further, it is just possible to make out the Chamber’s logo of a mermaid on the address label.

aspirational ease of affluence. The opening scene follows a recuperating World War II soldier as he leaves a rehabilitation center and decides to live in Santa Monica. Seconds later, the soldier is suddenly tanned, muscularly mowing the front lawn of his new home as his adoring wife watches amidst halesome sunshine. Sleek, new automobiles stream by on the broad, palm-tree lined streets of the picturesque neighborhood. The narrator stresses that this dream was within reach. The film then follows a whirlwind tour of beaches and coastal recreation, repetitively stressing the family-friendly environment for year-round play. Perrin tells viewers that, “the sun doesn’t hibernate, it spends the winter here and blends with the soft and invigorating surf to form a natural formula for bathing, tanning, or just plain relaxing.” Children swim and surf, lifeguards dutifully pluck sand from a toddler’s eye, and celebrities saunter for fashion photographers on the sands. Recently opened Pacific Ocean Park is featured prominently as a model of coastal entertainment. The film even boasts of the quality of public education in the city’s schools. Santa Monica resembles a paradise for families in a film, embodying changing perspectives on the meeting of sand and sea.

By the end of the 1950s, a committed focus helped transformed Southern California’s beaches into an environment tailored towards the practical needs and cultural values of middle-class families. Wide parking lots, changing rooms, friendly lifeguards, and expansive new facilities all became increasingly common over the decade. New buildings reflected the ubiquitous motifs of suburban architecture and mirrored explosive growth patterns that demanded extensive environmental change. Large, corporate amusement parks replaced dowdy, carnival-esque entertainment along the beachfront that beachgoers increasingly associated with the working class of an earlier era. Yachts and pleasure craft found a future home in Los Angeles that was convenient for their owners. As Angelenos embraced the postwar growth in leisure

time, the beach proved the perfect setting for wholesome family recreation. Municipalities policed and sanitized the sands to safeguard the space for youthful innocence.

The idealized civic aspirations represented by these beaches came at a clear cost to the economically disenfranchised residents along the coast, often hold overs from an earlier era. The transformation of the coastline continually embraced the capitalist logic of commoditizing the shoreline. Municipalities promoted strategies of urban renewal and redevelopment to attract more middle-class residents that eventually resulted in the displacement of hundreds of minorities, senior citizens, and working-class families from their homes. Rising real estate values in West Los Angeles and the South Bay drove the remaining working-class neighborhoods ever further inland. Beaches nearest to these communities, like Venice or San Pedro, received less funding as development and new facilities increasingly clustered in more affluent areas. Social norms grew equally striated. A tanned and toned body was no longer the simple rubric for membership. Being a beach patron now ostensibly necessitated not only fashionable swimwear and access to an automobile, but also the conspicuous consumption of amusement park admission, surfboards, or even boat ownership. Yet despite these barriers, ever more Angelenos visited the beach every year. Free admission had always ensured its affordability to all. By the 1960s, middle-class beach goers dissatisfied by diverse demographics had the opportunity to stay firmly ensconced in the safety of the home by building a backyard swimming pools. Midcentury cultural mores and potentially snide glances did little to diminish the Pacific's siren call during a summer heat wave.

The legacy of this restructured landscape crystallized by the 1960s, becoming a perfected playground of perpetual fun for the modern Californian teenager or family. The beach proved to be a fertile landscape for the region's surf culture that blossomed into national consciousness

during the late 1950s. When *Gidget* was released in 1958, America quickly fell in love with a quirky teenage girl's quest to surf and her underlying efforts to romantically tame a rebellious surfer. Despite its exotic coastal landscape of bongos, bonfires, and ukuleles, Malibu was where responsible middle-class teenagers enjoyed some clean summer fun. The architects of this irresistible midcentury environment had hoped for the popularity of profitable family fun, but never imagined their smashing success. Coastal capitalism starkly altered the shore as Angelenos' attendance and affection for the beach continued to grow.

Chapter Five: Campaigning for the Beach

For most of October 1972, over five hundred billboards throughout Los Angeles proclaimed, “The Beach Belongs to You – Don’t Lock It Up! Vote NO on Proposition No. 20.” The billboards depicted a photograph of the iconic, sandy Southern California beach imprisoned behind a fence and locked gate. This stark message stood in dramatic contrast to decades of advertisements that styled the beach in far more leisurely terms. These new advertisements admonished voters to reject Proposition 20, also known as the California Coastal Conservation Initiative, a ballot initiative to create a statewide coastal regulatory agency. Opponents, veiled by a vague acronym, based their claim on a legal analysis that “it would be so difficult to obtain a permit for development along the coast if the measure passe[d] that, in effect, a moratorium on providing new beach access would exist.”¹ Unless Proposition 20 was defeated, Californians would be deprived of their beaches. The political outcome of the election would define access not only in Southern California, but also along the state’s entire 800-mile coastline.

This advertising slogan outraged the authors and proponents of Proposition 20 and they rejected it as patently false. Assemblyman Paul Priolo (R-Santa Monica/West Los Angeles), a strong supporter of coastal legislation, organized a sidewalk news conference below a billboard in Hollywood to castigate the “slick advertising” (Figure 10). He chided voters not to look at the sign and asked, “Who wants to lock up the coast? Do the surfers and beach lovers and conservationists...or do the oil companies, the utilities and irresponsible developers?” Joined by Assemblyman Alan Sieroty (D-Beverly Hills/ Venice) to form the self-proclaimed “Truth

¹ William Endicott, “Ad Campaigns for Initiatives Come Under Blistering Attack,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 1, 1972.

Squad,” the political street theater received substantial attention from the media as Priolo exclaimed that the billboard was the greatest “deliberate distortion” California voters had ever seen.² Supporters of Proposition 20 demanded to “Save Our Coast” and believed that the opposition had stolen their slogan.³ Assembly Speaker Bob Moretti even proposed a truth in political advertising law, stating, “the message on these billboards is an out and out fraud. That ...[they] would so deliberately and openly deceive the public is indefensible.”



Figure 10. Assemblyman Paul Priolo Attacks CACI Billboards. Cropped by author, Courtesy of the California Proposition 20 Coastal Initiative Collection, Special Collections, San Diego State University.

² Cliff Tarpay, “Priolo Attacks Foes of Prop. 20,” *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, September 21, 1972, California Proposition 20, Coastal Initiative Collection, Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego State University, San Diego, California.

³ Jill Kramer, “Saving the Coast,” *Pacific Sun*, San Rafael, December 9 2005
http://www.pacificsun.com/story_archives/warner_chabot.html (Accessed 18 February 2012).

On Halloween, days before the election, a group of initiative proponents prepared to publically set the record straight.⁴ They mapped the locations of all the billboards with the help of an army of high school students.⁵ They silkscreened hundreds of 2-foot-by-2-foot high signs with the word “YES” on them and armed themselves with ladders. In a well-orchestrated midnight escapade, “about 90 percent of the billboards were transformed to Vote YES.”⁶ The signs now read, “The Beach Belongs to You – Don’t Lock It Up! Vote YES on Proposition 20.” Proponents were ecstatic with the media coverage generated by their guerilla tactics while outraged opponents filed suit. As the generally combative campaign cycle progressed, both sides tied their political ambitions to invoking a vision with popular resonance in California – a vision of an accessible urban beach. Why would political opponents use remarkably similar language and claims to champion the beach? Why focus on beaches along the Santa Monica Bay, ignoring the vast majority of the state’s coastline? This chapter explores the ways in which political discourse associated with Proposition 20 drew from, manipulated, and spread the urban landscape of Los Angeles’ leisurely sands.

The passage of Proposition 20 in 1972 critically hinged on the carefully constructed landscape of the beaches of Southern California. A conservationist dream initiated San Francisco activists galvanized the cultural dreams of millions of Californians, especially those in the Southland. Leading up to the November vote, claims leveraging the beach increased in prevalence and importance as partisan actors steered the public discourse from an evaluation of policy to advertising a specific vision of the beach. The election became less about the merits of

⁴ Activists most notably included Warner Chabot, future executive director of the California League of Conservation Voters.

⁵ This version was described by Warner Chabot. Recollections by another activist, Peter Douglas, claimed that proponents received a list of billboards’ locations from a sympathetic staffer working for the opponents’ public relations firm. See Peter Douglas, “Cancer and Saving the Sundown Coast – A Personal Story Part I,” Personal Blog, *Live Love with Cancer*, (June 2011), http://livelovewithcancer.blogspot.com/2011_06_01_archive.html.

⁶ Ibid.

establishing a regulatory body or a permitting process than about defending an iconic place from attack. Political opponents conjured this landscape through conflicting ideological prisms while representing diametrically opposed interests. Supporters of the measure largely came from grassroots environmental organizations while corporate forces in oil, real estate, and energy utilities worked against it. Despite these differences, both campaigns experienced far greater success mobilizing voters with utopic tropes of coastal leisure and recreation than with unpeopled or seemingly wild locales. These urban vistas possessed an aesthetic and representational essence with a mass appeal capable of facilitating action. Like other seascapes globally, this sandy strand embodied a powerful symbol for the multitudes, transcending traditional political boundaries, to “function as a signifier and foundation sign for – a series of narratives and cultural projects” close to the hearts of millions of Californians.⁷ Many voters across the state were more connected to Southern California’s *beaches* than to Northern California’s *coast*.⁸

Southern California’s shoreline seemed perpetually peopled in these cultural montages. These beaches possessed sandy shores and accessible parking lots, studded with piers, and bounded by commercialized boardwalks. This essential topography depended on the daily swell of urban throngs. Beaches all along the Santa Monica Bay were a stage for the daily experiences of surfing, tanning, and beach volleyball that also defined notions of the urban beach. As residents’ leisure needs materially influenced the beach, coastal pride was also imbedded in these beachgoers. Everyday life and the practiced habit of attending the beach was essential for the mutual production of this discursive and physical landscape.

⁷ Remedi, “The Beach Front (La Rambla).”

⁸ For more on this geo-linguistic divide, see Fradkin and Fradkin, *The Left Coast*, viii–ix.

While Los Angeles area beaches continually grew in popularity for decades, the 1960s brought the acclaim to new heights. Cooperative efforts between public and private sector forces during the 1950s helped to create a middle-class pleasure zone that widely appealed to residents. Movies, television, music, and other forms of popular culture regularly glamorized this landscape with the fictive embellishments of eternal sunshine and pristine waves. Popular fragments of surfing culture, including vocabulary and fashion, began to penetrate mainstream society. Voters across the state no longer needed to visit the shores to be reminded that Los Angeles' urban beach symbolized a romanticized good life – “materialistic, outdoor-oriented, in touch with nature.”⁹ Cultural industries continued to export this regional lifestyle near and far, sowing understandings of the urban beaches and their common tropes. Palm trees, sandy beaches, tanned bodies, and surfboards all elicited the well-known place in the minds of the residents. When this landscape came under potential assault, residents felt compelled political action.

Briefly, the 1972 California Coastal Conservation Initiative was a proposed ballot initiative that created the California Coastal Zone Conservation Commission (CCZCC), a temporary agency with a four-year sunset clause. The subsequent passage of the 1976 Coastal Act permanently created the California Coastal Commission. The legislation mandated that both local and statewide regulatory bodies would evaluate all changes to the coastal zones (generally up to 1000 yards from mean high tide line) “for preservation, protection, restoration and

⁹ Davidson and Entrikin, “The Los Angeles Coast as a Public Place,” 585.

enhancement of environment and ecology of coastal zone.”¹⁰ From private homes to airports, the Coastal Act granted the Coastal Commission wide-ranging regulatory authority.

The political climate of the early 1970s in the United States reflected mounting environmental concern and responsive citizen activism against the goliath-like forces of corporate interests that had long determined the coast’s political economy. In the aftermath of World War II, historian Samuel Hays suggests environmental advocates experienced a change in values and shifted their focus from pragmatic conservation towards natural beauty and ecological preservation.¹¹ Early environmental efforts focused on national parks and perceived wilderness later spawned a wide range of efforts during the 1970s, from smog to recycling to endangered species. Following Hays’ emphasis on the underlying causal forces of consumption and production, other historians have focused on how the rapacious postwar growth created an array of environmental problems that spurred activists and policymakers towards protection and regulation.¹² America’s new lifestyle of leisure and consumption in middle-class suburbia caused many of these environmental problems, but also pushed residents to dream of a solution for pollution and blight.

The nation’s shorelines received substantial political attention, leading to a dramatic growth of environmental protections by local, state, and federal forces. Politicians published

¹⁰ The 1972 election guide summarized the initiative, stating, “Creates State Coastal Zone Conservation Commission and six regional commissions. Sets criteria for and requires submission of plan to Legislature for preservation, protection, restoration and enhancement of environment and ecology of coastal zone, as defined. Establishes permit area within coastal zone as the area between the seaward limits of state jurisdiction and 1000 yards landward from the mean high tide line, subject to specified exceptions. Prohibits any development within permit area without permit by state or regional commission. Prescribes standards for issuance or denial of permits. Act terminates after 1976. This measure appropriates five million dollars (\$5,000,000) for the period 1973 to 1976.”

¹¹ Samuel Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

¹² Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*; Hal Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation? Environmentalism in the United States Since 1945* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1998); Philip Shabecoff, *A Fierce Green Fire: The American Environmental Movement* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993).

articles about coastal protection and pushed for further legislation.¹³ On a national level, in 1972 alone, this concern prompted Congress to pass legislation including the Marine Protection, Research and Sanctuaries Act, the Coastal Zone Management Act, and the Federal Water Pollution Control Act. These federal expansions primarily empowered the United States Army Corp of Engineers to armor shorelines, helped local governments create coastal management plans, and extended greater federal regulatory oversight to coasts.¹⁴ Much of this attention of coastal protection, however, was driven by states in the Eastern and Southern United States with far less stable beaches. California cities had already created management plans during the 1940s and 1950s. Hurricanes, erosion, and expensive construction from Virginia Beach to Mississippi played a far more pivotal role in motivating the passage of repeated legislation.¹⁵

Many analyses of Proposition 20 see its passage as reflective of this nationwide moment of green activism. A few years after the bill's passage, activists associated with the campaign declared it a victory for environmentalism. A key proponent, Janet Adams, retrospectively claimed that the initiative revealed "the public leads its elected representatives in the search for environmental solutions."¹⁶ Another activist recollected that the initiative only passed because of an "extraordinary grassroots volunteer effort" spurred by environmentalism.¹⁷ A legalistic analysis of the initiative's passage suggested that it "demonstrated that well organized citizen

¹³ For example, Senator Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) proposed legislation to halt ocean dumping in 1970 and published a popular article in *Reader's Digest* in 1971. See Gaylord Nelson, "A Reader's Digest Reprint: Stop Killing Our Oceans," *Reader's Digest*, February 1971, Folder 19, Box 6, Ellen Stern Harris Papers (Collection Number 1287), Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA, Los Angeles, California.

¹⁴ Peter Graber, "From the 1920s to the 1980s: Some Legal Responses to Coastal Issues," *Shore and Beach* 55, no. 3 (July 1987): 22–24.

¹⁵ Stanonis, *Faith in Bikinis*, 75–85.

¹⁶ Janet Adams, "Proposition 20--A Citizens' Campaign," *Syracuse Law Review* 24 (1973): 1019.

¹⁷ Rasa Gustaitis, "How the Coast Was Won: An Interview with Lew Reid," *California Coast & Ocean* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2002): 27–32.

activism could produce positive results.”¹⁸ Almost all early analyses supported what seemed like an obvious link between Proposition 20 and the growing popularity of environmentalism.

More recent scholarly research also supports this conclusion. Jared Orsi’s history of the California Coastal Commission, the eventual regulatory body created by the proposition, emphasizes citizen activism and argues that the initiative was the result of “grassroots mobilization that spilled over from the 1960s and triggered fundamental changes in environmental policy.”¹⁹ Environmental historian Adam Rome similarly argues contributing factors included the 1969 “Santa Barbara oil spill, the construction of second-home subdivisions and high-rise apartments on bluff overlooking the water...[and] the aesthetic blighting of public beaches.”²⁰ Collectively, these works construe Proposition 20 as one of many pieces of environmental legislation passed by activists in a period of intense social change. Thomas Osborne offers the most nuanced analysis, writing “California’s vibrant surfer/counter-culture, a Bay Area conservation effort, public insistence on beach access at the Sea Ranch development along the Sonoma coast, the Santa Barbara oil spill, and the growth of organizations committed to protecting the state’s natural heritage.”²¹

¹⁸ Carl E. Lutrin and Allen K. Settle, “The Public and Ecology: The Role of Initiatives in California’s Environmental Politics,” *The Western Political Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (June 1, 1975): 371. For similar analysis, also see John Ashbaugh and Jens Sorensen, “Identifying the ‘Public’; for Participation in Coastal Zone Management,” *Coastal Zone Management Journal* 2 (January 1976): 383–409; Lynton K. Caldwell, Lynton R. Hayes, and Isabel M. MacWhirter, *Citizens and the Environment: Case Studies in Popular Action* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976); Peter Douglas, “Coastal Resource Planning And Control: The California Approach,” *Environmental Law* 5, no. 3 (1975): 739–60; Mary A Eikel and W. Scott Williams, “The Public Trust Doctrine and the California Coastline,” *The Urban Lawyer* 6, no. 3 (1974): 519–71; Gilbert L. Finnell, “Coastal Land Management in California,” *American Bar Foundation Research Journal* 3, no. 4 (October 1, 1978): 647–750; Neil E Franklin, Patricia S Peterson, and William Walker, “Saving the Coast: The California Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972,” *Golden Gate University Law Review* 4 (1974 1973): 307; Gerald Swanson, “Coastal Zone Management From an Administrative Perspective,” *Coastal Management* 2, no. 2 (1975): 81–102.

¹⁹ Jared Orsi, “Restoring the Common to the Goose: Citizen Activism and the Protection of the California Coastline, 1969-1982,” *Southern California Quarterly* 78, no. 3 (1996): 257–84.

²⁰ Rome, *The Bulldozer in the Countryside*, 229.

²¹ Thomas J. Osborne, “Saving the Golden Shore,” *Southern California Quarterly* 96, no. 4 (November 1, 2014): 433–64.

The California Coastal Conservation Initiative campaigns' tactical use of the cultural landscape of the urbanized beaches of Los Angeles challenges existing narratives of citizen activism. Developing an understanding of this place and its historical usages reveals the underlying and broader spatial implications. While it is tempting to see this politicking as constitutive of ecological concerns, neither activists nor voters were primarily energized by desolate stretches of Northern California. Instead, both political campaigns emphasized the imperative of protecting the urban and peopled coast to voters statewide.

Coastal Halcyon to Crisis

In 1971, Architectural historian Reyner Banham's celebrated study, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies*, described the city's environment and devoted an entire chapter to the beach. Banham saw the coastal communities as "surfurbia," a fundamental yet Edenic environment for urban life in his regional analysis of Los Angeles, "the greatest City-on-the-Shore in the world."²² He passionately describes coastal municipalities in glowing terms, from the distinctive civic atmosphere of "San Mo" (Santa Monica) to Manhattan Beach's heavily-trafficked, beachfront walk. Everyday objects like surfboards become "the prime symbolic and functional artefact of these beaches."²³ The ode occasionally verges on hyperbole, like his dated claim about physiological benefits, but nonetheless offers a compelling snapshot of the beach on the cusp of 1972. Critically, Banham notes the captivating power of the built environment of the urban beaches of Los Angeles, tacitly recognizing decades of physical and cultural construction.

²² Banham, *Los Angeles*, 37.

²³ *Ibid.*, 49.

During the 1960s, the beaches of Southern California continued their physical and cultural development as Los Angeles emerged as a global metropolis. While the population growth slowed slightly, Los Angeles County still grew by over 16% between 1960 and 1970. Beach cities swelled to capacity as Redondo Beach grew by over 22% in the decade, Santa Monica's population reached an all-time peak, and Malibu became a lively if reclusive hub for celebrities.²⁴ The average age of Southern California residents also dropped as the parents of baby boomers started families. Funding for parks and recreational beaches received a big boost in 1964 when voters approved a \$150 million bond measure via ballot proposition. The same year, attendance to popular Zuma County Beach, Will Rogers State Beach, Santa Monica State Beach, and Dockweiler State Beach exceeded 36 million people, roughly the equivalent of every Californian visiting two of these beaches during the year. Beach priorities also stayed consistent in Los Angeles County as the more urbanized shorelines with wide sands received top precedence.²⁵ These popular beaches not only attracted legions of pleasure seekers, but also proved pivotal in bolstering the emergent mass consumerism of beach culture.

Angelenos avidly sought the coastal leisure for decades, but during the 1960s, beach life captivated Hollywood and the business of cool. Forces of capital worked for decades to commoditize coastal space and created a malleable and alluring landscape, easily adapted by other industries. The popularity of Southern California's idealized seascape grew nationally through film, radio, and beyond as images of surfing, eternal sunshine, and leisure captured mass attention. In 1964, Chevrolet introduced the top-of-the-line Malibu Super Sport model of its

²⁴ Santa Monica's population has decreased in every census since 1970 in large part to the city's slow growth measures and gentrification. In many ways, 1970 represented the city at its maximum population capacity while still adhering to its oft-advertised leisurely lifestyle.

²⁵ Division of Beaches and Parks, "Los Angeles County Beach Study, Requested by Senate Resolution No. 46" (Sacramento: California State Parks Commission, May 1965), 6.

Chevelle sedan, claiming a commitment to good times and using Southern California beaches as the backdrop for a national advertising campaign. Teen beach films, like *Beach Party* (1963), *Muscle Beach Party* (1964), or *Bikini Beach* (1964), presented wholesome depictions of the beach amidst the growing tensions of the decade's counterculture.²⁶ Bruce Brown's *Endless Summer* (1966) followed two surfers' hunt for waves across the globe, but its music, narration style, and ethos evoked Southern California beach culture.²⁷ The beach also invaded the radio as the genre of surf music appeared and exploded during the early 1960s. The Beach Boys, Dick Dale, The Vandals, and popularized an electric guitar inflected sound that championed the beach. The impact of beach culture was undeniable in spreading constructed visions of leisure and converting millions into admiring fans.

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, the continued popularity of Southern California's beaches spurred a variety of statewide reactions among long-time beach goers and coastal residents. Beaches everywhere in the state felt crowded to residents, as new development along the coast dramatically escalated during California's postwar growth spurts and the construction of U.S. Highway 101 opened new stretches of the coast to residents. Despite numerous coastal studies commissioned by the state of California throughout the 1960s, by the end of the decade only 200 miles of the state's 1,072-mile coastline were available for public use.²⁸ Overcrowding on the sand and in the water chafed some residents of once-sleepy coastal hamlets as the region's population continued to climb. Surfers increasingly worried that greater publicity would spoil some of the remaining "undiscovered" beaches. Other coastal residents

²⁶ William Asher, *Beach Party* (American International Pictures, 1963); William Asher, *Muscle Beach Party* (American International Pictures, 1964); William Asher, *Bikini Beach* (American International Pictures, 1964).

²⁷ For more analysis of beach and surfing films, see Krista Comer, *Surfer Girls in the New World Order* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010); Thomas Lisanti, *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies: The First Wave, 1959-1969* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012); R. L. Rutsky, "Surfing the Other: Ideology on the Beach," *Film Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (Summer 1999): 12–23.

²⁸ Orsi, "Restoring the Common to the Goose," 257–60.

responded to the growing human demands of the coast by pushing for greater environmental protection. Representatives from energy companies disputed the impact of pollution caused by coastal oil drilling, but activists remained unconvinced.²⁹ Peter Douglas, an aide for Assemblyman Sieroty, co-author of Proposition 20, and future director of the Coastal Commission, recalled alarm about “the rapid change, the deterioration of quality, the filling of wetlands, the proposed nuclear plants, the freeways proposed right along the coast, new marinas. It was all overwhelming to a people who came to know the coast as kinda the geographic soul of California and they said stop.”³⁰ Another co-author, Ellen Stern Harris, recalled the impetus “was the Great Wall against the sea -- development blocking the view of the beach all along the coast of Malibu.”³¹ Exasperated by this changing coastline, some activists launched a campaign to institute greater coastal protection via regulation, preserving the beaches for future generations.

VOTE YES: Save the Coastline

While the leisurely beach culture was closely imbricated with Southern California, efforts at coastal environmentalism was rooted in Northern California. Nascent protection of coastal places began hundreds of miles from Los Angeles’ peopled shores. Instead, the tidal ecology and patterns of development surrounding the San Francisco Bay created growing problems with pollution, infill and blight during the 1960s. Beginning in 1961, Kay Kerr (wife of Clark Kerr,

²⁹ For example, in 1968, Assemblyman Alan Sieroty introduced AB2090 to create the Southern California Beach Study Commission and fund it with \$75,000. Energy companies strongly disagreed. Henry Wright, a lobbyist representing the Western oil and Gas Association testified in front of the Assembly Subcommittee on Marine Resources and Conservation and Beaches in December, 1968 and disputed the actual impact of pollution. See Alan G. Sieroty Papers, LP188, Microfilm, California State Archives, Office of the Secretary of State, Sacramento, California.

³⁰ EarthAlertGlobal, “Peter Douglas on the Significance of Prop. 20.” *YouTube*. Online video clip, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EI7E_2bgmEA.

³¹ Ellen Stern Harris, “Coast Panel’s Work Demands Integrity,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 3, 2003.

then president of University of California), Sylvia McLaughlin, and Ester Gulick created the Save San Francisco Bay Association to advocate for a single agency to control long-term planning for the Bay and to prevent infilling. In 1963, Mel Scott, a lecturer in planning at University of California, Berkeley published *Saving the San Francisco Bay* (1963), which described the alarming changes to the Bay and pushed for greater government oversight.³² The book became the blueprint for the June 1965 creation of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission (BCDC). The BCDC was not just an environmental conservation agency, but instead its regulatory body was responsible for the seemingly disparate goals of conservation and development. The agency was “spectacularly successful, a model of environmental regulation for public good, as well as of efficient, effective government.”³³ Some wondered about applying similar regulations statewide.

The California Coastal Alliance (CCA) represented the fulfillment of these ambitions, becoming the focal agency in efforts to create this broad regulatory structure and to pass Proposition 20. Formed in November of 1970, the group was a coalition of supporters of coastal legislation, environmental organizations, conservationists and liberal democrats. The group supported statewide legislation modeled on the San Francisco BCDC, but statewide politics proved far more complex than the Alliance’s members expected.³⁴ While the CCA would

³² Mel Scott, *The Future of San Francisco Bay* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1963).

³³ Walker, *The Country in the City*, 114–16. The most comprehensive study on BCDC during the 1960s is Rice Odell, *The Saving of San Francisco Bay; a Report on Citizen Action and Regional Planning*. (Washington, D.C.: Conservation Foundation, 1972). For more on the early creation of the BCDC, see Booker, *Down by the Bay*, 181–84; Philip J. Dreyfus, *Our Better Nature: Environment and the Making of San Francisco* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2012); Carolyn Merchant, *Green versus Gold: Sources in California’s Environmental History* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 359–64.

³⁴ The idea to create statewide legislation based on the San Francisco BCDC is generally credited to Ellen Stern Harris. After 1968 hearings of the Natural Resources Committee of the California Assembly, Harris made the suggestion to Assemblyman Sieroty. Harris also credits the idea to a suggestion by William Davoren, an adviser to U.S. Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall. See Douglas, “Cancer and Saving the Sundown Coast – A Personal Story Part I”; Videotero, LLC, *Hero of the Coast - Ellen Stern Harris*, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejWOZrJm7dA&list=PLBD01F408061F5C33&index=13>.

eventually capture the attention of residents across the state, its reach proved limited in its infancy. During the first eighteen months of operation, the Alliance utilized a political discourse that failed to build public consensus because it failed to resonate with a wider demographic. CCA communications and public outreach reflected a young organization with a core constituency and transparent political goals. It would take the early supporters of coastal conservation almost two years before they eventually embarked on a campaign to pass legislation by using savvy political tactics and public elicitation capable of facilitating mass action.

Early Coastal Alliance communication and actions resonated with its homogeneous and relatively small member base. Supporters primarily lived in Northern California and had experience in political and conservationist struggles. Many of the activists behind the San Francisco BCDC would eventually join the Alliance leadership, including Claire and Kent Dedrick, Bill Kortum, Phyllis Faber, Mel Lane, and Joe Bodovitz.³⁵ This small group of primarily East Bay social elites had success in past campaigns primarily due to their social networks of academics, politicians, and celebrities. The earliest CCA mailing list, was based on Janet Adam's personal network from her time managing an environmental public relations firm, Conservation Coordinators.³⁶ The majority of her clients, as well as BCDC activists, were residents of the greater San Francisco Area. While officially devoted to comprehensive coastal legislation, most Alliance members focused their attention on their immediate environs. The CCA organized a "Save Our Bay" day in 1971 across Northern California, emphasizing a regional commitment in locale and audience. No recreational beaches in urban areas were featured.

³⁵ Walker, *The Country in the City*, 126–27.

³⁶ Walker, *The Country in the City*.

Activists supported moderate legislation that balanced public conservation and private development.³⁷ Members saw this sensible approach as appropriately balancing the needs of diverse stakeholders. Early campaign rhetoric repeatedly stressed this duality. A 1971 CCA letter declared legislation “provides the balance between extreme conservation and development” while another letter described a bill as “for balanced development, for the public interest.”³⁸ The Alliance described its involvement in drafting the legislation as “carefully work[ing] to represent the needs of the diverse conservation groups and the public interest.”³⁹ The group’s position initially proved too moderate for some potential members. Some activists in the Sierra Club leadership, like former executive director David Brower, initially pushed for the group’s environmental focus towards national parks and pristine wilderness instead of the more polluted Bay Area shoreline.⁴⁰ When the issue eventually became more popular, the Sierra Club became much more involved. Corporate interests, defeated by the earlier creation of the BCDC, loathed the expansion of any regulatory structure.

The narrow membership and focus of the California Coastal Alliance was compounded by communications from 1971 and early 1972, employing technical jargon and assuming a politically astute audience. Other than the CCA’s self-evident name, many of these mailings are so narrowly focused that there is scant evidence of beaches, coastline, or oceans. The Alliance

³⁷ Early legislation from 1970 and 1971 was less environmentally strict than the subsequent Initiative as members of the Alliance were willing to compromise with Republican legislators towards majority support. See Douglas, “Cancer and Saving the Sundown Coast – A Personal Story Part I.”

³⁸ Janet Adams, “A Call for Action for Coast Folk,” September 1971, California Coastal Management Papers, The Water Resource Center Archives, University of California, Riverside; Janet Adams to Coastal Alliance Members, September 1971, California Coastal Management Papers.

³⁹ Janet Adams to Friends of Conservation Coordinators, March 3, 1971, California Coastal Management Papers.

⁴⁰ Notably, Brower and the Sierra Club did nothing to try to stop the 1961 Reber Plan, which would have flooded the San Francisco Bay with fresh water and dramatically altered the environment. See Charles Wollenberg, “The Man Who Helped Save the Bay by Trying to Destroy It,” *Boom: A Journal of California*, April 15, 2015, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2015/04/14/the-man-who-helped-save-san-francisco-bay-by-trying-to-destroy-it/>. Brower and the Sierra Club also split in the late 1960s over the possible nuclear power plant at either Nipomo Dunes or Diablo Canyon. See Pincetl, *Transforming California*, 194–95; Robert Wyss, *The Man Who Built the Sierra Club: A Life of David Brower* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016), 224–49.

repeatedly mailed legislative roll calls with specific lobbying instructions. It sent a highly-detailed memorandum on the forty-one amendments to a 1971 coastal protection bill, including obtuse critiques about acceptable levels of urban density and overly large *de minimis* exceptions.⁴¹ Early members of the Alliance were also activists familiar with the political process from past campaigns. Janet Adams and Claire Dedrich orchestrated multiple congressional races while Bill Kortum was actively involved in efforts by Californians Organized to Acquire Access to State Tidelands (COAAST) to stop the construction of Sea Ranch.⁴² These local insiders needed little or no convincing to support coastal legislation, only a steady stream of political updates and action items.

Coastal Alliance's initial strategy was to orchestrate enough political support to pass coastal legislation in the California Legislature despite their limited member base and correspondingly limited influence among the state's representatives. The Alliance leaders (from San Francisco, Marin, and Sonoma) did have one important ally and CCA member in Los Angeles, Ellen Stern Harris, who maintained her long-standing political relationship with her childhood friend, Assemblyman Alan Sieroty.⁴³ In 1970, Sieroty introduced legislation (amended

⁴¹ Ray E. McDevitt, "RE: Position of the Coastal Alliance on Amendments to Senate Bill 1555," August 23, 1971, California Coastal Management Papers.

⁴² Bill Kortum, "How It All Got Started," California Coastal Trail, <http://www.californiacoastaltrail.info/cms/pages/trail/kortum.html>.

⁴³ Ellen Stern Harris was an important figure in Los Angeles environmental circles by the late 1960s. Harris served on the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, wrote a Consumer Advocate column for the *Los Angeles Times*, served on the Los Angeles County Beach Advisory Committee, and even helped produce a television show. As the campaign for Proposition 20 began, Harris had been campaigning to preserve the Ballona Wetlands against the construction of San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station. In 1972, Harris was appointed to the Coastal Commission after the passage of Proposition 20. In 1976, Harris left the Commission, claiming it had been corrupted by developers and wasn't doing enough. Her decision created a rift in environmental circles and likely substantially strained her friendship with her peers. The Ellen Stern Harris Papers originally comprised over two hundred boxes, yet offer tantalizingly little evidence of her role in the campaign for Proposition 20. Despite being a co-author and member of the Alliance, parsing her role in the struggle is extremely difficult. There are almost no documents related to the passage of Proposition 20. While her contemporaries remembered her as an ardent environmentalist, understanding her influence in a Northern California-centric campaign could offer important nuance and even substantively alter this narrative. The Harris Papers have only been available for research for a few years. More research, analysis, and scholarship is clearly needed to better tell this part of the coastal struggle.

to AB640) to the California Assembly Natural Resources Committee but it never was put to vote. Almost identical bills were reintroduced in the State Senate and Assembly in 1971 (AB1471 and SB1555) and 1972 (AB200 and SB100), but none gathered enough votes to pass both Houses despite Alliance efforts. Mailings and newsletters were full of lobbying strategies, grassroots organizing tactics, and action alerts to woo politicians to the newest bill. The organization did try one effort at greater public outreach and lobbying. In September of 1971, the Alliance organized a “Sandy Says” contest where members could win “the original Sand Pail” by submitting carbon copies of letters sent to their State Senator and Governor. Alliance members could even “submit as many entries...but each one must have a carbon of a letter to a different Senator.”⁴⁴ Politicians, however, were largely unresponsive and disinterested in an uphill battle against Republican Governor Ronald Reagan.

In November of 1971, AB1471 fell just one vote short in the Senate Natural Resources and Wildlife Committee as State Senator James Wedworth took delivery of a new purebred colt at his ranch instead of voting to support the legislation as promised.⁴⁵ The Coastal Alliance finally recognized that its political campaign had thus far been a failure. A newsletter mailing by the Alliance in March of 1972 was the last to call for lobbying (albeit half-heartedly). After outlining the recent legislative failures, Adams wrote, “thus ends the less than sanguine saga of the future of coastal legislation in 1972.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Janet Adams, “!! Call to Action for Coast Folk !!,” September 30, 1971, California Coastal Management Papers.

⁴⁵ Peter Douglas asserts “the horse was purportedly given to him by a racetrack lobbyist who also happened to represent several big oil companies who opposed our bill.” For more, see Douglas, “Cancer and Saving the Sundown Coast – A Personal Story Part I.”

⁴⁶ Janet Adams, “Coastal News Vol. II, Num. II,” March 1972, California Coastal Management Papers.

VOTE YES: Save the Beaches

Frustrated with political deadlock after more than thirty months, the California Coastal Alliance eventually implemented a radical strategic realignment towards a ballot initiative, taking the issue of coastal regulation and preservation directly to California voters. Janet Adams, speaking as Executive Director, began publically discussing the possibility of a ballot initiative in the aftermath of this defeat.⁴⁷ John Zierold recollected the initiative strategy was the idea of Dr. Richard Ball, a physicist for RAND Corporation and active member of the Angeles chapter of the Sierra Club.⁴⁸ Fifteen activists, scientists, and planners associated with the Alliance then apparently gathered over a kitchen table and collaboratively wrote the majority of Proposition 20, building on Peter Douglas' initial draft. Members present included Janet Adams, Don May, Assemblyman Alan Sieroty, Peter Douglas, Ellen Stern Harris, and Dr. Richard Ball. After gathering sufficient signatures to qualify the initiative, the CCA had less than five months to introduce Proposition 20 to the public and advocate for its passage.

Coastal Alliance activists also took a dramatically different approach in their subsequent campaign as they strove to appeal to Californians across the state. After public hearings on the proposed coastal legislation had drawn rebukes from corporate interests, activists recognized greater popularity would require a dramatically different approach than the highly detailed mailings of 1971. The Alliance's attention pivoted away from politicians towards the populace as it used hyperbolic and syllogistic claims to emphasize the danger of legislative inaction. Like many political appeals, calls for Proposition 20 by the Alliance pared the issue down to the

⁴⁷ "Coastline Protection Measure is Defeated," *Merced Sun-Star*, November 16, 1972; Jerry Gilliam, "State Senate Panel Kills Last Major Coastline Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, November 16, 1972.

⁴⁸ John Zierold, *Environmental Lobbyist in California's Capital, 1965-1984*, Interview by Ann Lange, Sierra Club Oral History Series (Berkeley: Regional Oral History Office, Bancroft Library, 1988).

potent symbolism of the state's recreational shores. The CCA embraced its new constituency as the geographic focus of the campaign rapidly shift from Northern California to campaign material laden with evocative constructions of the threatened urban beaches of Southern California.

The Coastal Alliance needed to reach the largest possible cross-section of the electorate with its message of the necessity for coastal legislation. As membership and support swelled, campaign material needed to be rapidly legible to non-environmentalists and political novices alike. The Alliance gathered promised voters and financial support from its broad appeals to its diverse coalition partners, including the League of Women Voters, Associated Sportsmen, American Association of American Women, Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs, United Auto Workers District 6, the 1972 George McGovern Presidential campaign, and Associated Students of University of California.⁴⁹ These organizations disagreed on a few specifics of the final version of the legislation as they jockeyed for eventual concessions and political appointments for allies.⁵⁰ Alliance leaders recognized that legislative specifics might prove divisive, opting for sweeping claims about the urgent need for coastal action instead of earlier messages of balanced development.

The California Coastal Alliance succeeded in joining forces with the Sierra Club, gaining a powerful ally. In May of 1972, delegates at the Sierra Club's California Legislative Committee voted to organize a "blitz" campaign in support of Proposition 20. While the Sierra Club leadership had been lukewarm about the early legislative efforts, the push for a ballot initiative proved more popular. In January 1972, an internal report by Robert Coats entitled, "The Rip-Off

⁴⁹ Janet Adams, to Members, May 1, 1972, California Coastal Management Papers.

⁵⁰ Specifically, permissible development and the selection process for CCZCC positions. For more, see Peter Douglas, "Blog. 3 – Saving the Sundown Coast," Personal Blog, *Live Love with Cancer*, (June 2011), http://livelovewithcancer.blogspot.com/2011_06_01_archive.html.

of the California Coast,” urging local chapters and state leadership to become more involved in the yet-unnumbered Proposition. The issue presented an opportunity for the Sierra Club to “reaffirm for the entire conservation public that we have the resolve and the resources to carry environmental battles “into the streets.”⁵¹ The report also noted that the Proposition’s fate hinged on voters in the Los Angeles Basin. Other internal documents repeatedly emphasized the poor statewide performance of Proposition 20 and that “members of the Sierra Club can make or break” it.⁵² Subsequently, the Sierra Club took a central role in supporting, tuning, and amplifying Alliance communication led by veteran activist William Siri.

The California Coastal Alliance’s effort to resonate with voters was compounded by a busy election season. During fall of 1972, the California electorate was faced with twenty-two different ballot initiatives as well as local, state, congressional and presidential candidates. Coastal legislation did not initially attract anywhere near the same attention as far more polarizing ballot proposals, like abolishing the death penalty or legalizing marijuana. In an August 1972 Field Poll of adult voters, only 12% of respondents had “seen or heard anything” about Proposition 20.⁵³ The Alliance needed not only to sway a diverse group of likely voters, but also to stand out in a crowded political cycle. The CCA adopted rhetorical tactics that underscored imminent and irreparable threats as a way to reverberate with voters and generate more media coverage.

During fall of 1972, the California Coastal Alliance and the Sierra Club worked together to produce a brochure entitled “Saving Your Coast Is Up To You” that best embodied these new

⁵¹ The report cover is mistakenly dated 1971, but internal content clearly suggests it was written in January 1972. Robert Coats, “The Rip-Off of the California Coast,” January, 1972, Sierra Club records, BANC MSS 71/103 c, carton 289, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁵² John Zierold, “Shoreline Protection: Taking the Initiative,” n.d., Sierra Club Records.

⁵³ The Field Institution, “California Poll: Elections/Propositions,” 10-14 August 1972, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/.

outreach efforts. The brochure molded language and iconography to stress the potential dissolution of both the physical sands of prototypical leisure beaches and their corresponding cultural identity.⁵⁴ Evocative pictures replaced earlier blocks of legalistic text. Two of the six panels in the trifold handout featured clichéd but highly recognizable coastal scenes of leisure. The lack of geographic specificity in the pictured landscapes enabled their symbolic potential to support claims about a familiar yet illusory space. The cover image displayed two children playing in the tide on a sandy beach with a flock of seagulls flying overhead (Figure 11). This utopic shot recalled an archetypal recreational experience, easily accessible to millions of Californians. The title, “Saving Your Coast Is Up To You,” combined with a peopled beach, suggested a familiar environment to millions of Californians, yet was perhaps most evocative to voters closest to these peopled shores predominately located in Southern California.

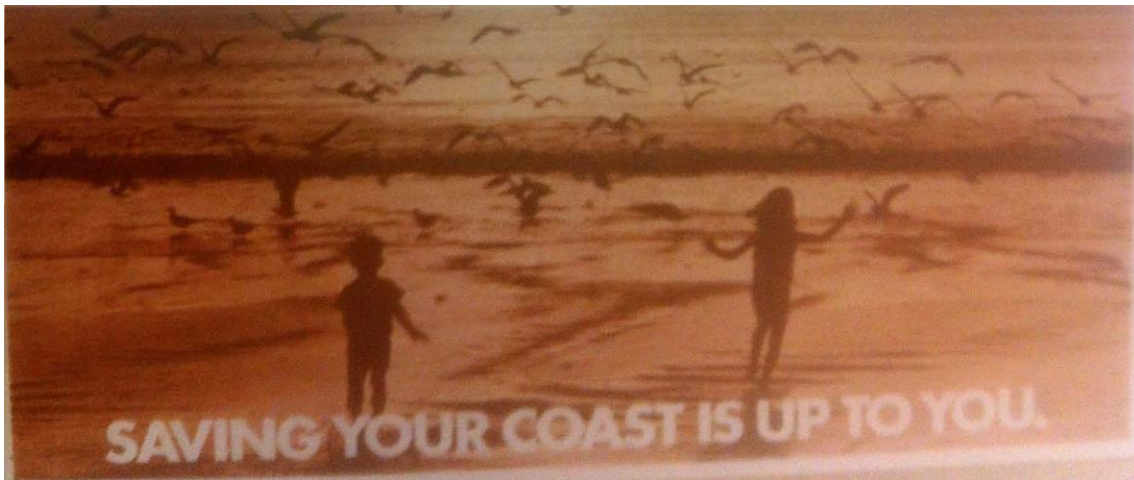


Figure 11 – Cover of the 1972 California Coastal Alliance’s “Saving Your Coast is Up to You.” Cropped by author. California Coastal Management Papers, MS 89/6, The Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Riverside.

⁵⁴ California Coastal Alliance and Sierra Club, “Saving Your Coast Is Up To You,” 1972, California Coastal Management Papers.

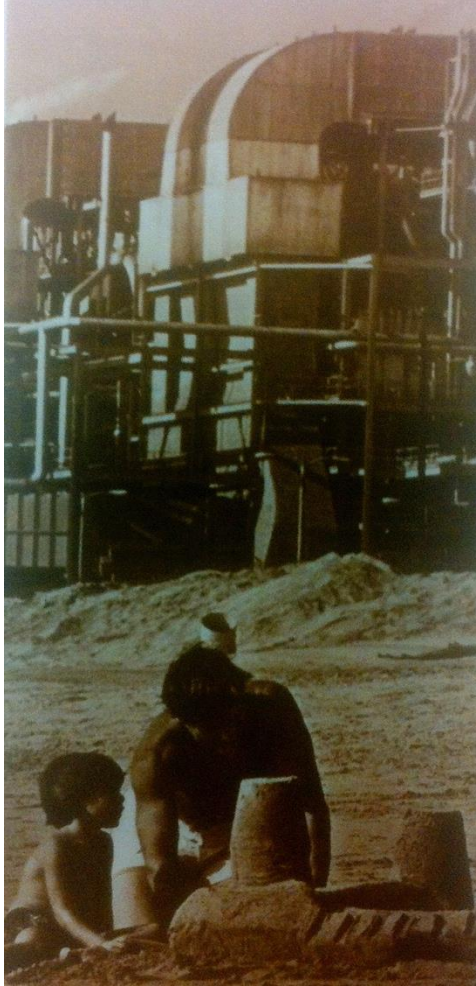


Figure 12 – Inside of “Saving Your Coast is Up to You.” Cropped by author. California Coastal Management Papers, MS 89/6, The Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Riverside.

Coastal Alliance leaders knew of the necessity of targeting voters outside of its Northern California base, particularly in Los Angeles, the state’s largest metropolitan region. In July of 1972, the CCA hired Eagles, Burke, and Menard, an advertising firm, to redefine and develop their campaign strategy. The brochure largely embodies the suggested strategies of appealing to voter self-interest and stressing the positive benefits of tourism and recreation. Activists and consultants suspected that these recreational landscapes would have the greatest resonance statewide. The beaches of Southern California fit easily within the mass cultural framework of an average Californian in the 1970s. This coastline was not constructed realistically, as the

statistically prevalent crags and rocks were absent. Nor was it depicted as a conservationist's dream of pristine wilderness. Instead, the iconography of the urban beach provoked a core sense of populist ownership capable of compelling electoral support for Proposition 20.

This notion of public accessibility was again educated inside the brochure by a photo of a father and son building a sandcastle on the beach (Figure 12). While building sandcastles was far from the most typical experience on the beach for many Californians, this pastime evoked the nostalgia of childhood and potentially represented an activity threatened by unfettered coastal development. Behind the pair loomed a gargantuan industrial structure impinging on the beach with its pipes, smokestacks, and air vents. Development threatened this iconic pastime. Further, there was a clear contrast between two forms of coastal architecture. Coastal proponents knowingly compared the ultimate low impact "structure" with sprawling and unsightly heavy industry. Finally, a sand castle was a coastal edifice available to all residents, conveying a sense of public access. This was subtly juxtaposed against opponent Citizen Against the Coastal Initiative's ideology of "home rule" imbued in other representations of the urban beach. This alternate conception of the shore prominently factored into the arguments made by the opponents of Proposition 20.

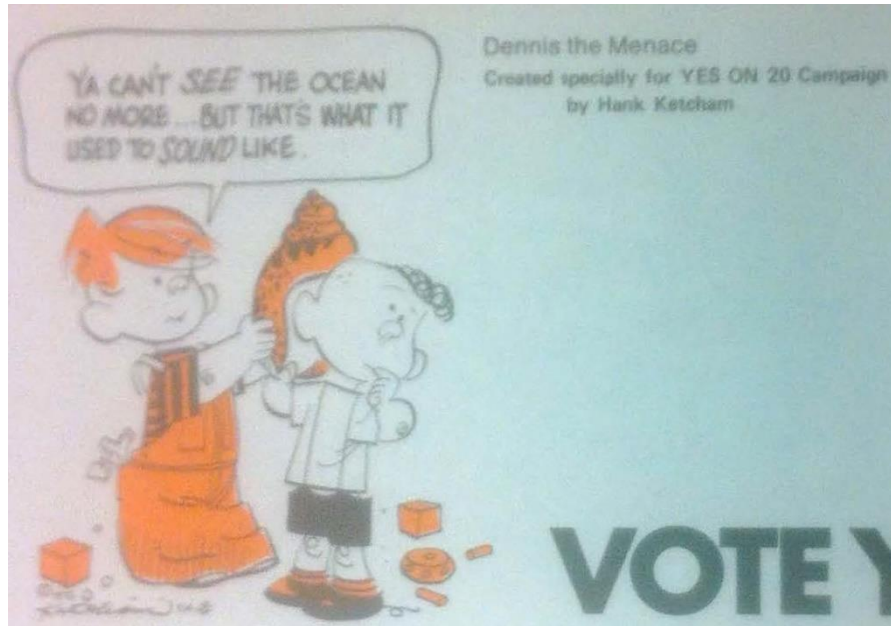


Figure 13 – Back of “Saving Your Coast is Up to You.” Cropped by author. California Coastal Management Papers, MS 89/6, The Water Resources Center Archives, University of California, Riverside.

Finally, the back of the brochure reinforced these themes with an original “Dennis the Menace” cartoon by Hank Ketchum for the CCA (Figure 13). Dennis holds a conch shell to his friend’s ear and says, “Ya can’t *see* the ocean no more...but that’s what it used to *sound* like.”⁵⁵ The cartoon offered a dystopian future to alarm voters. The photographs and cartoon transformed the beach into a fluid artifact, worthy of preservation for future generations. Without action by the viewer, however, the urban beach, a product of shared historical negotiations, would be forever lost. Additionally, tropes of social nostalgia and imminent threats to the coast were reinforced. Imagery on CCA propaganda ensured that the rhetorical claims were read within the context of the seemingly ever-present urban beach.

Arguments inside the CCA brochure largely reinforced the claims made by the visual imagery of the urban beach as popular space for recreation and leisure under imminent threat.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

The text was written in a second-person narrative, emphasizing its communality with extensive use of the pronouns “you” and “our.” Walking, swimming, and simply gazing upon the beach were referenced as prototypical experiences, illustrating both the wide accessibility of the place to the electorate and symbolizing the role of everyday practice in identity making. Finally, claims that Proposition 20 would “save our shrinking shoreline...for all the children to come” and “guarantee that you can get to the beach ten year from now” stressed the temporal nature of the urban beach. Readers were left with a sense that the beach as they had known it would not last much longer without immediate action.

The political trajectory of the Coastal Alliance’s campaign from wonky details for Bay Area political insiders to a cultural appeal to the entire state increasingly offered linguistic claims about the urban beach. The CCA’s strategy defined the parameters of political discourse around Proposition 20 in terms of popular access, California identity, and temporality. The calculated approach resonated with voters and awareness for the referendum dramatically increased.

VOTE NO: Stifling Regulation

Opponents of Proposition 20 also bombarded voters statewide with political claims laced with visual and textual tropes of Southern California’s familiar recreational beach. As the Coastal Alliance’s sprawling coalition of activist organizations worked to pass the ballot initiative, the exceedingly well-financed Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative (CACI) challenged them at every turn. The populist-sounding organization was actually composed of corporate developers, utilities, energy companies, and the construction industry. CACI, through their public relations firm, attempted to court voters with a series of changing tactics that

condemned Proposition 20. During the last few weeks of the campaign, these strategic pivots crystallized with CACI's repositioning towards an attention grabbing, mass media campaign. The deployment of a bevy of urban beach symbolism increased voter awareness and turned some voters against the proposition. Tracing the escalation of parallel ideas used by both the CCA and CACI bares the centrality of iconic beaches of Southern California to the 1972 election discourse despite CACI's eventual defeat.

The opponents of Proposition 20 regularly campaigned against any form of statewide coastal legislation beginning in the late 1960s. Lobbyists at public hearings and conferences mocked regulation as "a strong desire to return to Walden."⁵⁶ State Senator Peter Behr (R-Marin), a conservationist ally, attributed the repeated demise of proposed bills to the work of "34 special interest lobbyists [who] have been meeting frequently in Room 704 of Sacramento's venerable Senator hotel...to defeat, derail, or dilute strong coastal legislation."⁵⁷ Lobbyists represented the California Chamber of Commerce, League of California Cities, California Manufacturers Association, building trades unions, coastal land developers and energy companies like Union Oil.⁵⁸ Until the ballot initiative campaign, the Chamber of Commerce's California Coastline Committee was responsible for much of coordination between forces opposed to coastal regulation. Independently, local chapters of the Chamber of Commerce in Southern California banded together to form a task force opposing 1971's coastal legislation by Assemblyman Sieroty (AB1471).⁵⁹ The group also worked more discreetly to help pass more

⁵⁶ Barbara S Gardner, ed., *The Crowded Coast; the Development and Management of the Coastal Zone of California.*, Sea Grant Program (Los Angeles: Center for Urban Affairs, University of Southern California, 1971).

⁵⁷ Peter H. Behr, "Will the Coastal Initiative Save the Shoreline ...?" *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1972.

⁵⁸ Stanley Scott, *Governing California's Coast* (Berkeley: Institute of Governmental Studies, University of California, Berkeley, 1975), 319–52.

⁵⁹ Represented Southern California cities included Santa Monica, Malibu, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Hermosa Beach, Wilmington, Torrance, and Avalon. See Cliff Tarpy, "Group Whets Axe For Coastal Bill" *Santa Monica Evening Outlook*, February 7, 1972.

favorable legislation. State Senator Dennis Carpenter (R-Orange County) introduced SB860 in 1972, a coastal bill with few regulatory mechanics and far more generous taxation structure for public benefits.⁶⁰

The Coastal Alliance's decision to pass legislation through a ballot initiative in 1972 caught the normally-savvy opponents off guard and unprepared for the new phase of the political battle. Lobbyists and corporate allies rushed to develop early critiques of the initiative. Unsurprisingly, these early condemnations of the initiative rather transparently reflected their authors' concerns of draconian regulations on land use and a stifled economy. A July 1972 mailing by the California Coastline Committee to local chapters is illustrative of this early phase. Sacramento lobbyists Don Fultz and Jack Smith warned Chamber businesses of the supposed impact of the initiative on "existing property rights, [the] concept of elected government, total cost to taxpayers, ...[the] economy, and [the] precedent for future land control legislation."⁶¹ This view of cascading catastrophe served to rally opposition, but did little to engage the general public. The ballot initiative was treated as a strictly monetary measure in which regulation would hinder commerce.

Corporate opponents quickly worked in tandem to understand and articulate the legislation's impact. Perhaps feeling unprepared, the same mailing by the Coastline Committee included a detailed legislative analysis and called for recipients to "study the issue," "study alternative proposals," and "consult your County Assessor on tax-base implications."⁶² This

⁶⁰ Perhaps unsurprisingly, Senator Carpenter subsequently retired from politics in 1978 and founded Carpenter Snodgrass & Associates, one of the state's top lobbying firms for decades. Carpenter then more formally represented the interests of Arco at the California State Capitol. For more California Coastline Committee communications, see Series 40: Florence Klinger Papers, 1963-1976, Sierra Club Members Papers, BANC MSS 71/295 c, folders 1-2, carton 73, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley.

⁶¹ California Coastline Committee, "The Coastal Zone Conservation Act," California Chamber of Commerce, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

⁶² *Ibid.*

analytical approach mirrored efforts by city and county counsels to evaluate the new legislation and determine local impacts. Opponents hoped it would find a critique through extensive study. With less than four months until the election, organizers recognized the need to move beyond legal analysis towards a strategy to alarm voters.

Concerted efforts to quash an unrelated piece of environmental legislation also distracted many of Proposition 20's opponents from a more strategic and thoughtful campaign. A ballot initiative in June of 1972, Proposition 9 or the Clean Environment Act, submitted by Ed Koupals and the People's Lobby, would have strictly regulated pollution and created a five-year moratorium on nuclear power plant construction, but was rejected by voters.⁶³ The coastal initiative was not the most ambitious environmental proposal presented to the California electorate. Most analyses of the campaign suggested that the defeat was the result of the efforts by "one of the most successful professional public relations firms in the United States, Whitaker and Baxter of San Francisco."⁶⁴ Faced with new hurdles and little time until the November election, opponents had little time to savor their victory. Instead, they promptly retained Whitaker & Baxter for help again.

Whitaker & Baxter Campaign Inc. was a distinguished firm with a proven approach to winning elections. Eventually run by Clem Whitaker Jr., the conservative enterprise was extremely successful and won 70 of 75 contests between 1933 and the 1960s, including the defeat of Upton Sinclair in the 1934 gubernatorial race. Their tremendous success mostly reflected their seemingly patented approach to elections. Each time they began with extensive analysis of the issues and detailed opposition research, crafting both an offensive campaign plan

⁶³ Prop. 9 lost by a 2 to 1 margin, 3,901,151 to 2,128,087. For the best overview, see David D Schmidt, *Citizen Lawmakers: The Ballot Initiative Revolution* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 46–49.

⁶⁴ Lutrin and Settle, "The Public and Ecology," 360.

and a defensive counterstrategy. Whitaker & Baxter would then launch an expensive television and radio media blitz that transformed politics into an entertaining contest “by constant pounding away” at “a message, pithily and pungently expressed and kept as simple as possible.”⁶⁵ This effective and savvy campaign style resonated with voters and formed the basis of their playbook. With a winning background and successful political strategy, it is no surprise that opponents enlisted Whitaker & Baxter to defeat the measure.⁶⁶ With their help, Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative was finally formed.

Whitaker & Baxter fired their first public salvo of the campaign when they official submitted both a rebuttal to arguments in favor and a separate argument against Proposition 20 to the California Secretary of State. The firm had little time to research the issue and write these pieces before the election guide printing deadline and these early portions of campaign rhetoric reveal a clear attempt to reject the Alliance’s beach-centric language as distracting voters from an undemocratic land grab. While more persuasive, the emphasis on property rights still resembled earlier generations of legislative counterarguments. The rebuttal was an unequivocal refutation of the Alliance’s conjuring of the urbanized leisure beach, lampooning the spatial claims as evading the facts. Assertions to “[protect] California’s beaches” or “stop our beaches from becoming the exclusive playground of the rich” were rejected as misleading.⁶⁷ CACI claimed to reveal the legislation it as a devolved “scheme for appropriating private property without paying for it.” Voters were repeatedly warned a “land grab” would create “a severe

⁶⁵ Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 194–97.

⁶⁶ For more on Whitaker & Baxter, see Dennis W. Johnson, *Democracy for Hire: A History of American Political Consulting* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Jill Lepore, “How Politics Became a Business,” *The New Yorker*, September 24, 2012; Kathryn S. Olmsted, *Right Out of California: The 1930s and the Big Business Roots of Modern Conservatism* (New York: The New Press, 2015).

⁶⁷ California Secretary of State, “Proposed Amendments to the Constitution,” California State Archives, 1972, <http://library.uchastings.edu/library/california-research/ca-ballot-pamphlets.html>, 53-54.

economic depression in every one of the 15 coastal counties.”⁶⁸ Unfortunately for CACI, the cost and exclusivity of coastal property neutered the impact of these alarmist cries. The pitch likely appealed to CACI’s corporate steering committee, but it was less successful among the electorate. The largest seaside landowners were the same corporations bankrolling CACI, including the Irvine Corporation, Deane & Deane, Standard Oil and Bechtel.⁶⁹ Most voters did not own coastal real estate and thus had little to lose from potential setbacks to coastal development.

Cunningly, however, Whitaker & Baxter alleged the proposition “bypass[es] the democratic process” in a strategic effort to appeal landowners elsewhere. An “appointed, not elected, super-government to control the destinies of almost 3½ million people... would grab our coastline for their own purposes then be after our mountains, our lakes and streams, our farmlands.”⁷⁰ They intoned the legal precedent set by the initiative might cause regulation to spiral out of control and encompass the majority of property in the state. The dramatic uptick in environmental legislation nationally during the late 1960s and early 1970s only exacerbated this fear, and it clearly aimed at support in inland counties. Many residents of the Central Valley and the northeast corner of the state were financially dependent on these land-intensive businesses. After the election, Clem Whitaker, Jr. asserted that geography was largely irrelevant to the issue. The “[environmentalists] just happened, in this instance, to pick the coastal area.”⁷¹ According to Janet Adams, however, this simplistic reading backfired as CACI inadvertently offended

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Collectively, CACI received over \$150,000 from these four donors. See “Prop. 20 Foes Raise \$435,000,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, September 27, 1972.

⁷⁰ California Secretary of State, “Proposed Amendments to the Constitution,” 54.

⁷¹ Clement Sherman Whitaker, Jr. Oral History Interview, Conducted 1989 by Gabrielle Morris, Regional Oral History Office, University of California at Berkeley, for the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program, 145-146.

residents' sense of intelligence and "unwittingly made friends for the Coastal Alliance."⁷² Voters were not only suspicious of the idea of the slippery regulatory slope; it seems likely that voters were insulted by the claim that a direct democracy referendum was undemocratic. The ineffectiveness of these flawed rhetorical strategies necessitated new approaches.

By late summer of 1972, representatives of Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative began publically questioning the legal integrity of the proposition, hoping to tie the bill up in the court system. CACI lawyers tried to impugn the legal capabilities of the legislation's authors. This counterargument predicated an elite discourse of expertise and formed as they gathered legalistic and technocratic studies on the proposed coastal legislation. A report by the Office of the Los Angeles County Counsel from July of 1972 was clearly influential when it warned "it is possible that the effect of the initiative would be virtual elimination of development along the coast until 1977." This language was quickly incorporating into marketing strategies. Opponents ignored other parts of the report that described the initiative as "technically well-written" and able to "preserve the coastal environment."⁷³ Perhaps unsatisfied with an impartial report, Whitaker & Baxter even commissioned a 300-page investigation, *Preservation and Management of California's Coastline*, which critically analyzed the legality of each provision in the proposition.⁷⁴ The report broadly castigated issues including government land-use controls and the undemocratic potential of initiative provisions. Whitaker & Baxter judiciously spread the report to conservative allies and friendly media members.

⁷² Adams, "Proposition 20--A Citizens' Campaign," 1019.

⁷³ John D Maharg, "Opinion on the Coastal Conservation Act" (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles Office of the County Counsel, 1972), Frederick C. Whitney Papers, Special Collections & University Archives, San Diego State University.

⁷⁴ Kahl Associates and Ralph Andersen and Associates, "Preservation and Management of California's Coastline; a Critical Analysis of the California Coastal Zone Conservation Initiative of 1972" (Washington, 1972), Box R25, Ronald Reagan's Governor's Papers, Resource Agency: Files, 1967-1974 - Series I: Governor's Office, Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, California.

Opponents of the Proposition bolstered the credibility of these expert judicial analyses by mocking Alliance rhetoric as a crude effort to disguise defective legislation. In late September of 1972, Whitaker & Baxter formally introduced CACI at a press conference in Los Angeles. Speakers engaged in classic mudslinging and sought to denigrate the CCA by loosely stressing its supposedly amateurish tactics. CACI tried to take the tone of jurisprudence and exude trustworthy expertise as it pointed to supposed mistakes in the measure. CACI cochairman and attorney A.L. Hamilton excoriated the Alliance for failing to “really read and analyze the measure and its effects before popping off” and repeatedly ridiculed the “misleading claims of the proponents.” His fellow cochairman, Mayor Edwin Wade of Long Beach and past president of the League of California Cities, summarized the proposition as “a loosely-worded, ill-conceived piece of legislation.”⁷⁵ Listeners were left wondering about the credibility of the Alliance.

Vote NO: Conservation Yes, Confiscation No

In early October, the next salvo came as CACI’s released over one million copies of two pieces of political advertising that supposedly called attention to specific legal flaws in Proposition 20. They encouraged voters to act as an appellate court, interrogating the legality of Proposition 20. The effort brought CACI closer to manipulating the evocative potential of place. Advertising was distributed by bulk mailings and through partner organizations.⁷⁶ A short pamphlet stressed the specter of coastal conservation extending inland along tributaries, while a

⁷⁵ Whitaker & Baxter Campaigns Inc., “Formation of Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative,” Los Angeles, September 25, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

⁷⁶ “A county-by-county shipment of 286,750 copies of the small folder “What’s Wrong with the Coastal Initiative?” went to California Real Estate Association offices for local distribution among membership and other individuals.” Whitaker & Baxter, “The Proposition No. 20 Campaign, 1972: An Analysis by Whitaker & Baxter,” n.d., 9, Frederick C. Whitney Papers.

detailed brochure called for alarm over the supposed textual ambiguity of the term “coastal zone.” Both pieces were printed with CACI’s new slogan, “Conservation YES, Confiscation NO.” It hinted that coastal proponents were ineptly working against their own goal of conservation. CACI wanted voters to believe they supported conservation, but their expertise about Proposition 20 prevented them from supporting flawed legislation. They asked the public to render a verdict on detailed charges against the initiative.

The four-page pamphlet, “What’s Wrong With The Coastal Initiative,” blasted a supposed loophole in the legislation. This critique, on the front cover and metaphorically above the fold, decried “a ‘permit area’ which extends not just along the ocean but to such inland cities as Sacramento and Stockton.”⁷⁷ The piece continued efforts by CACI to appeal to inland voters who might be less passionate about beaches or coastal space. Legal interpretations of Proposition 20 hypothesized that the California Coastal Zone Conservation Commission’s (CCZCC) jurisdictional authority would extend upstream along all tidal tributaries.⁷⁸ The numerous rivers that flow into the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta (and eventually the Pacific Ocean) fan out to envelop most of Northern California. The cover image dramatically reinforced this message with a stylized image of the state of California. The Proposition’s permit area was thickly traced along not only the coast, but also along these tributaries. Inland waterways acted like tentacles of unjust regulation engulfing California. CACI hoped this risky loophole from imprecise Alliance language might force the public to consider the technical merits of the legislation, not the politics of environmental conservation.

⁷⁷ Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative, “What’s Wrong with the Coastal Initiative,” 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

⁷⁸ A lawsuit by Proposition 20 opponents based on this interpretation was denied a temporary restraining order by a Superior Court judge. See Alan Cline, “Prop 20 Suit Thrown Out,” *San Francisco Examiner*, September 30, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection. California Attorney General Evelle Younger later unofficially dismissed this argument. See Evelle J. Younger to Whitaker and Baxter, November 2, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

In almost half a million copies of a 16-page brochure entitled “Where is the Coast,” Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative sounded the alarm over the geographic ambiguity in specific legal terms in the Proposition. The brochure claimed that regulatory boundaries of the CCZCC threatened common conventions as a nebulous “coastal zone” supposedly obfuscated the coast.⁷⁹ The cover displayed the same threatening image of the state covered by the CCZCC’s capillary-like, regulatory zones, similar to 19th century political cartoons depicting railroads as an octopus. The brochure began by doubting the seemingly obvious location of the coast. While “most people think of the California coast as the shorelands immediately adjoining the Pacific Ocean,” the piece claimed “nobody knows for sure” the location of the coastal zone established by Proposition 20.⁸⁰ The initiative called for a variegated regulatory zone dependent on coastal geography and the littoral ecosystem. This fluctuating zone challenged more conventional notions of the coast as a ribbon along the state’s edge. Opponents hoped to highlight the dissonance between legislation and the popular imagination. Proposition 20 was not about the cherished coast, but an ambiguous and varied scientific habitat.

Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative repeatedly questioned the initiative’s geographic haziness in the press. The detailed brochure provided the majority of the rhetoric for advertisements. A series of five-column by 16” newspaper advertisements were published during the second half of October 1972 in 138 daily and 504 weekly newspapers. Whitaker & Baxter designed different ads for inland counties, coastal counties, and Southern California coastal counties. The ads were intended to “bring home to the people just how Proposition No. 20 could

⁷⁹ “The California Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972 (Proposition 20) defines “Coastal Zone” as “that land and water area of the State of California from the border of the State of Oregon to the border of the Republic of Mexico, extending seaward to the outer limit of the state jurisdiction, including all islands within the jurisdiction of the state, and extending inland to the highest elevation of the nearest coastal mountain range.” See “The California Coastal Zone Conservation Act of 1972,” *California Coastal Plan*, 1975, 431-434.

⁸⁰ Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative, “Where is the Coast?,” 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

affect them, wherever in the state they lived” by “spotlight[ing] the...ambiguity of...what lands would come under...restrictive jurisdiction ”⁸¹ By destabilizing engrained understandings of place, CACI tried to defuse the emotional charge associated with the California coast. After decades of cultural construction and years of propaganda by the CCA, coastal support was ubiquitous. CACI’s slogan “Conservation YES” signaled even Proposition 20’s opponents supported some form of coastal legislation. CACI sapped the emotions imbued in the landscape of the beach by constructing the initiative as forming yet another inland regulatory agency. Voters had little invested in this space.⁸² The beach was a well-known place, but the technocratic “coastal zone” was only a physical location. The CCA’s cries were rebuked as an emotional distraction. Numerous editorials and press releases sponsored by CACI condemned “emotion-charged rhetoric,” “emotionalized arguments,” “emotional appeals,” and “using a highly emotional issue such as protection of the beaches as a smoke screen.”⁸³ CACI continued to present its public persona as issue-oriented experts.

Throughout the election cycle, elected officials’ critiques of CACI’s campaign blunted the ideological impact of the no campaign. Santa Monica Assemblymen Alan Sieroty and Paul Priolo’s “truth squad” held press conferences and watchdog committee hearings to dispute claims made by Proposition 20’s opponents. Bob Moretti, Speaker of the California Assembly, used his position as a bully pulpit and personally harangued Clem Whitaker Jr. about the accuracy of CACI’s advertising. An Alliance activist recollected that after being subpoenaed

⁸¹ Whitaker & Baxter, “The Proposition No. 20 Campaign, 1972: An Analysis by Whitaker & Baxter,” 12.

⁸² As Yi-Fu Tuan explains, “what begins as undifferentiated space becomes place as we get to know it better and endow it with value.” See Yi-fu Tuan, *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 6.

⁸³ “Roughing In,” *Los Angeles Building News*, September 22, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection; A.L. Hamilton, “Statement for Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative,” radio transcript, KYMS, Santa Ana, 26 October 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection; “Prop. 20 is Overkill,” *Orange County Daily Pilot*, October 26, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection; San Diegans Against Proposition No. 20, “Proposition 20 is an Immoral Measure,” San Diego, October 27, 1972, Frederick C. Whitney Papers.

Clem Whitaker Jr. was “humiliated by being denounced by a legislative committee,” but that the hearing “did make the point that the advertising was fraudulent.”⁸⁴ Even Governor Reagan, who described Proposition 20 as having “more booby traps than a trail in Vietnam,” was cornered into condemning CACI’s propaganda.⁸⁵ These repudiations of CACI’s slogans and tactics by politicians revealed a flaw in their claims of expertise. With a looming deadline and an increasingly skeptical public, CACI finally began to infuse its claims with an emotional charge that superseded technocratic merit.

VOTE NO: Save the Beaches

In late October, Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative tactically repositioned one last time to emphasize that Proposition 20 threatened to lock up the beloved beaches. Suddenly all campaign material was branded with the slogan, “Don’t Lock Up the Beach.” This political strategy was first introduced in Southern California, but quickly spread statewide. Rhetoric about authority and accessibility was conducive to attention-captivating slogans. Strategists at Whitaker & Baxter knew that a more sensational, media-centric campaign was necessary to overcome a delayed start and bad publicity to attract voters. The urgency was exacerbated as CACI’s legal challenges continued to fail, rarely getting beyond preliminary injunction hearings. The firm traditionally saved its most compelling and lurid messages for the end of its campaigns. CACI “devised [these claims] when polling showed they touched those issues appeal[ed] to potential ‘no’ voters.”⁸⁶ They believed “seventy-five percent of all resources should be reserved

⁸⁴ Gustaitis, “How the Coast Was Won: An Interview with Lew Reid.”

⁸⁵ Bill Leonard, “Reagan Blasts Coast Initiative, Demos,” *Palo Alto Times*, September 23, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection. For more detailed analysis, see Janell Anderson, *Economic Regulation and Development Goals: The California Coastal Initiative* (Davis: Institute of Governmental Affairs, University of California, 1974), 69–72.

⁸⁶ Endicott, “Ad Campaigns for Initiatives Come Under Blistering Attack.”

for the final month, the final week, the final days of the contest.”⁸⁷ As they had done successfully in previous campaigns, Whitaker & Baxter orchestrated an approach to steamroll any lingering support.

In Southern California, CACI dramatically increased advertising that referenced urbanized beaches used for leisure and recreation. Southern Californians disinterest in CACI’s earlier campaign material necessitated this new approach that stressed the vague threat of cultural loss. The potential reach of Proposition 20 was not concerning to the region’s residents more than familiar with the popular topography of the Santa Monica Bay. While “Conservation Yes, Confiscation No” dominated billboards in San Francisco, Los Angeles was draped with warnings of permanently lost beaches. CACI hoped Angelenos, living in the epicenter of the compelling landscape, would be more ideologically invested in protecting their beaches. Angelenos on average spent far more time at the beach than many residents elsewhere in the state. As the CCA’s billboard tampering revealed, supporters *and* opponents of Proposition 20 in Southern California were invested in protecting different aspects of its developed coast and felt a clear sense of spatial ownership.

Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative rapidly spread familiar images and metaphors of the beach statewide with deliberate rhetorical choices in newspaper and television advertisements. CACI had previously referred to the state’s western edge as the “permit area,” “coastal zone,” “littoral zone,” “coastline,” “coastal areas,” “seashore,” and “seaside” while actively avoiding the word “beach.”⁸⁸ Whitaker & Baxter tweaked the language of CACI’s 30-second, beach-centric television spot to exclusively use the term to describe the threatened

⁸⁷ Starr, *Golden Dreams*, 195.

⁸⁸ It was only rarely employed in explicitly recreational contexts. See “Park Land” section in Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative, “The Coastal Zone Initiative Fact Sheet,” 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

landscape. The spot script read in part, “Proposition 20, the coastal initiative doesn’t provide one dime for new access roads to California’s beaches, or expansion of camping and other facilities...the beach already belongs to the public. The problem is to get to it.”⁸⁹ The design for the final newspaper advertisement also hammered this new slogan through repetition. Newspapers statewide featured advertisements broadcasting, “If you like to spend leisure hours on the ocean beach...Vote NO on Proposition No. 20.”⁹⁰ Advertisements were featured in newspapers intended for varied geographic and ethnic audiences, including the *Los Angeles Times*, *La Opinion*, *Modesto Bee*, and *Merced Sun-Star*. Spatially and emotionally charged language had replaced technocratic discourses of expertise.

These public entreaties explicitly manipulated the beach’s identity as the symbolic home of recreation and a cultural lifestyle of leisure. The text of the newspaper advertisement claimed that Proposition 20 would not “make one dime available for new access roads to California’s beaches, or for any expansion of camping, picnicking, boating, and other recreational facilities for the public.”⁹¹ Imagery of sweeping shots of peopled beaches dominated both newspaper and television advertisements. As CACI tried to emphasize themes of access and recreation, they also reminded voters that a human presence at the seascape was fundamental to this constructed environment. By displaying the phenomenological experiences that helped to fabricate the urban beach, voters not only saw a familiar landscape, but were also reminded of Proposition 20’s ability to unmake the beach.⁹² If daily practice of this lifestyle were prohibited, cultural constructions of the imagined landscape of Southern California’s beaches might quickly unravel.

⁸⁹ Adams, “Proposition 20--A Citizens’ Campaign,” 1040.

⁹⁰ Whitaker & Baxter, “The Proposition No. 20 Campaign, 1972: An Analysis by Whitaker & Baxter,” 13.

⁹¹ Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative, “If You Like to Spend Leisure Hours on the Ocean Beach,” advertisement, *Los Angeles Times*, November 1972.

⁹² As David Harvey has argued, places lack permanence and “are, in short, always contingent on relation processes that create, sustain, and dissolve them.” See David Harvey, *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 190.

CACI introduced a beach that appeared visually similar to the CCA's marketing, but with decidedly different ideological underpinnings. Proposition 20's opponents had a vested interest in continuing to subtly imbricate Los Angeles' famous beach with ideologies of home rule and local autonomy. From Marion Davies' extravagant beach home in Malibu to Sonoma's exclusive Sea Ranch, many of the state's land developers and wealthier residents treasured their rights to construct coastal residences regardless of the environmental, recreational, or social impacts.⁹³ The vagueness of "lock up the beaches" allowed CACI to hint at recreational beach access while really speaking private property rights and unfettered development. Cities throughout the state also loathed to cede any regulatory authority and tried to paint themselves as allies of the common man in this regulatory struggle. Long Beach mayor and CACI cochairman Edwin Wade lamented, "under the provisions of Proposition No. 20 home rule is wiped out and local control of local destinies is handed over to the bureaucrats."⁹⁴ California's strong tradition of "home-rule culture ensures that zoning and land use are the sacred cows of local government; woe betide the state official who tries to take them away."⁹⁵ CACI hoped voters wanted to keep their sandy self-determination.

During a telephone press release early on, Clem Whitaker Jr. promised, "the campaign against the measure is going to be waged on the initiative itself, not a childish game of deception which the proponents seem interested in generating."⁹⁶ Yet despite this blustering, CACI

⁹³ This issue far from unique to Los Angeles. For a more detailed interrogation of class, landownership, and coastal place, see Kahrl, "Fear of an Open Beach." For more legalistic analysis of coastal public trust doctrine, see Jack H Archer, *The Public Trust Doctrine and the Management of America's Coasts* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994); Diana M Whitelaw and Gerald Robert Visgilio, eds., *America's Changing Coasts: Private Rights and Public Trust* (Northampton: E. Elgar, 2005).

⁹⁴ Whitaker & Baxter Campaigns Inc., "Eleven More Coastal Cities Say No," October 13, 1972, Coastal Initiative Collection.

⁹⁵ Press, *Saving Open Space*.

⁹⁶ Whitaker & Baxter Campaigns Inc., "Response to Janet Adams," August 29-30, 1972, Frederick C. Whitney Papers.

adopted similar tactics less than two months later. Warnings about the appropriation of private property were replaced with pleas of “Don’t Lock Up the Beach!” Whitaker & Baxter’s eventual emphasis on Southern California’s prized beaches in their final advertisements represented an unspoken capitulation to the CCA’s framing of the political discourse surrounding Proposition 20. Efforts to generate concern over an abstract, heterogeneously bounded region failed to resonate with voters while iconic leisure beaches were immediately recognized throughout the state.

Opposition to the initiative substantially increased under this suggestive media barrage, but CACI was never able to overcome the CCA’s lead. A poll by The Field Institute days before the election found that voter awareness for Proposition 20 had increased to 72%.⁹⁷ Alliance’s polling numbers as CACI blanketed the airwaves. Proponent activists sensed that the campaigns narrowed in divide, but hoped to hang on for eventual victory.⁹⁸ Both groups found clear success with visions of the recreational beach. The initiative passed with just over 55% of the vote and an 800,000-vote margin; a victory for the California Coastal Alliance. After losing, CACI’s public relation firm, Whitaker & Baxter, published a final report that outlined campaign hurdles including uncompromising environmental extremists, and meddlesome public officials. The political veterans noted that the primary struggle, however, was overcoming the tremendously popular Alliance propaganda.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ The Field Institute, “California Poll: Elections/Propositions,” 30 October – 1 November 1972, The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research, http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/data_access/ipoll/ (Accessed 9 January 2012).

⁹⁸ Peter Douglas, “Cancer and Saving the Sundown Coast – A Personal Story Part I,” 2011.

⁹⁹ Whitaker & Baxter, “The Proposition No. 20 Campaign, 1972: An Analysis by Whitaker & Baxter,” 1–5.

Forever California's Beaches?

The passage of Proposition 20 and the eventual creation of the California Coastal Commission represented a dramatic change in the history of the Santa Monica Bay and broader Southern California. The rate of development and change to California's coastal topography has waned with greater regulatory oversight. Detailed analysis of the campaigns' strategic pivots offer an important window into this moment of crystallizing change. Political slogans and imagery successfully manipulated decades of cultural understand of coastal place to great efficacy.

Fears of tectonic shift to the beloved environment of the beach worried many Californians. What scholars and observers too often saw as simply a moment of environmental activism instead represented a coronation-like affirmation of the existing coastal landscape, a product of decades of construction. While activists and the average California voter both wanted to protect the beach, the underlying vision of the landscape couldn't have been more different. Most residents across the state not only knew the Southern California's peopled shores from images and television, but also loved the landscape and saw it as part of the state's identity. Proposition 20 preserved and protected this seemingly innocuous and fun place. Activists at the core of the Coastal Alliance imagined a very different stretch of coastline under threat. They frantically hoped to save what they saw as the last remaining bits of unspoiled coast from the steady march of development. Fundamentally, voter's endorsement of Proposition 20 came from the overwhelming public desire to preserve a built environment, not protect a natural environment. Popular culture, not wilderness, represented many voters' primary priority.

Amidst a crowded campaign season with a full slate of electoral choices, the beach attracted apathetic and unaware voters. Billboards and advertisements called out to them with rhetorical strategies and visual tropes. The spatial claims of the urban beach were literally

presented to voters as their own – “the beach belongs to YOU.” The electorate was told it was not only owner of this public space, but responsible for its maintenance. Voters were reminded of their obligation to protect the coast. This framework suggests that while undoubtedly mass action was necessary to qualify for the ballot, fundraise, mobilize voters, and pass the referendum, these actions should not be seen exclusively as bottom-up social change or citizen environmentalism without acknowledging political engineering. Like so many other elections, romantic stories of democracy in action are challenged by the reality that voters’ beliefs mirrored ideological solicitations. Proposition 20 represents a triumph of political advertising through resonant urban seascapes, not civic upheaval.

For many who see environmental triumph in the Proposition 20’s passage, the 1969 Santa Barbara Oil spill was the harbinger of environmental doom that awoke many to the need for coastal protections. In 1969, a wellhead failed at a Union Oil offshore platform near Santa Barbara, causing a massive oil spill. Almost a quarter of a million gallons of oil spread over eight hundred miles, blanketing over thirty miles of central coast beaches. National media quickly descended and began to broadcast footage of polluted coastline and oil-soaked animals. Seals, otters, and pelicans marred in the black tide horrified millions of Americans.¹⁰⁰ President Nixon, said “It is sad that it was necessary that Santa Barbara should be the example that had to bring it to the attention of the American people....The Santa Barbara incident has frankly touched the conscience of the American people.”¹⁰¹ Warner Chabot, like many of the activists associated with the movement, pointed to the spill as galvanized them into action.¹⁰² Another key activist, John

¹⁰⁰ Even before the oil spill, the die off of California’s Brown Pelican from DDT spraying had raised public awareness of seabirds.

¹⁰¹ Keith C. Clarke and Jeffrey J. Hemphill, “The Santa Barbara Oil Spill: A Retrospective,” *Yearbook of the Association of Pacific Coast Geographers* 64, no. 1 (October 1, 2014): 160. For a broader environmental context, see Rothman, *The Greening of a Nation?*; Teresa Spezio, “Rising Tide: The Santa Barbara Oil Spill and Its Aftermath” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of California, Davis, 2011).

¹⁰² Jill Kramer, “Saving the Coast,”

Zierold agreed stating, “the memory of Santa Barbara’s disaster...[a]ll of those things got up us to a critical mass.”¹⁰³

This sort of mindset by activists makes the absence of Santa Barbara and allusions to the 1969 spill from the Proposition 20 campaign so notable. Adorable sea creatures are almost entirely absent from both campaigns’ advertising. This wilder and less peopled coastline held symbolic beauty, but couldn’t compel direct action. Historian Paul Sabin argues that the Santa Barbara oil spill was part of a series of environmental disasters, like the Cuyahoga River Fire, that shaped a popular political consensus for wide-ranging environmental legislation. Despite an array of environmental legislation in the aftermath of the spill, few laws if any directly addressed the underlying issue of offshore oil production.¹⁰⁴ This vision of coastal wilderness lacked the symbolic potential of Southern California’s scenic shores.

The necessary specificity of urban, recreational beaches for both campaigns’ visual elicitation also emphasizes the geographic importance of Southern California to a statewide campaign. Proponents defined the proposition as defending an idealized Southland locale by melding coastal regulation with the popular beach. Janet Adams and Coastal Alliance membership overwhelming lived in Northern California, yet Los Angeles became the eventual battleground. Television and radio advertisement purchases by Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative overwhelmingly focused on Southern California. The media market was the state’s largest, but advertisements tailored for Los Angeles quickly spread to the rest of the state.¹⁰⁵ An extensive analysis of ballot initiative voting patterns concluded that defining the terms of the

¹⁰³ Zierold, *Environmental Lobbyist in California’s Capital, 1965-1984*, 19.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Sabin, “Crisis and Continuity in U.S. Oil Politics, 1965–1980,” *Journal of American History* 99, no. 1 (June 1, 2012): 177–86.

¹⁰⁵ Whitaker & Baxter, “The Proposition No. 20 Campaign, 1972: An Analysis by Whitaker & Baxter.”

public debate was most critical to campaigns.¹⁰⁶ The discursive deployment of leisure beaches permanently shifted the framing of the Proposition from conservationist Northern California to popular culture Southern California.

Perhaps more importantly, the passage of Proposition 20 enflamed populist sentiment for the beach and largely expunged the very forces responsible for coastal construction. By the late 1960s, the constructed environment along the coast fulfilled public needs of accessible leisure, concerns for a middle-class playscape, and desires for ideal physiques. In many ways, Proposition 20 supported a vision of the beach as timeless. By conjuring civic notions of public trust, local autonomy, and resources for future generations, the recently constructed built environment comes to more closely resemble a timeless resource. While older Angelenos experienced and saw successive waves of change to the beaches, most still saw the historically contingent topography as a permanent part of the region's landscape. Proposition 20's rejection of further development reinforced the idea that Los Angeles and Southern California had always had wide, sandy beaches for recreation.

Southern California's coast had been under human construction for over one hundred years. Numerous corporations opposed the passage of Proposition 20, but real estate developers in California felt the blow particularly, losing one of their most productive and profitable landscapes. Since the late 19th century, land developers along the Santa Monica Bay played a pivotal role in its creation, from shaping its physical topography to its cultural lifestyle of leisure. For much of this time, few restrictions or regulations hampered extensive change and steady construction. Even as local governments developed coastal plans and laws, developers maintained cozy relationships with officials and continued substantive influence. Proposition 20

¹⁰⁶ Deborah Lynn Guber, *The Grassroots of a Green Revolution: Polling America on the Environment* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2003), 150.

voided these relationships. Complex regulatory structures created by the legislation empowered scientists and citizen activists to make decisions potentially removed from lobbying. While limited coastal construction continued through the 1970s and beyond to the dismay of some activists, the scale of previous endeavors has rarely been reproduced. The creation of the Coastal Commission roughly concluded the rapid construction of the Southern California coast.

Proposition 20's successful passage in 1972 finally created an agency to manage coastal conservation and development. This success, in part, stemmed from the Citizens Against the Coastal Initiative challenging strategies employed by the Coastal Alliance with surprisingly familiar rhetorical devices and political imagery. Both sides took claim to the urban beach with the slogan, "The Beach Belongs to You – Don't Lock It Up." More than any other event, the logical dissonance of both sides' declarations that they were trying to protect the beach reveals the centrality of a socially and historically produced coastal sense of place to the election. When activists crowded around a dinner table in 1971, they hoped to slow the rate of physical change to the California shoreline. None of them imagined that the California Coastal Commission would help to preserve a snapshot of the cultural life of the Santa Monica Bay. When Californians voted for Proposition 20, they affirmed what their opponents had known for decades. The symbolic landscape of the urbanized leisure beaches of Southern California captivated residents across the state and beyond.

Conclusion: Constructed Beaches, Concerning Futures

Southern California's iconic coastline, beloved by popular culture, is actually a methodically constructed landscape. While many pleasure seekers see the coastal tableau as a timeless formation, the making of place was a modern process. Over the last century, the forces of capitalism tirelessly worked to arrest natural processes and fabricate stasis. Bathhouses, plunges, and lifeguards responded to the initial physical challenges of the ocean safety and temperature. Cement halted estuarial rivers and littoral drift. Walls and palisades buffered endless residential developments from the tides. Railroads, roads, and highways carved along this controlled coast brought Angelenos to impossibly wide, sandy beaches with amenities and amusements. Advances in oceanography and coastal engineering buttressed ambitious visions as excavators reshaped the underwater topography of the nearshore. Against the tidal forces of the Pacific Ocean, a select group of individuals profitably sculpted the beaches of the Santa Monica Bay. By the 1970s, these man-made coastal attributes became a potent impetus for residential and industrial growth, reshaping the physical environment and helping to sell the beach lifestyle to millions of tourists and consumers.

Los Angeles' sun and sand intoxicated Americans for decades. The region's residents incorporated beach visits into the daily practice of urban life. Summer vacations became weekly excursions. Ever-growing members of the "lunch box crowd" took in the sights and smells of the coast every day. From a young age, beaches were a part of life for many as local organizations led swim lessons and high schools organized surfing competitions. As Midwesterners, snowbirds, and Americans across the country flocked to Southern California's beaches for tourism, countless visitors bought into coastal suburbia and became Angelenos. Even despite

racial and economic exclusion, people across the Southland made the frequent pilgrimage to the tides. Public adulation for the coast reached new heights in the 1970s as the voters of California finally asserted their will with the passage of the Coastal Initiative. Over the century, hundreds of millions of Americans consumed the landscape and the lifestyle of the region's beaches with little concern for its creation or creators.

Behind the scenes, developers, politicians, planners, and corporations worked tirelessly to appeal to Angelenos as the principal agents of change in constructing littoral leisure. The region's beaches developed as products of a highly contested political economy, stretching back nearly a century. Helped by metropolitan growth and public policy, Southern California power brokers profited immensely from promoting the region's coastline. Some of the first land speculators and railroad tycoons realized entire coastal communities like Ocean Park, Venice, or Redondo Beach. Subsequent subdividers and residential developers built sprawling residential communities, like Playa Del Rey, with help from supportive local, county, and state representatives. By the 1940s and 1950s, politicians and planners became far more involved in constructing the beach. Public-private partnerships, governmental management, and corporate projects increasingly worked in concert to profit from the coast. Beach building both proved financially profitable for developers and yielded powerful political capital for local bureaucrats. The sun-soaked leisure seekers were not the only winners at Los Angeles' beaches.

Developers quickly learned that beaches needed to be promoted as sunny, accessible, commercialized, and recreational. The success of this cultural myth proved to be a lasting boon to the area's economy through successive waves of development and profit. Bathhouse and plunge operators promised endless summer in the warmed water underneath the electric lights. Railroad and trolley companies published extensive advertising describing a coastal paradise just

within reach of Los Angeles' urban life. Seaside living could offer modern conveniences with sunny leisure and healthful ocean air. A later generation of beach builders seduced Angelenos with visions of urbane, middle-class living in manicured coastal communities like Santa Monica. These ideas have proved tremendously popular and many still define modern understandings of Southern California's shoreline.

Limited beach acreage along the Santa Monica Bay produced inevitable conflict as the region rapidly grew. Struggles over shoreline land use and governance have involved diverse political actors from the early twentieth century Chamber of Commerce to the California Coastal Commission. The popularity of sun and sand was pivotal in political battles and the eventual formation of legal structures to preserve and maintain the urban resource. This transformation has only temporarily resolved issues of zoning, aesthetics, and access to maximize the utility of the shoreline. Today's recreationally oriented beach stands in stark contrast to early seaside resorts, primitive coastal tents and cabins, or tidelands festooned with oil derricks. As local governments attempted to redevelop the shoreline over the years, they also removed institutions with potentially moral aesthetics, including saloons, gambling halls, crumbling pleasure piers, and even the weightlifters of Muscle Beach. As planners struggled to sanitize the beach, their actions further marginalized the few nonwhite and low-income residents. Some coastal tussles occurred covertly. The midcentury coastal lobbying organization, the Shoreline Planning Association, spent considerable effort trying to manipulate the California Senate and Assembly into dramatic funding increases for Southern California at the expense of funding less peopled seascapes. Other beach contests happened publically. The passage of California's Proposition 20, the Coastal Zone Conservation Act, pitted environmental activists against corporations with coastal land interests as they enticed the public with visions of sandy leisure. While California's

tidal zone had been protected since the passage of the Coastal Act, control of the shoreline has always been a contentious issue and sea level rise in the coming generation are projected to wash away this constructed consensus.

This dissertation leaves many questions about the beach unanswered. The historical development and political economy of the beach offers insights into broader understandings of leisure and popular culture in Southern California. The coastal landscape imbricates recreation with class, race, and the politics of land use, exposing underlying notions of identity and citizenship. The modern beach often embodies hegemonic culture and exclusivity, but this only represents a portion of a more vibrant past. The beach was open to all in its earliest days. During the 1910s and 1920s, a significant percentage of Los Angeles' working-class visited the amusements and pleasure piers of Venice, Ocean Park, Redondo Beach, and Long Beach. Even as many proscribed beachgoers as an extension of white suburban life in the 1950s, a more motley crowd visited the shore. Understanding the continuing questions of leisure and self-expression on the edge of society requires placing the beach within a larger historical dialogue about urban dynamics of the Los Angeles metropolis. The influence of Los Angeles beaches also spread far beyond Southern California. The landscape's rise to mass familiarity prompted a pastiche of beach developments across the globe that drew from its physical and cultural growth. From knowledge networks surrounding coastal engineering or pier construction to the latest in fashionable, celebrity swimwear, the expansion of Southern California's beach culture offers new lens to understand changing urban topography, popular ideals, and consumerism.

Today, the landscape of the beach has a popular resonance that would have been unthinkable a century ago. The sunny sands Angelenos take for granted are in fact the historic result of environmental, political, and cultural change. A sculpted shoreline buoyed changing

social norms, urban growth, and rampant coastal capitalism to create a hybrid landscape rather unique to Los Angeles. The appeal of this constructed seascape has proved tremendous since the late 1870s. This dissertation has tried to explain how this landscape has grown, who profited from its political economy, what it has meant to its residents, and why beaches have remained such a potent symbol for over a century.

Erecting the built environment of the Southern California coast took around one hundred years, but just as rapidly, its destruction looms during the 21st century. The wide, sandy beaches that stretch from Malibu to Palos Verdes are under constant pressure by wind, waves, climate change, and geologic movement. Sea level rise, beach retreat, and coastal erosion are threatening to radically transform this seemingly stable landscape. A recent oceanographic study on change to the Los Angeles region shoreline change commissioned by the City of Santa Monica models a very different meeting of sea and land than its familiar incarnation. By 2100, sea level is expected to rise over five and a half feet, subsuming the existing sands and causing beach retreat. Current residents will likely see marked changes far sooner. By 2030, with just one foot of sea level rise, “long segments of beach may essentially disappear during times of peak tides and high water levels, while cliff retreat will occur simultaneously.”¹ Perhaps more alarmingly, the report offers few suggestions to prevent this shift in the sands, acknowledging the inevitability of environmental change. A well-known oceanographer of the California Coast has begun to document the disappearing communities and neighborhoods that will be swallowed by the

¹ Estimated sea level rise is based on a model that assumes a range of possible outcomes. This study estimates sea level rise between a conservative 3 feet to a high of 9.4 feet by 2100. In more severe scenarios, sea level rise could reach 5.5 feet by 2080. For more, see Reinhold Flick and Adam Young, “Local Coastal Program Sea Level Rise Grant Program Los Angeles Region Shoreline Change Projections” (San Diego: TerraCosta Consulting, September 30, 2016), 3.

Pacific Ocean.² Today's beaches of Los Angeles, central to the region's identity, commerce, and culture, will soon be gone.

In the future, a new shoreline will form between Southern California's edge and the Pacific Ocean. This latest landscape, forged amidst rising sea level and climate change, will continue a historical and geological process of reformation that has occurred for eons. While nature was not quiescent during the twentieth century, successful efforts to impose a temporary stasis intensified the coming challenges. The new coast will be every bit as much a creation of human resolve. Facing cascading environmental changes, Angelenos will need to physically transform and culturally translate this space. While the topography of coastal futures is unclear, motivated stakeholders once again may need to bring the beach to Los Angeles.

² Gary B. Griggs, "Lost Neighborhoods of the California Coast," *Journal of Coastal Research* 31, no. 1 (2015): 129–47.

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