HOW LOCAL POLITICS
SHAPE FEDERAL POLICY

Business, Power, and the Environment
in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles

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INTRODUCTION

BUSINESS INTERESTS, SPECIAL INTERESTS, AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST

When Americans imagine their democracy, they envision government institutions that protect and nurture the public interest. So far, so good. But this vision quickly gets complicated and contradictory. Americans vilify equally the influence of uninformed public opinion and that of so-called special interests. And yet interest groups have played a role in American politics from the very beginning. In the earliest years of the Republic, merchants and consumers pressured congressional representatives for lower tariffs, while manufacturers advocated higher import duties. Farmers took up arms against taxes on whiskey because they enriched urban merchants at the farmers’ expense. The Fugitive Slave Law, recognition of squatters’ rights in western lands, and dozens of other nineteenth-century policies reflected the desires and needs of specific economic, regional, or political factions in American politics. Although leaders from James Madison and John Adams in the eighteenth century to Barack Obama in the twenty-first have excoriated special interests as threats to American democracy, interest groups remain entrenched in American politics.

Of all the interest groups active in American cities, the local business organizations have enjoyed the greatest legitimacy and influence. Chambers of commerce, merchants and manufacturers organizations, realty boards, and a myriad of smaller organizations made up of prominent business leaders have enjoyed political influence out of proportion to their numbers or economic importance. In fact, these groups enjoyed such political legitimacy during the mid-twentieth century that they were rarely described as special interests at all. The central question of this book is how this type of organization secured its special status in local politics and how that status was transcribed into national
politics in the second quarter of the twentieth century. To answer that question, I have examined local environmental policy in Los Angeles and the interactions of Los Angeles municipal and county officials with federal agencies and federal politics between the 1920s and 1950s.

Business groups earned their legitimacy by supporting city and county officials with a wide range of political services that these elected officials desperately needed. Los Angeles's experience with this is representative: the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce identified which emerging problems merited public action, studied policy options, drafted legislation, and framed public debate about emerging issues. City and county officials enacted ordinances drafted by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and routinely forwarded chamber recommendations to Sacramento and Washington for state and federal action. The city council also looked to the business community to provide "public" reactions on the very policies that the chamber had initially proposed. Federal agencies undertaking major public works for cities and counties looked to these same groups when they needed public input. In essence, public officials at all levels of government treated chambers of commerce and similar organizations as the voice of the people. The business groups themselves believed they represented the public interest, and they actively defended their status when challenged.

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce's influence never quite rose to the level of hegemony. Frequently, other community members organized to oppose specific chamber of commerce proposals. These challengers usually began their campaigns by asserting that they represented the public and that the chamber of commerce was merely a special interest. They offered alternative values for public policy that weighed home, community, and public services and recreation more highly than what they dismissed as "mere profits." Their arguments echoed common American critiques of industrial growth and corporate consolidation and were clearly inspired by the stunningly rapid pace at which oil rigs and heavy industry displaced Los Angeles's orange groves and rural suburbs in the twentieth century. However, those who challenged the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce usually mobilized after local government, with the assistance of favored business organizations, had already established the framework for understanding and solving environmental problems; as a result, they were excluded from the conversations most critical to formulating policy. Moreover, both before and after World War II, new industrial jobs attracted hundreds of thousands of new residents to Los Angeles who endorsed pro-business policies. Even the longtime residents struggled to balance the appeal of industrial prosperity with their desire to protect their communities from the changes that accompanied industrial growth. In the end, the economic importance of industry, the rise in the numbers of voters dependent on industrial jobs, and the close relationship between the...
chamber of commerce and local officials combined to deprive critics of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce of political traction. Even when these critics did speak for a larger public, they could not displace the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce as the recognized representative of public opinion. The status of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce excluded other groups from the policy-making process. In other words, the power of the chamber of commerce meant that the general public in Los Angeles had surprisingly little voice in its own governance.

The influence of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce did not end at the borders of Los Angeles County. During the Great Depression the federal government implemented numerous programs for and with American cities and towns. To carry out these initiatives, key federal agencies looked to city and county governments and to local powerbrokers like chambers of commerce for project recommendations. This, in turn, transposed business groups' influence in local politics onto federal policy. The status of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and similar organizations was further enhanced between 1930 and 1950 as Americans grew increasingly frustrated with and suspicious of the power of the federal government and as local control and private enterprise emerged as counterweights to Washington's power.

The central argument of this book, then, is that the institutional structures and practices of American municipal government gave business groups political legitimacy at the local level and unanticipated influence over federal policies. With this new power, American business groups recast private enterprise, localism, and fragmented government authority as the best guarantors of American democracy.

It is important not to overtstate the policy realignment that took place in the second quarter of the twentieth century. As scholars of the nineteenth century and of the Progressive Era have shown, private enterprise has always been an important force in American politics and society. In the mid-nineteenth century, as Robin Einhorn explained, cities built public works to promote economic growth and meet the needs of property owners. The use of special assessments to fund public works was responsible for an astonishing, but inequitable, array of public improvements in the middle decades of the nineteenth century.

A broader understanding of the public interest, one that included taxing property owners to pay for sanitation and basic services for the poor, began to emerge in the 1860s. However, large corporations profited from many Progressive Era regulations, and even the creation of national parks benefited the urban elite at the expense of the rural poor, so much so that it can be tempting to dismiss Progressives' critiques of business as insincere or, at least, ineffective. Nevertheless, Progressives did believe that government authority could and should be used to counter the power of business in American politics and society; the cases explored here reveal very real movement away from this ideology in the transitional period that followed the Progressive Era.

Many other scholars have explored the growth of business influence in public policy after World War II. Historians have described Progressive Era politics as driven by the contrast between national or general interests and "the demands of special interests." As early as the 1950s, they noted the eclipse of Progressive ideology by the more business-oriented ideas outlined here and traced this realignment to the deprivations of the Great Depression, the production shortages and crisis mentality of World War II, and the anticommunism of the Cold War. Clayton Koppes termed this transition the replacement of "commonwealth liberalism" by "corporate liberalism." Alan Brinkley, Louis Galambos, and many others have explained the postwar rejection of Progressive-style business regulation as a result of evolving economic theory and of business influence in government. Most of these studies have focused on federal policy and on changes wrought from within federal agencies themselves. They have not considered the local manifestations of postwar retrenchment, the way federal collaboration with local governments increased business-oriented groups' influence, or the institutional roots of business influence in local politics.

Questions of political influence and federalism have not been a major focus for historians of Los Angeles either. A series of excellent books on Los Angeles history, many of them nurtured by the Huntington Library's Los Angeles History Group, have focused on the social construction of race and on the politics of place and the efforts of minority and working-class Angelinos to shape their communities. Becky Nicolaides and H. Mark Wild discuss the Los Angeles Chamber
of Commerce’s opposition to unions and its role in the creation of Los Angeles’s industrial suburbs and the racially segregated bedroom communities. But the main emphasis in these works is community development, race relations, and working-class life and politics in Los Angeles, not the political influence of Los Angeles’s powerful business elite itself. 3 In other important recent works, Douglas Flannery, Josh Sides, and William Deverell examine the complex racial politics of the Los Angeles region. 10 By placing minority and working-class Angelenos at the center of their analyses, these scholars have reinvigorated social and urban history and complicated the history of race and class in America in felicitous ways. Meanwhile, scholars of Los Angeles’s geography and politics, such as Greg Hise and Robert Fogelson, have explained the origins of Los Angeles’s decentralized, sprawling geography and equally fragmented governance. 11 In all these works, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the editors of the Los Angeles Times appear as powerful political actors whose decisions determined the shape of Southern California’s landscape, environment, and communities. While the works that focus on Los Angeles’s racial politics do suggest that the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce did not always speak for the public, none of this excellent literature on Los Angeles has sought to explain how business elites came by their influence or how they extended their reach from local to federal politics.

As it turns out, Los Angeles is a particularly good city in which to begin to answer these questions. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce left excellent records of internal discussions and political activism, as did several city and county officials. Southern California is widely considered prototypical of twentieth-century American urban politics and development. Take sprawl, for example: Los Angeles’s pattern of residential and industrial suburbs, linked by highways to each other and to shopping malls, has come to dominate the American urban landscape. Electoral politics, too, are distinctly twentieth-century, with nonpartisan elections and governing authority fragmented by municipal, county, and special authority boundaries. Finally, the region’s industrial economy and urban infrastructure exist largely because of federal spending. The Army Corps of Engineers built the port that made the city a center of Pacific trade and the flood control channels that have made sprawling development possible. The Bureau of Reclamation’s Hoover Dam eliminated the looming energy shortage that threatened to halt industrial growth in the 1920s; the U.S. Navy bought the region’s oil; federal investment jumpstarted Los Angeles’s aerospace industry; and war mobilization reinvigorated automobile, rubber, and chemical manufacturing, the core heavy industries in the region. 13

If Los Angeles embodies twentieth-century American urbanization, it is unusual in two respects that make it particularly useful for understanding just how business groups secured their political influence: the range of environmental problems besetting the city, and the nature of the Los Angeles business community’s political influence there. So much of the business of city government involves managing the urban environment that it is fair to say that urban history is a story of the relationship between people and nature. Most American cities have struggled with some combination of nuisance industries, air pollution, flooding, and water and energy shortages. Very few, however, have had to manage all these at roughly the same time. Similarly, chambers of commerce or merchants and manufacturers organizations have long enjoyed a great deal of power in American cities. But Los Angeles’s business organizations encountered little viable opposition. Labor unions were unusually weak. Progressives such as John R. Haynes worked tirelessly to inject other priorities into Los Angeles’s civic and political life, but he and his allies never enjoyed the kind of influence that they would have had in, say, San Francisco. 11 Meanwhile, the probusiness, antunion Los Angeles Times dominated the newsstands, enhancing business influence even when the Times and the chamber of commerce disagreed on policy details. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce did not, for all its influence, entirely live up to the stereotypes of business organizations. As the main booster for Los Angeles, the chamber grappled more aggressively than its counterparts elsewhere with industrial pollution and oil drilling that threatened agriculture, real estate, and tourism. The exaggerated quality of Los Angeles’s environment and politics makes this city a distillation of national urban trends and thus an ideal jumping-off point for understanding environmental politics and the power of business interests during the transition from the guarded confidence in centralized government that marked the Pro-
gressive Era and New Deal to the localism and guarded confidence in the private sector and the antigovernment politics that have evolved from World War II to the present.

Los Angeles’s myriad environmental problems, its dependence on federal aid, and to a lesser extent its political conflicts, as well, derived from geography and growth. The Los Angeles basin is an extensive sloping plain surrounded by steep mountains. The city was founded on the banks of the Los Angeles River, one of several flood-prone streams that course through the basin. Compared with the gold rush towns of northern California, during the nineteenth century Los Angeles grew slowly. Residents came to the region looking for respite from sooty, industrial cities; for decades boosters promoted the region as a natural sanitarium for those suffering from tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases. The Los Angeles River and rain-fed aquifers supported the region’s largely agricultural economy. In the early twentieth century, rail links and the federally constructed harbor at San Pedro sparked rapid growth and real estate speculation. Then an oil rush of the first order transformed the region. Boosters energetically promoted Los Angeles throughout the Great Depression and World War II, attracting hundreds of thousands of new residents with depictions of a healthy, idyllic life and an economy that seamlessly combined petroleum, industry, and agriculture. The Los Angeles County population more than doubled between 1930 and 1950 (from 2,266,455 to 4,308,492 residents) and then doubled again to 4,251,687 in 1950. New residents built homes, businesses, and factories that narrowed river channels, increased runoff, and thus multiplied the danger of and damage from the floods that regularly swept down from the mountains. Newcomers competed for space along Los Angeles beaches with each other, with private developers, and with the oil industry. Automobiles, wartime manufacturing, and oil refining combined with climate and topography to raise air pollution to critical levels in the early 1940s. Growth overtaxed the city’s water and power networks, forcing public and private utilities alike to seek resources farther afield.

Each of these problems—the pollution and chaos of oil drilling, air pollution, the danger of flooding, hydroelectric power shortages, competition for water resources, and conflicts over access to and use of Los Angeles area beaches—precipitated city, county, or federal action during the second quarter of the twentieth century. In fact, many other urban environmental problems emerged during this same period that illustrated similar political patterns. Traffic congestion, urban planning, the creation of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, solid waste disposal, the regulation of oil drilling in Los Angeles’s residential neighborhoods, and a host of other public policies all grew out of the interactions of local officials and favored interest groups. The five case studies presented here were each selected to explore a single aspect of the relationship between business groups and local or federal government; linked together, they form a composite picture of the way political influence transformed American cities and the way American democracy worked in the second quarter of the twentieth century.

Each of the five chapters in this book explores a single environmental controversy. They are not arranged in a strict chronological order, in part because so many of these stories overlap with one another. Instead, they are arranged to emphasize how the daily functioning of municipal politics privileged groups like the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and then how these patterns of political influence shaped national politics. There are some disadvantages of this thematic organization. In particular, moving back and forth through time can obscure the differences between the Los Angeles of the 1920s and the city of the 1940s or 1950s. World War II changed Los Angeles in many ways. After the war, the city was larger and more industrial and had stronger unions. Moreover, the industrial workers who arrived during World War II did not share the same vision of Los Angeles as residents who had arrived earlier.

The book begins on Los Angeles’s beaches, the origin of some of most indelible images and profound resource conflicts of Southern California. This chapter shows how contentious and maleable the concept of “public interest” was and how business-focused public policy developed in the second quarter of the twentieth century. Oil companies began drilling for offshore oil from piers built over the ocean in the 1920s. Some homeowners along the shore leased their property to oil companies, eager to cash in on oil royalties. Some desperately wanted to keep oil out of their neighborhoods to protect their homes
and property values from oil spills, fires, and the devastating explosions that accompanied early oil development. Other Angelenos protested the appropriation of recreational beaches for industrial development. Meanwhile, starting in 1938, Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes tried to assert federal control over undersea oil deposits hitherto managed by the states. Out of this welter of conflicting claims the public beach movement emerged, spearheaded by a self-appointed group of Realty Board and chamber of commerce members. They pressed for public ownership of the recreational shoreline, the better to protect the businesses, real estate values, and tourism in coastal Los Angeles County. They succeeded in setting aside more than thirty miles of beachfront for public use and institutionalizing their own influence over the land use planning process. Because of racial segregation, their successes also reduced beach recreation opportunities for Los Angeles’s black community.

The second chapter explores more specifically how the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce secured its influence and thus limited the political influence of opposition groups and the general public. In the summer of 1943 clouds of car exhaust and industrial smoke blinded drivers in downtown Los Angeles and introduced Los Angeles and the nation to the modern scourge of smog. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce responded immediately, studying the causes of air pollution, enforcing voluntary smoke reductions among its members, and writing reports and ordinances for the Los Angeles City Council. These actions ensured that industries complied with new regulations, prompted the creation of a regional air pollution control board to coordinate anti-smog measures across the whole county, and blunted the demands of smaller clean air advocacy groups to limit industrial growth in greater Los Angeles. Moreover, its assistance with air quality control made the chamber of commerce the only public voice that mattered in air pollution policy. Scattered opposition groups across the county objected to official policies and to the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce’s role in developing them; considerable public protests surfaced again and again because so many Angelenos believed that officials ignored industrial pollution and failed to examine the public health implications of smog. However, these critiques had little impact on policy debates. The conflicts over air pollution control revealed great differences in opinion about the causes of air pollution, policy priorities, and who spoke for the public.

The debate over who represented the public interest continues in the story of San Gabriel River flood control in chapter 3. In the late 1930s, the Army Corps of Engineers planned comprehensive flood control for Los Angeles County, based largely on the recommendations of Los Angeles County’s own flood control board. One major component of the Army Corps’ plan for the San Gabriel River, a dam at Whittier Narrows, divided the business communities above and below the dam. One group, based in Long Beach and in the industrial and agricultural communities downstream from the proposed dam, argued that the dam offered cost-effective flood control and water conservation. Representatives of downstream businesses met regularly with the Army Corps of Engineers and participated fully in early policy debates. The upstream group opposed the dam because it displaced more than a thousand people, threatened a brand new public school, and sacrificed residents’ prosperity for the benefit of larger agricultural and industrial interests downstream. The opposition, however, enjoyed little contact with the Army Corps and had almost no ability to alter flood control policy. The relationships between the Army Corps and San Gabriel River valley residents and business organizations reinforced the local distribution of power within Los Angeles County. Moreover, because Whittier Narrows Dam grew out of local power structures, federal involvement in local public works transposed Los Angeles’s local power structure onto federal policy.

The final two chapters focus on national policy debates of great interest to Los Angeles. Chapter 4 relates the political compromise that allowed private, for-profit utility corporations to develop hydroelectric power at Boulder Dam. Early proposals for Boulder Dam on the Colorado River specified that the Bureau of Reclamation would control floods, irrigate the Imperial Valley of Southern California, supply Los Angeles with drinking water, and generate electricity for Arizona, Nevada, and Southern California. Planners expected and Congress required hydroelectricity revenues to subsidize construction of the dam and irrigation networks. The Water Power Act of 1920 required that the
Bureau of Reclamation sell electricity from the dam to nonprofit utilities owned by cities or rural electrical cooperatives. The dam proved so controversial, however, that Congress dropped restrictions on who could generate and sell electricity from Boulder Dam and allowed Southern California Edison, a private corporation, into the dam. The battle over Boulder Dam was a bitter one, but the compromise on who would operate the generators in the dam, and the resulting cooperation between the public and private sectors in dam operations, were trumpeted as the epitome of good governance. Ultimately, this depiction of Hoover Dam weakened the public power movement and, more important, helped recast the private sector as the moderator of government excess.

The challenges of federal leadership in natural resources development became still clearer after World War II. As part of postwar reconstruction, Congress approved dozens of major dams, many of which seemed ill considered or uneconomical. President Harry Truman, under pressure both to approve these dams and to cut federal spending, appointed the President’s Water Resources Policy Commission to draft a new water policy to resolve these contradictory pressures. Chapter 5 examines the commission’s work and the wholesale rejection of it by a nation grown leery of federal power. The commission, made up largely of former New Dealers, recommended that the federal government establish agencies to coordinate public and private water resources development for entire river basins. Its plan never even came before Congress, stillborn by red-baiting, localism, and the status quo that the private sector had achieved over the previous decades. By the time the President’s Water Resources Policy Commission completed its work, many Americans believed that only private enterprise and home rule could protect their interests from excessive, tyrannical federal power.

Los Angeles’s efforts to manage oil development and public access to beaches, air pollution, and flood control and national debates over water resources and hydroelectricity development reveal huge disparities in power, influence, and the ability to participate in policy debates. They demonstrate who had a voice in local politics, who did not, and how local politics shaped national policy. In each case, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce or another business coalition claimed to speak for the general public, and local elected officials accepted them as the legitimate voice of the public. Because the federal government relied heavily on local leaders, both within and outside government, to articulate goals for federal programs in urban areas, the entry of the Army Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, and other agencies into the field of urban public works did not substantially reorganize political influence in local government. When Americans rejected “big government” after World War II and began the long process of dismantling the New Deal and wartime programs, they did so partly with the conviction that centralized government power posed a greater threat to their interests and to democracy than even the largest corporations in the private sector. This further reinforced the power of local elites.

A number of individuals and groups did try to challenge the legitimacy of the Los Angeles business groups, from the Altadena Property Owners League and the Citizens Anti-Smog Action Committee, which disputed the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce’s authority to shape air pollution control policies, to the El Monte Citizens Flood Control Committee, which questioned flood control strategies on the San Gabriel River. Because these opposition groups always emerged in reaction to specific policies, they always entered the political debate after city and county officials had established policy strategies and working relationships with the groups they considered representatives of the general public. The opposition, therefore, entered the policy debate late, too late to effectively introduce new values into policy discussions or to establish itself as the real voice of the people.

Over the course of the twentieth century and into the twenty-first, new groups have achieved more success in challenging the status quo and securing seats at the policy-making table. After decades of activism, ethnic, racial, and social minorities have come to enjoy greater visibility, influence, and political representation than they had before World War II. Local and federal regulations, including particularly environmental regulations, expanded the representation of nonindustry groups on agency advisory panels, required greater reporting of policy objectives and consequences, and made public comment periods and public hearings a more common part of the policy-making process than they
were in the 1950s.28 Some of these changes grew out of broad shifts in public priorities, signaled by rising environmental concern in the 1960s and 1970s.29 Some of them were the result of deliberate campaigns on the part of environmental groups to challenge business as the voice of the people.

When national environmental groups entered local policy debates, they brought with them a political weight sufficient to balance local business elites and to redefine business groups as special interests. However, the role of national groups in local policy debates was not a simple victory for the public interest. National groups did win significant environmental battles and transform land use and pollution regulations. But they did not necessarily represent public opinion or encourage public participation any more than the business organizations they challenged. Moreover, these groups routinely shifted the venue of key policy debates—addressing local issues through state or federal legislation or, more recently, asserting state authority when the federal executive scaled back regulatory enforcement—which could also reduce local participation in policy debates. Clear signs of the resulting paradox emerged in the late twentieth century as urban environmental justice groups began to accuse national environmental powerhouses of elitism, racism, and the sacrificing of cities and people for trees and birds.

One of the central attributes of late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century politics in the United States has been the rise of the New Right, and with it the rejection of regulations as unnecessary barriers to enterprise and progress, and decades of campaign promises to eliminate waste in government and reduce public spending. These trends have complex origins in American political culture. But a number of phenomena from the second quarter of the twentieth century played a crucial role in this political transformation. First, the business community protected its legitimacy as the voice of the public in city government. Next, close cooperation between business and government, brought on by political conflict and the exigencies of environmental crisis, was celebrated as necessary for good government. This helped to undermine public support for adversarial regulations like those promoted by some

Progressives. Finally, Americans embraced local control and the private sector as the best bulwarks against excessive federal authority, which, in the end, brought American politics full circle. This transitional period in American environmental and political history gives new meaning to Tip O'Neill's famous assertion that "all politics is local."
CHAPTER ONE

OIL AND WATER

The Public and the Private on Southern California Beaches, 1920–1950

Los Angeles beaches have changed since the 1920s. Old photographs reveal people lounging in the sand, playing in the waves, and fishing from piers. They show lifeguard towers and crowds of umbrellas. But these crowds play in the shadow of oil rigs and ornate beach clubs that have mostly disappeared from Los Angeles's shoreline. It took nearly thirty years, but miles of Los Angeles area beaches were eventually acquired by state, county, and city governments. The campaign was spearheaded by prominent individuals in the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the Los Angeles Realty Board with support from the outspoken superintendent of the Los Angeles City Department of Playgrounds and Recreation. Efforts to secure public rights to the beach were not unique to Los Angeles; on the contrary, groups like the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association supported public access movements nationwide. These movements thrived on the widely held conviction that beaches were a distinctly public and recreational resource.

In the 1920s, most of Los Angeles’s beaches and adjacent lands were in private hands; some private holdings dated from eighteenth-century Spanish land grants. Much of this private land lay undeveloped and open for recreational use by local residents and visitors alike. The real estate and oil booms of the second and third decades of the twentieth century accelerated the development along the shoreline and constrained recreational access with a suddenness that surprised and alarmed Angelenos. Oil companies began drilling near the shore, then on the sand, and finally from piers that stretched out into shallow waters. Real estate developers erected fences and houses that blocked customary public access. These booms, of course, also brought more people to the region who wanted to use the beach. Unsurprisingly, the
conflict between these incompatible uses of the shoreline resources quickly coalesced into campaigns to ban oil drilling on the beaches and then to move drilling farther and farther from the coast. These campaigns rested on assertions that the beaches were uniquely public, non-commercial, non-industrial spaces.

During the New Deal and World War II, visitors continued to swarm to the beaches in large numbers. Neither the coastal erosion that narrowed beaches nor sewage pollution so severe that the state board of health quarantined most of the Santa Monica Bay coastline deterred them. New construction along the shore slowed; landowners up and down the coast abandoned property because of bankruptcy or when erosion damaged their homes beyond repair. Meanwhile, a national movement emerged to preserve public access to the recreational shoreline. In Los Angeles, this movement inspired civic leaders in coastal communities to organize the Shoreline Planning Association to promote public ownership first in Los Angeles County and then in the rest of the state. They saw abandoned and depreciated coastal properties as an unprecedented opportunity to acquire beaches for the public. They also feared that Los Angeles's best chance at preserving its recreational shoreline would vanish as soon as peace reenergized Los Angeles's real estate market.

The Shoreline Planning Association largely succeeded. By 1930, city, county, and state governments coordinated their efforts to buy beach lands, install facilities, and operate the beaches. Widely promoted by Los Angeles boosters and seen by local residents as integral to the return to a peacetime lifestyle, the beaches in Los Angeles were a uniquely noncommercial space. Residents and the SPA explicitly rejected public-private collaboration at the beach. They eschewed leasing space at the beach for privately owned concessions even when those concessions would underwrite lifeguards, maintenance, and popular facilities. In fact, Angelenos rejected private ventures on the beach with nearly identical language and vehemence regardless of their scale, from major construction projects by restaurants or beach clubs to petty commerce.

Two ironies emerged from the successful public beach campaign. First, because of Los Angeles's racial segregation practices, public beaches excluded African Americans from the shore in the name
of ensuring public access for all Angelenos. Second, even as the SPA proceeded to protect Southern California beaches from all types of development, the debates over shoreline oil development shifted from their initial focus on public rights versus private exploitation to a new emphasis on maximizing oil production. Because of the success of the public beach campaign and because of these apparent inconsistencies, the story of Los Angeles beaches is important for understanding both the evolution of business influence in American politics and the eclipse of Progressive Era faith in government by the Cold War confidence in private enterprise.

Like the other cases examined here, the public beach movement was propelled by business leaders with an economic stake in the policy outcome. In this case, the leadership of the Shoreline Planning Association, the organization that came to exercise more influence than any other in Southern California beach policy, brought together real estate, tourism, and commercial interests whose fortunes rose or fell on the tourism appeal of Southern California. In other words, the story of Los Angeles’s public beaches illustrates the exclusiveness of city politics much as air pollution and flood control debates do. In addition, the debate over oil drilling on the beaches reveals a larger shift in public policy during the second quarter of the twentieth century toward economic productivity to the exclusion of other concerns. Nevertheless, Angelenos rejected industrial and commercial development on the beaches, which suggests that alternative values persisted in American cities in spite of this policy realignment. Many urban residents, the beach debates suggest, continued to value public services and recreation above growth. These values resurfaced perennially in critiques of industrial growth in the twentieth century, and although they may have triumphed in the beach debates, they had little traction outside recreational policy after 1940.

Oil and Water: A Brief History of Oil on Los Angeles Beaches

The first major conflict over the beaches of Southern California defined those beaches as a recreational rather than an industrial resource. By the 1920s, Californians had discovered huge deposits of oil in and around Los Angeles. Some of the most productive pools lay underneath land already subdivided for residential development. Several particularly rich deposits extended under the beaches and into the shallow waters off Venice Beach, Playa del Rey, and Long Beach in Los Angeles County and Huntington Beach in northern Orange County. In the course of developing these oil deposits, oil companies raised derricks and installed pumps, pipes, and oil tanks next to houses, on beaches, and looming over cemeteries. Oil drilling did not just bring the sights and sounds of industry, including fires, gushing wells, and gas explosions, to these distinctly nonindustrial locales. In reaction, the Los Angeles City Council imposed zoning and other restrictions to protect residential and commercial property values and to spare residents the destruction that accompanied oil drilling.7 This same impulse, strengthened by the conviction that the shore should be recreational and scenic rather than industrial, drove Angelenos to seek to limit oil drilling in and near Los Angeles’s beaches in the 1920s.

California’s oil industry began in the 1870s in the southern reaches of the San Joaquin Valley.8 The early years set the tone for California’s oil industry: wildcatters treated oil exploration as an excuse to embark on a wide variety of speculative ventures. Early company charters outlined the companies’ intentions “to locate, acquire . . . and sell water rights and water”44 and “in any and every way [to] deal in real estate,” in addition to “buy[ing] . . . and develop[ing] oil lands.”45 Even Standard Oil, which by 1880 controlled some 90 percent of all the oil refined in the United States, planned to “acquire [and] build . . . pipelines for conveying . . . water” in addition to oil and intended to “improve, develop and cultivate lands whether for mineral or agricultural purposes.”46 In the 1890s, prospectors found more oil deposits in Santa Barbara, Ventura, and Los Angeles counties.

Drilling in Los Angeles began in 1892 with one shallow well located about a mile from Los Angeles’s city hall. Within a decade, more than a thousand wells had sprouted up around downtown in what became known as the Los Angeles City Field.7 On the Santa Barbara coast north of Los Angeles, oil companies built derricks on the ends of piers to recover oil from undersea pools.8 By 1909, California led the nation in oil production, but the Los Angeles basin contributed less than 15 percent of this total.9 This would soon change. Between 1917 and
1926, a half dozen astoundingly rich oil fields were discovered in the Los Angeles basin. Just three of these, the Huntington Beach, Signal Hill, and Santa Fe Springs, soon produced almost 80 percent of the state's total oil output. Oil production from Los Angeles swamped the market, causing oil prices to drop by two-thirds in eighteen months.\textsuperscript{10}

The oil boom of the 1920s was one of the major engines of Los Angeles's growth, but the costs of that growth were high. Volatile oil prices and rapidly rising oil consumption spurred oil companies to claim new leases and drill and pump oil as fast as they could. Much of the land in the newly discovered oil fields had previously been developed or subdivided as small house lots. This created unique opportunities and problems for both oil companies and property owners. On the one hand, because so many different individuals owned property in the oil fields, more landowners could negotiate leases with oil companies and thus profit from the oil under their land. In addition, oil companies of all sizes could lease and drill, so no single landowner or oil firm could establish a monopoly in these fragmented fields. On the other hand, this pattern of land ownership encouraged oil companies to erect oil wells very close together and to drill and pump oil as fast as they could to maximize their yields. As Daniel Yergin described the Signal Hill field, "The discovery created a stampede... Money flew all over the hill as oil companies, promoters, and amateurs scrambled to get leases. The parcels were so small and the forest of tall wooden derricks so thick that the legs of many of them actually interfaced." People even received royalties for oil pumped out from under a Signal Hill cemetery.\textsuperscript{11} The rapid pace of oil production exacerbated price fluctuations and oversupply. It also threatened the long-term production from each oil field by depleting the gas pressure that made it possible to pump oil out of the ground.

Oil development in Los Angeles's residential areas caused a myriad of problems. Natural gas explosions, runaway wells, noise, odor, and sprayed or spilled oil befouled these communities.\textsuperscript{12} Fires raged out of control among tightly packed wooden derricks, open oil tanks, and spilled crude. One resident who stayed in Huntington Beach despite the bedlam there complained: "These oil men have taken everything except the food in the icebox.... My back yard is an oil well, a sump
hole. My fence is gone and the inside of my house is a mess." Given
the destruction that followed in the wake of each new strike, it is unsurprising that Angelenos did not view the oil companies as good corporate citizens. Meanwhile, ongoing revelations of corruption and market manipulation by the oil industry—exposed by a Federal Trade Commission report in 1915, a Senate investigation led by Robert M. La Follette in 1912, and the Teapot Dome scandal from 1923 to 1928—fed public antipathy toward oil companies. The industry’s reputation as a corrupt special interest added to public outrage and to local efforts to regulate the industry. From Huntington Beach to Ventura, communities reacted to the chaos by trying to impose regulations on where and how oil companies could operate. When the oil companies thought regulations would reduce competition and risk, they cooperated; when regulations curtailed their access to the oil fields, they resisted.  

As oil drilling spread from dry land onto Los Angeles beaches in the 1920s, derricks, drilling piers, fences, pipes, and equipment proliferated along the shore. Competition for oil leases was, if anything, even more fierce on the beach than inland because pier drilling proceeded in a legal vacuum; the property laws that regulated oil leases on dry land did not apply to navigable and coastal waters. As on dry land, oil companies rushed to erect wells and pump as much oil as fast as they could, but on the beaches and tidelands, as nearshore areas were known, oil companies also tried to impede competitors’ access to their leases, sometimes buying long, narrow strips of land to block other companies’ leases and piers. Oil drilling interfered with recreation, too. Fences and equipment blocked access; crude spills fouled the beaches. Simply walking along the beach through this maze of equipment became increasingly difficult. Derricks, piers, and other unsightly machinery threatened to reduce tourism and prosperity in shoreline communities. Spilled oil, derrick fires, noise, and fumes from the oil-drilling operations transformed the beaches from recreational to industrial landscapes. Although one defender of pier drilling dismissed complaints by comparing Los Angeles’s oil rigs to “New England’s rotting fish- whoarves, which painters . . . sketch and tourists admire,” local opposition to the oil piers mounted.  

The California legislature reacted to the chaos along the shore first by passing the Submerged Land Leasing Act in 1921 and then by banning oil piers in 1927. The Submerged Land Leasing Act finally established state authority over offshore leasing and property rights in California. This brought some legal order to the chaotic tidelands oil fields, but the legislation brought few improvements for recreation. Oil wells and unsightly machinery still cluttered the shore and walled off large sections of beach from public recreational use. Spills, fires, and blowouts still threatened the beaches. These ongoing problems fostered support for the pier-drilling ban in 1928. This measure was portrayed by supporters explicitly as protecting the public interest. When Governor C. C. Young signed the pier-drilling ban in January 1928, he heralded the measure as a victory for the public in a long battle to protect the priceless California coast from the private exploitation and ruin.  

The oil companies’ reactions to these bills underlined the characterization of these measures as victories for the public’s rights to the beach. The biggest participants in the oil industry—the Majors—supported both bills. In fact, the Majors helped develop oil-drilling regulations to bring order to the oil industry. They sought to reduce market fluctuations and reduce oil waste by slowing and stabilizing production and by reducing competition in the oil fields. The Majors emphasized slower production in particular because rapid oil extraction contributed to crippling boom-bust price-and-supply cycles and depleted the all-important underground natural-gas pressure that pushed oil into pipes and allowed companies to pump it to the surface. Rapid depletion of gas pressure stranded oil under ground. The smaller firms, known as the Independents, opposed these rules vehemently because their profits depended on maximum production in the short term. The conflict between the Majors and Independents grew quite bitter, with the Independents accusing the Majors of monopoly and the Majors calling the Independents wasteful and irresponsible.  

The Majors endorsed the Submerged Land Leasing Act of 1921 because it gave them stronger and clearer state leasing laws, which made it easier for them to operate. Public discussion of the legislation did not engage the importance of clear drilling rights. Instead, newspaper coverage of the Submerged Land Leasing Act focused almost exclusively on the way drilling on the beaches interfered with public recreation.
This made the Submerged Land Leasing Act seem like an effort by
the oil industry to increase its rights to the shore at the expense of the
public. The Majors also supported the 1928 pier-drilling ban because
they believed that moving wells off the beach would reduce public op-
opposition to drilling in the Huntington Beach, Venice Beach, Playa del
Rey, and other nearshore oil fields.21 Because of technological innova-
tions, well-financed firms no longer needed piers to exploit tidelands
oil. They could drill diagonally from dry land into the tidelands called
whipstocking or slant drilling, this technology promised to open vast
territories to new oil exploitation.

The pier-drilling ban did not completely protect the oil companies
from criticism of their impact on the beaches. Although oil companies
did not erect any new oil piers after 1928, they continued to operate
existing wells. In addition, they built new rigs that loomed over miles
of beach as they whipstocked into offshore deposits. In 1930, a private
social club that owned facilities on the beach urged the city council to
"take every measure within their power to prevent the drilling of
oil wells along or adjacent to the sea coast" in Santa Monica Bay on
the grounds that such development impaired beach recreation "to the
great detriment of the community as a whole."22 By the mid-1930s, com-
munities all along Santa Monica Bay, from Malibu to Palos Verdes, de-
manded a ban on all drilling within half a mile of the water.23 The Los
Angeles City Council passed an ordinance in 1935 to do just this but
never enforced it.

Pressure for an extended drilling ban persisted, and slant drilling
became an issue on land too. In 1936, the Los Angeles City Council
contemplated leasing the right to drill for oil underneath the city's Hy-
perion Point sewage treatment plant. If the council had approved the
idea, oil companies would have whipstocked from private land adja-
cent to the plant and paid the city royalties on the oil they extracted.24
Although this could have yielded considerable revenue for the city, it
raised the specter of a new boom and the spread of derricks through-
out the city to exploit oil reserves unavailable to the oil companies because
of hard-won regulations protecting beaches and neighborhoods.

In response to mounting pressure to move oil drilling farther and
farther from the lucrative shoreline deposits, and in reaction to public

THE MARCH OF THE DERRICK.

This cartoon suggests that the speculators were the main force behind the exten-
sion of oil drilling into residential neighborhoods, but homeowners also pressed
city officials to permit them to realize oil profits from their lands. "The March of
fears about whiststocking, in 1936 Standard Oil sponsored a state ballot initiative to explicitly legalize whiststocking into offshore oil deposits. Protest erupted immediately. The West Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and the *Venice Evening Vanguard* newspaper repeatedly demanded the creation of new setback rules to prevent "commercial development along the beach." Newspapers in Venice and Playa del Rey opposed both the Hyperion Point drilling proposal and Standard Oil's 1936 referendum because they feared that legalizing slant drilling would increase drilling operations near beaches and in residential neighborhoods. Opponents called Standard Oil's ballot proposal "vicious" and "impudent"; they demanded legislation to "clearly define the public's right to full enjoyment of the beach, without regard to the plans or desires of private interests." Chambers of commerce from West Los Angeles, Santa Monica, Venice, Manhattan Beach, Palos Verdes, Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach and Playa del Rey joined the campaign. Drilling restrictions gained considerable support from inland residents who visited the beach and who had their own experiences with the hazards and nuisances of petroleum exploitation.

Los Angeles County supervisor John Anson Ford criticized slant drilling as "detrimental to [the] beaches." The secretary of the Hermosa Beach Chamber of Commerce decried the ballot measure as "a medium for satisfying the private greed of certain large oil interests ... [and] a vehicle through which ruin and destruction will be carried to our beaches." Independent oil producers charged Standard Oil with drafting the bill to monopolize the oil fields. But the slant-drilling initiative earmarked half of the oil royalty payments for the state to acquire and maintain public beaches and parks statewide. This windfall for public recreation enticed the California State Park Commission and the majority of California voters to support Standard Oil's slant-drilling ballot proposition.

Tension over the place of drilling in Los Angeles erupted periodically for decades after the slant-drilling proposition passed as first World War II and then postwar economic growth fed demands for even more oil and thus challenged the wisdom of prohibiting oil extraction in residential and shoreline areas. In the late 1930s, however, Los Angeles's efforts to control oil production on the beaches were eclipsed by federal claims to tidelands oil. In August 1937, Senator Gerald P. Nye of North Dakota proposed that Congress recognize the "tidelands" in California, Louisiana, and Texas as part of the public domain. Harold Ickes supported this idea; it was entirely consistent with his vision of federal management of vital natural resources. Nye, Ickes, and their allies believed that federal management of offshore oil reserves would ensure that the whole nation, rather than just a few lucky states, shared the benefits of oil royalties. The idea of federal management of the tidelands actually originated with the Independents, which had been effectively excluded from California's lucrative nearshore oil fields by the regulations sponsored by the Majors. The Majors and the state governments of California, Texas, and Louisiana protested federal ownership as a violation of states' rights and a threat to prosperity and energy production. Although the urgency of oil production during World War II overshadowed proposals for federal ownership for a time, the issue of federal claims remained unresolved until President Dwight D. Eisenhower issued an executive order recognizing California's ownership of all oil deposits within three miles of the coast. Texas and Louisiana were given control of all deposits within three leagues of their shores.

The conflicts over nearshore oil drilling in the 1920s and 1930s originated with Angelenos' desire to keep and use the beaches for recreation. They saw the coast as a scenic rather than an industrial resource. Oil industry activities—from erecting wells, piers, and fences that interfered with public recreation to price-fixing and other monopolistic and aggressive corporate practices—fuelled public opposition to tidelands drilling. These activities also made the oil industry an easy target for those who did not want an intrusive industry to dominate the beach. Criticisms of the oil companies muted over time, but the campaign to remove oil rigs from the shore remained vibrant through the Depression and World War II. The organization formed to spearhead this campaign drew its leadership from the groups that dominated political debate in Los Angeles: chambers of commerce and real estate organizations. Some of Los Angeles's most elite, exclusive social clubs joined in, as did both the *Los Angeles Times* and the smaller newspapers that usually disagreed with the *Times*. This coalition of business leaders
and newspapers encountered no organized opposition to its campaigns against oil drilling and for public ownership of the beaches. Still more significant, with the exception of one brief debate over a highway in Santa Monica, the coalition’s right to speak for the public on this issue went unchallenged.

The 1936 proposition legalizing whiststocking passed, in spite of strong opposition by the chambers of commerce, elite social clubs, and elected officials in Los Angeles and in spite of a campaign to paint the initiative as a giveaway of public resources. Significantly, the three major laws regulating tideland and nearshore oil development in California were all sponsored by major oil companies. Clearly the Majors exercised considerable political influence on oil policy during this period. Particularly in the case of the pier-drilling ban, the Majors used public outrage over the beaches to secure the regulations they wanted.

The rhetoric used in the pier-drilling and whiststocking campaigns and, later, in the drive for public ownership of the beaches shared vehement assertions about the uniquely public nature of the shore. But consider the key advocates of public rights: elite social clubs that owned beachfront property, and newspaper editors and chambers of commerce from Los Angeles beachfront or oil-producing communities. These groups portrayed oil companies as monopolistic outsiders without legitimate claims to the beach and insisted that any oil industry presence on the beach illegitimately transferred public resources into greedy private hands. In thus juxtaposing the private interests in oil development and the public’s interest in the recreational beach, this coalition of the real estate promoters, boosters, social elites, and entrepreneurs echoed Progressive Era criticisms of big business. This is ironic, given how public beaches served this coalition’s economic interests and how few members of the general public actually had a hand in shaping beach policies during the second quarter of the twentieth century in Los Angeles.

_Private Beach Clubs, Cafés, Mansions, and Other Threats_

Starting in the 1920s, just as Los Angeles’s oil production ramped up, social clubs like the exclusive Los Angeles Athletic Club built clubhouses on Los Angeles beaches. These clubs drew their memberships from the social registers and business elites of Orange and Los Angeles counties; their rolls included state senators, state highway commissioners, city councilors, writers, actors, and members of chambers of commerce, realty boards, and the Hollywood Bowl Association. By 1930, eight private clubhouses offered members swimming pools, dining rooms, bars, and comfortable guest rooms for overnight stays in Santa Monica, Long Beach, Hermosa Beach, Venice Beach, Torrance, and Huntington Beach. They featured ornate furnishings and whimsical architecture; one even emulated a medieval castle complete with turrets and
tapestries. Similar developments peppered prime recreational lands in many other cities during this period. The Chicago Yacht Club built exclusive facilities in Chicago’s Grant and Lincoln parks. The venerable Appalachian Mountain Club erected private cabins in Boston’s Emerald Necklace. San Diego’s Balboa Park is still home to at least a dozen semi-private facilities for bridge, horseshoes, lawn bowling, model railroad, and other activities.

Through the 1920s, and with few exceptions, American cities welcomed this sort of private development. Clubs brought facilities and visitors to beaches and parks at no cost to the public treasury, while the proliferation of beachside homes increased the local population, business, and tax base. Not all private development was equally welcome, of course, as protests against oil drilling in Los Angeles and against railroad monopolies of the Oakland and Chicago waterfronts suggest. Nevertheless, Americans have long credited private initiative rather than government activities for economic growth and prosperity. This was particularly true in Los Angeles, a city with few public parks for its size and population. In Los Angeles and Orange County, private ownership of much beachfront land dated from Spanish and Mexican land grants. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, real estate developers and railroad magnates made fortunes buying up and subdividing the old ranchos. Elsewhere in the region, municipal, county, and state governments sold or leased public land for a wide range of private purposes, including residential and industrial development. Particularly in smaller Southern California cities, no real mechanism or motivation existed for extensive public ownership of the shoreline.

By 1930, sixty-four of Los Angeles County’s seventy-one miles of beach were closed to the public. With so much beach in private hands, private development no longer seemed such a universal boon. As one Cassandra put it, “Mile after mile of matchless ocean frontage has been blocked off with public clubs and private residences which range all the way from motion-picture magnates’ homes to sordid shacks, while other miles have been fenced around and plastered with ‘For Sale’ or ‘No Trespassing’ signs until the general public might well paraphrase the Scriptures and cry, ‘Beach, beach, but there is no beach.’ Newspaper editors lamented a gauntlet of food stands and cheap entertain-

ments that threatened to crowd Angelenos off the remaining public strands. Elected officials worried that developers were subdividing beachfront lots so quickly that little would be left for public recreation. Eventually, protests about private beach use grew so strident that public beach advocates stopped distinguishing between large-scale projects like oil drilling or real estate subdivisions and the relatively trivial commercial umbrella and food peddlers.

Efforts to limit private exploitation of the beaches were never wholly divorced from self-interest because the coastal communities recognized the beaches as some of their greatest economic assets. The civic and elected leaders of Los Angeles-area beach cities balanced the needs of new and established enterprises against each other and against their understanding of what attracted visitors to the strand. But the impetus for some of the campaigns against “commercial exploitation” on the beach grew from direct economic self-interest; curtailing new business on the shore protected older, more established ventures located farther inland. For its part, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce supported private exploitation as much as it did public beach development only as long as it felt that private beach clubs, food vendors, and shoreline businesses attracted money and visitors to Southern California.

In 1928, the Westport Beach Club proposed building a groin to reduce erosion in front of its Venice Beach clubhouse. A groin is a small seawall extending across the beach and into the water perpendicular to the shore. Because the Westport Beach Club’s groin would have functioned like a stone wall across the beach, critics of the plan accused the beach club of trying to close off the beach in front of the club to keep people from walking along the shore. A member of the Los Angeles Playgrounds and Recreation Commission who saw himself as “fighting single-handed to save the beaches for the public,” protested that the Westport Beach Club’s project and others like it would “give[e] the beach fronts to the clubs.” Others objected because the groin damaged the “city’s interests” by “constitut[ing] a menace to bathers along the beach.”

Battles over beach club facilities continued into the 1930s in reaction to the Pacific Coast Club’s proposal to build a small pleasure-boat harbor near its Long Beach facilities and to the Surf and Sand Club’s
scheme to fence off part of the public strand in Hermosa Beach for the exclusive use of its members. The *Long Beach Post Telegram* protested the Pacific Coast Club’s yacht harbor project as a “question of private or public beach rights.”46 The business community in Hermosa Beach had long celebrated the Surf and Sand Club, but the fence changed that. In 1935, the Hermosa Beach Junior Chamber of Commerce declared that “they could not possibly support any plan that would place a section of the publicly owned beach under private control.”47 The Hermosa City Council blocked the fence at every turn, even when the club proposed giving the city other beach lands in exchange for approval of the fence.48 The Surf and Sand Club renewed its efforts to build a fence in 1936, warning that it would close if it did not acquire a private beach.49 Hermosa Beach officials again refused. Chambers of commerce, municipal officials, and newspapers that had once embraced private recreational development now vehemently rejected beach club projects as appropriations of public resources for private use.

The beach clubs, of course, were not the only private interests exploiting the beach. Private homes blocked access to much more of the shore. In 1924, for example, the owners of a large beach tract at the mouth of Santa Monica Canyon suddenly subdivided and sold their land. This particular land deal created great consternation among public beach advocates because the Santa Monica Canyon tract was at that time under consideration for the creation of a state beach. Worse still, the new landowners immediately closed the Santa Monica tract to all visitors and began charging tourists a quarter just to look at the view. Such profiteering, the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce protested, was “intolerable” and “should not be allowed.”50 Some years later, in 1933, the state of California purchased and established a state park there. Even this did not eliminate fears of private exploitation because the state park commission leased out a small plot on the beach for a privately owned café.51 Instead of accepting this café as a welcome amenity, the LAACC called the enterprise an “encroachment of business upon the state beach . . . detrimental to the public interest” and a dangerous precedent for commercial development of beaches throughout the county.52 In a similar dispute over an amusement pier in Venice, opponents argued that private development would undermine efforts to expand the public beach.53 The chamber of commerce’s vehement rejection of business development is striking but becomes less surprising when seen in light of its connections to tourism and its commitments to established businesses and high property values in beach communities.

The LAACC was joined by the Los Angeles Playgrounds and Recreation Commission and the venerable landscape architects of the Olmsted firm in criticizing businesses as threats to the unique pleasures of the shore. In 1930, an LAACC committee commissioned the Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Associates to prepare a comprehensive park plan for the city. They found “commercial exploitation . . . [had] gradually put the beach . . . wholly out of existence . . . and . . . corrupted the crowd into indoor commercialized enterprises which might just as well have been elsewhere and which are on the whole distinctly deleterious in character.”54 The landscape architects so opposed private enterprise on the strand that they urged Los Angeles city leaders to control the expansion of even those private businesses that provided useful services to beach visitors.55 In 1946, this aversion to commerce on the beach, in part, prompted the West Los Angeles Police Commission to request a citywide ban on peddling and begging on the beaches.56 In the same year and on a much grander scale, county supervisors considered an elaborate public-private partnership inspired by newly opened facilities at Jones State Beach in New York. They proposed spending more than $8 million in county bond funds to build a “complete recreational plant, with modern public bathhouses, parking spaces, well-equipped picnic grounds, game areas, food stand, cafeterias and restaurants.”57 As at Jones State Beach, income from concessions such as snack bars, parking, and umbrella rentals was to underwrite facility maintenance and operations.58 The Los Angeles County supervisors quickly decided that this much private enterprise was inconsistent with public recreation and abandoned the ambitious scheme. In rejecting the Jones State Beach model, they turned their back on the strategy of public-private cooperation that dominated many other areas of postwar public policy.

The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and others rejected the beach clubs and beachside businesses when these enterprises no longer seemed like an economic boon. Their opposition to commercial
beaches served public recreation suggest why campaigns against private development of the beaches were not as contentious as, say, policy debates over air pollution or flood control. The perceptions of the beach established during the 1920s and 1930s, moreover, greatly facilitated the postwar movement to expand public ownership of the shoreline.

Postwar Planning on the Public Beach

By World War II, Los Angeles could boast a record of reducing oil development on the beaches and protecting access to some beach lands. The community as a whole, including business and real estate interests, had defined the beaches as a distinctly public resource. But a surprising percentage of the beaches that Angelenos used for recreation remained in private hands and thus vulnerable to postwar development. Other threats to public recreation loomed during the war years, too. Overdevelopment of the shoreline, long-term neglect, and population growth had left miles of public and private beaches eroded, polluted, and cluttered with abandoned industrial and commercial structures. These problems threatened to turn the beaches from a tourist attraction and vast public park into unusable, even dangerous territory. In reaction, the same groups that had fought shoreline oil drilling and commercial development before the war organized to protect the beaches as public recreational resources.

Dire reports on the physical decline of Los Angeles’s beaches multiplied as World War II came to a close. The national publication of the Municipal League, American City, reported in 1944 that severe erosion along the Los Angeles coast had undermined beachfront facilities and reduced beaches to narrow, rocky, inhospitable strips. The Los Angeles Times fretted in 1946 that sewage had turned Santa Monica Bay into a “common cesspool” where “sands intended for quiet sunbathing [were] smeared with the scum of human filth.” A Venice neighborhood improvement association complained to the Los Angeles City Council in 1947 that debris from neglected piers posed a “menace to life, limb and property.” These conditions had eroded property values along the shore almost as fast as the beaches themselves seemed to melt away. Those behind the public beach movement recognized that these lower
property values created a fleeting opportunity for local and state governments to purchase large tracts of shoreline for parks. To the casual observer, it may have seemed at the time that Los Angeles's beaches had abruptly descended into crisis. But these environmental problems had developed gradually over several decades.

Beaches are dynamic places. Sand moves constantly along the shore in a process known as littoral drift; seasonally sand moves on and off the beach, too. Wind also plays a role, carrying sand inland to form dunes or sending the sand cascading back onto the beach from those dunes. Any structure can change this equilibrium of water, wind, and sand, tipping the balance and trapping sand in one place or washing it offshore in another. As engineers were just discovering in the 1920s, structures that crossed the surf line were especially disruptive of these geological processes. From the first breakwaters built to protect shipping channels to the oil drilling and recreational piers erected in the first decades of the twentieth century, structures that interfered with littoral drift multiplied in Los Angeles County, with devastating consequences. Flood control projects exacerbated shoreline erosion problems because debris and flood control basins, and the concrete channels built to contain Los Angeles's unruly rivers, all drastically reduced the amount of gravel, sand, and other sediment that washed down from the mountains to replenish the beaches.

Erosion burst into public consciousness following a particularly ferocious storm in December 1940. High tides and powerful waves forced evacuation and then undermined and damaged beachfront property from Venice to Redondo. In response, the group that was to become the premier advocate of public beaches across the state, the Shoreline Planning Association, launched a series of studies that blamed flood control for reducing sand deliveries to the beaches and "unwisely planned yacht harbor developments" and amusement piers for interrupting the natural movement of sand along the shore. Tight municipal budgets prevented Los Angeles from acting to halt coastal erosion even in the wake of this report. At another time, the city might have turned to the Army Corps of Engineers for assistance, but by 1942 that agency had halted all civil works for the duration. So erosion continued, damaging property and narrowing recreational beaches throughout the war and feeding dire predictions in the immediate postwar years that Angelenos would soon lose access to their coast.

Like erosion, the pollution of Santa Monica Bay developed gradually but suddenly attracted public attention immediately after World War II. The city of Los Angeles began dumping its sewage into Santa Monica Bay with the completion of its first sewage outfall at Hyperion Point in 1894. Beach cities began to complain about waste and odors from the Hyperion Point outfall in 1912. Los Angeles did nothing to address these problems for more than a decade. Finally, in 1925 the city added a screening plant and a longer outfall pipe to the Hyperion Point facility. Screening was intended to reduce the amount of solid waste pouring into Santa Monica Bay. The mile-long "submarine outfall," city officials hoped, would reduce pollution by increasing dilution and removing sewage farther out to sea.

The 1925 additions did little to improve water quality in Santa Monica Bay. Almost immediately after the screening plant opened, cracks appeared in the outfall pipe, and the state board of health reported serious odor problems at the plant. An earthquake opened yet more leaks in 1933, but the Los Angeles Department of Public Works quickly exhausted funds for repairs. Between 1930 and 1940, the population of Los Angeles grew from 376,673 to more than 1.5 million residents. So even as the city struggled with its inadequate, leaky sewage disposal plant, this population explosion overwhelmed the sewer system and any environmental gains that the longer outfall pipe might otherwise have yielded. At the best of times, city officials would have been hard pressed to build infrastructure to serve all these new residents. But the 1930s and 1940s were not the best of times.

When lack of funds forced the Department of Public Works to abandon outfall repairs, the city of Los Angeles applied for federal assistance under the New Deal. But in contrast to generous federal support for flood control described in chapter 3, the New Deal agencies rejected Los Angeles's sewage applications. Then, the war further hindered the city's ability to fix the outfall. By 1942, conditions were so bad in Santa Monica Bay that the state board of health canceled the Hyperion Point operating permit and sued the city. But because wartime production codes now prevented city action, the state board of health could do...
little more than exorcise the city for "procrastination and inadequate planning and financing of sewage disposal" and close the beaches to protect public health. Ten miles of beach along Santa Monica Bay remained closed from 1943 to 1947. This did not keep Angelenos from the shore; in spite of dire warnings that swimming in polluted water might lead to typhoid fever, twenty million people visited the quarantined beaches in the summer of 1943 alone.

The abrupt emergence of the beach crisis after 1944, therefore, did not reflect a surge in pollution, decay, and erosion. Rather, peace returned public attention to problems that had seemed unimportant or unsolvable while the United States was fighting the Axis powers. At the end of the war, however, these same problems—erosion, abandoned property, and sewage contamination—seemed to create an opportunity to establish extensive public beaches. Meanwhile, peace and the easing of wartime regulations also promised to bring to Los Angeles an unprecedented real estate boom that could drive up land prices and put public ownership forever out of reach. The Shoreline Planning Association used the opportunities created by the war to expand public beach ownership in Los Angeles and to cement its political influence up and down the state.

The Shoreline Planning Association formed in Los Angeles in the mid-1930s, an outgrowth of a national movement to increase public beach access. It grew quickly; by 1945 it all but directed the Los Angeles County beach planning and development program. Affiliated organizations dominated coastal planning statewide through the 1960s. In the 1950s, several other organizations also advocated for public beaches, but nearly all of them shared the SPA's priorities. R. Carman Ryles, for one, organized a group in 1955 to oppose a new beachside highway between Ocean Park and Venice that the SPA advocated. The Shoreline Planning Association, Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, Santa Monica Chamber of Commerce, and the Los Angeles City Department of Playgrounds and Recreation all favored the highway because it would increase access to the shore. Ryles, whose family had given the city much of the beachfront land affected by the proposed highway, argued that the road would narrow the beach and destroy public recreational lands. But this conflict was resolved within a matter of months and revealed little real disagreement over priorities or values; all the groups involved wanted to expand public beach access and saw a road as essential to doing so. Most other Los Angeles beach organizations did not even differ from the Shoreline Planning Association as much as Ryles's group had. In 1951, for example, representatives of six Southern California counties convened as the Save the Beach League to combat oil pollution on beaches, pollution they blamed on ships dumping oil at sea. Beach improvement and conservation organizations from all over the state formed the California Beaches Association in 1936 to coordinate their efforts to mitigate beach erosion and pollution, halt oil drilling in the tidelands, and develop beaches as tourist attractions. Of all the public beach advocacy groups, the SPA worked most closely with local and state officials and by doing so became an institutionalized fixture in California coastal policy making.

The Shoreline Planning Association rose to such prominence because of its membership and its political tactics. Six of the SPA's 1940 board of directors, Glanton Beall, Morton H. Anderson, Edgar L. Ettor, George P. Larsen, A. A. Newton, and Otto Fehling, also served as officers of the Venice, Santa Monica, Redondo Beach, Hermosa Beach, West Los Angeles, and Los Angeles chambers of commerce. Three of the SPA directors not affiliated with chambers of commerce were involved in real estate. Their number included G. Brooks Snelgrove, the manager and one of the original planners of Palos Verdes Estates, and George H. Linley, the founding chair of the South Bay Realty Board. Geoffrey Morgan, who later became president of the Shoreline Planning Association, also served as president of the Santa Monica Community Chest and represented Santa Monica in the California State Assembly. The SPA secured its influence over beach policy because of the personal power of these individuals but also because it prepared careful studies of beach problems when local officials needed them and drafted local and state legislation for local officials. This ensured that state legislation reflected the Shoreline Planning Association's priorities and guaranteed its continued role in the acquisition and development of public beaches. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce used similar tactics to great effect in the battle against air pollution, as chapter 2 illustrates.
From its founding, the Shoreline Planning Association pressed Los Angeles officials to curb sewage pollution and beach erosion and to expand public ownership. George Hjelte, the superintendent of the Los Angeles City Department of Playgrounds and Recreation, was a powerful ally. From 1940 on, he repeatedly urged the Los Angeles County supervisors to purchase private beachfront land for a vast public playground before prices rose or owners built on undeveloped parcels. Some land came into public hands with little effort on the part of the SPA or anyone else. Beach clubs, dependent on membership dues for operating and mortgage expenses, fell into debt even before the Great Depression. Financial straits forced most of the beach clubs in Los Angeles to consolidate with the Los Angeles Athletic Club in the 1920s. The Los Angeles Athletic Club scraped through the Great Depression by accepting food staples and home furnishings in lieu of club dues. By 1944, however, gasoline rationing and war mobilization decreased membership so much that the Los Angeles Athletic Club had to sell off the Surf and Sand Club in Hermosa Beach, Deauville Club in Santa Monica, and the Pacific Coast Club in Long Beach. The Deauville Club remained in private hands. The Coast Guard used the Pacific Coast Club’s yacht harbor, and the National Youth Administration operated the Surf and Sand Club during the war; the federal agencies declared these properties surplus after the war ended. A number of private landowners facing the same economic pressures that undid the private beach clubs also disposed of their property during this period. In 1943, for example, Louis B. Mayer, Mary Pickford, and some of their neighbors offered to sell their Venice Beach homes to the city of Los Angeles for a dollar. This donation was a public spirited way of dealing with the erosion and pollution that had so damaged their property.

Elsewhere along the coast similar events led to the creation of public beaches. In 1939, for example, a group of Carpenteria residents bought the heavily mortgaged Cerca Del Mar Club and turned it over to Santa Barbara County for public use. In 1936, Los Angeles city and county governments purchased more than a mile of beach property north of Santa Monica because the owners of the land could pay neither mortgages nor back taxes. In 1937, the Playgrounds and Recreation Commission urged the Los Angeles City Council acquire a thousand feet of beach frontage in Venice from bankrupt owners. In 1943, the Los Angeles Municipal League proposed the gradual transformation of private country clubs into public facilities by allowing cash-strapped members to transfer their interest in a club to the city or county. The California State Senate considered appropriating funds for state purchase of tax-delinquent forest lands in 1943. All over the state, proponents of public ownership viewed bankruptcy and tax delinquency as opportunities to increase public ownership.

The Shoreline Planning Association applauded land donations and beach purchases in the 1930s and 1940s, but it was not satisfied. Buying properties in foreclosure or taking tax-delinquent land increased public ownership, but only in the most haphazard way. The SPA wanted a comprehensive plan to ensure that city, county, and state agencies would work together to buy enough land in the right places to meet the regional needs. The SPA also wanted state aid for beach purchases; after all, oil royalties accumulated unspent in the earmarked fund for beach and park acquisition throughout the Depression and the war. Local officials were more than willing to give up with the Shoreline Planning Association on both state aid and planning. The Los Angeles City Council even passed a resolution urging state legislators to appropriate the funds to purchase “all privately-owned shoreline property” in California. In December 1944, the county supervisors submitted a beach acquisition bill to the state legislature. The Shoreline Planning Association, the Los Angeles County Regional Planning Commission, and the state park commission wrote the bill together. The legislation appropriated $10 million in state funds to assist counties in buying beach lands; to get this aid, counties had to write an acceptable comprehensive plan and match state grants with either cash or beachfront acreage. Because the Shoreline Planning Association was now the major author of beach master plans in the state, the comprehensive plan requirement all but codified the SPA’s influence.

The legislature passed the beach bill in early 1945. By that summer, nine cities had approved a beach master plan drafted by the Shoreline Planning Association and the county regional planning commission. None of the newspapers in the county offered any objection to either the Shoreline Planning Association’s influence or the master plan itself.
The plan called for significant crossing of jurisdictional boundaries, the county would use state funds to purchase private property inside the municipal borders of the city of Los Angeles. Even this did not either spawn criticism or alarm defenders of local autonomy. Instead, the media cheered the ambitious beach acquisition and development program as a route to a postwar normalcy of prosperity, recreation, and public access in place of military installations and gasoline-rationing-induced travel restrictions: "There'll be parking spaces, picnic grounds, recreational areas and the public will be back into the swing of good living again."68

Before Angelenos could get "back into the swing of good living," however, the county still had to match state beach funds. So the Shoreline Planning Association campaigned to increase local spending for the public strands. In press releases, interviews, and reports, the association reiterated the same arguments it had used in the 1930s, calling beaches the state's "greatest natural recreational resource" and insisting that the shore ought to be "owned, protected and developed by the State for the enjoyment of the people."69 It also appealed to patriotism and fresh memories of the war. Recalling both the war and the military training exercises held on Los Angeles beaches, it argued, "Our armed forces used the 'beaches' to beat enemy forces. They should now be able to enjoy publicly owned beaches in peace."60 The association's Women's Division publicized the idea of a "Living War Memorials' plan" through which donors giving money for public acquisition could name the strands after friends or relations they had lost.61 The Haynes Foundation likewise suggested developing the Palos Verdes Peninsula shore as a war memorial park.62 In 1946, the Shoreline Planning Association continued to urge state and local governments to buy all available beach property quickly before "public clubs and private residences" completely dominated the shore.63 Beach acquisition plans proceeded aspace over the next five or six years. In 1952, the Los Angeles City Planning Commission began revising the master plan because the city, county, and state agencies had already acquired nearly all the "first priority" property identified in the 1945 plan.64

Although the initial postwar rush of beach purchases encountered little opposition, this changed dramatically in the 1950s. In 1948, a few individuals did protest government purchases of beach land. For example, property owners in Manhattan Beach went to court to keep their land.65 In Ventura County, some property owners protested, too. The Los Angeles Times sharply criticized these opponents of public beach ownership, which suggests the political power of the public beach movement. When Orange County drafted its master plan in 1950, the city of Newport Beach opted out. There, the Central Newport Beach Community Association and the Ocean Front and Beach Protective Association fought public beaches because, they explained, the state government manipulated property taxes and property value assessments to force landowners to sell at unfair prices. These two organizations also tried to cast the issue as one of local control, criticizing state management of the beaches and arguing that the creation of state beaches threatened the character of their community.66

The Los Angeles Times was silent on the Newport civic groups' rejection of the Orange County master plan. The newspaper clearly still supported public beaches. When opponents to Ventura County's 1955 beach master plan called it "a vicious power grab" and a 'socialistic scheme' that threatened property rights throughout the county, the Los Angeles Times dismissed the opponents as self-interested oil companies and real estate developers.67 The growing opposition to the beach master plans, and the media's inconsistent critiques of them suggest that the consensus that had undergirded public beach development since the 1920s had begun to fracture. As it did so, critics increasingly portrayed the state government as a threat to democracy and community rather than their protector.68

By 1961, the public beach movement had completely fallen apart. When the Los Angeles County supervisors and Regional Planning Commission held public hearings on the new master plan, city officials from Hermosa Beach, Palos Verdes, and Manhattan Beach, "alarmed at the authority of the R.P.C. [Los Angeles Regional Planning Commission]," demanded that the county exempt their communities from the master plan and return beaches to local control.69 Although they had once welcomed beachgoers as a boon to the local economy, officials in these three cities now saw visitors as invading outsiders who increased traffic, burdened local services, and threatened the character of their
neighborhoods. Before World War II, Los Angeles area civic and elected leaders saw beaches as so important to economic growth and public recreation that such a response to a beach acquisition plan would have been unthinkable. But by 1960 these communities felt like victims of their own success, overwhelmed by ever growing crowds at public beaches, and by the associated costs of providing services to those visitors. The rejection of the 1960 master plan signaled a more substantial change in the way communities regarded their beaches. Residents now saw their beaches as a local rather than national or regional asset and viewed state-sponsored beach acquisition planning as a threat to home rule. Similar concerns about local control appeared in many other policy disputes of the postwar years, with profound implications for a host of other regional and national environmental decisions.

Segregation on Public Beaches

Using local and state resources, by 1961 Los Angeles County had set aside miles of public beaches. These beaches are still the region’s primary recreational space and integral to the region’s image. But this only partly explains the broad appeal of an accessible public shoreline. Public ownership protected Los Angeles County residents’ recreational opportunities and attracted tourists to the region. Public strands served equally beach cities that built their economies on beachgoers and the larger aspirations of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce and other boosters who saw tourism as an engine for population growth, business investment, and regional prosperity. In the beaches, it appears, Los Angeles found the intersection of public and private interests, where the public good was defined in terms of public access instead of private exploitation. However, in spite of all that public beach advocates claimed, public ownership did not always guarantee all Angelenos equal access to the sea. On the contrary, most of Los Angeles’s public beaches were racially segregated until the 1920s; some beaches remained so into the 1960s. African Americans and, to a lesser extent, Mexican and Asian Americans needed private beaches to have access to the shore.

Like so many other American cities, Los Angeles adopted Jim Crow segregation in the 1920s. The city parks department suddenly segregated swimming pools; real estate agents refused to show African Americans houses in white areas, and some communities adopted restrictive covenants that prohibited the sale of homes to African American buyers. Even before Los Angeles fully embraced Jim Crow, the public beaches were off limits to blacks. African Americans could swim and picnic only on a half-mile stretch in southern Santa Monica called the Inebwell and on Bruce’s Beach, an even smaller enclave in Manhattan Beach. These were not public beaches. Rather, private individuals had purchased beach frontage to create recreational space for Los Angeles’s black community. When African Americans tried to cross the color line and use other beaches, they were met with violence and often arrested for disorderly conduct or inciting riots.

On several occasions, African Americans tried to improve their beach access by purchasing more frontage or building their own beach clubs. These efforts rarely succeeded. White segregationists, arguing that all private beach development hurt the public interest, pressured local officials to condemn lands that blacks had purchased. When public beaches were established on these condemned strands, segregation excluded African Americans. In 1921, for example, a group of investors arranged to purchase a large beachfront lot in Santa Monica to build a “first class resort with beach access” for blacks. The proposal infuriated chamber of commerce director and Santa Monica resident Sylvester Weaver. During one chamber of commerce meeting, he blurted out, “I was born pretty far south to have that in front of my house.”

The Santa Monica Bay Protective League blocked the project, first by persuading city officials to deny the group a building permit, then by pressuring the owners of the land to withdraw from their agreement to sell, and finally by convincing large landholders in Santa Monica to adopt restrictive covenants to prohibit home sales to blacks. In 1924, this story repeated itself. In this case, Titus Alexander, a one time city council candidate who was later recognized by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce for hosting black athletes during the 1932 Olympics, tried to lease beach frontage near the Hyperion Point sewage outfall. He hoped to build an “amusement resort” for African Americans but instead he got a court injunction that blocked the lease and a citywide ballot initiative to ban any leases of public beach for private develop-
ment.\textsuperscript{108} More than seven thousand voters signed the ballot petition.\textsuperscript{109} Arthur W. Eckman, the leader of the campaign to block Alexander’s lease, insisted that his was “simply a movement to keep the municipally owned beaches open, free to all the public, white and colored, and prevent them from being leased to private parties for gain,” but of course he knew that public beaches were segregated in Los Angeles.\textsuperscript{109} Most news coverage associated with this petition drive reinforced the racial elements of this conflict by describing Alexander’s plans for Hyperion Point as “a recreation beach for colored people.”\textsuperscript{110} Regardless of Eckman’s claims, race factored into the public response to the proposed ordinance.

An African American beach club and resort in Orange County met an even more devastating fate. In 1923, Hal R. Clark, a white attorney working with black partners, purchased seven acres of land, including a thousand feet of beach frontage, just outside Huntington Beach. He planned to build the Pacific Beach Club for African Americans there, with a dance hall, a bath house, and two hundred beach cottages. From the beginning, the project encountered fierce opposition from the Huntington Beach and Newport Beach chambers of commerce and from other Orange County civic groups.\textsuperscript{111} In April 1925, the Los Angeles Times reported that “various organizations in Orange County” had persuaded the Pacific Electric and Southern Pacific railroads to prohibit the club from building an entrance road across the railroad tracks.\textsuperscript{112} The California Railroad Commission ordered the railroads to permit the club to access its property.\textsuperscript{113} Contractors refused to take on the project or abandoned it after beginning work.\textsuperscript{114} Once Clark finally found a builder, he received warnings that the club would never open; carpenters at the site reported ill-concealed threats of arson.\textsuperscript{115} On 21 January 1926, an arsonist destroyed the nearly completed clubhouse and dance hall. That night, opponents of the club petitioned the Orange County supervisors to condemn the club’s land for a public park and beach. The supervisors did not act, but the Los Angeles Times reported that “it was said at Huntington Beach . . . that the condemnation campaign now will be launched with new vigor” because arson had decreased the value of the Pacific Beach Club’s land.\textsuperscript{116}

As the club tried to recover from the fire, an effort that included a national appeal to African Americans for funds,\textsuperscript{117} a Huntington Beach organization formed specifically to block the establishment of an African American enclave on the property. In 1925, Clark gave up and sold the land. Demands for a public beach at the site died out immediately, and there was nothing but fanfare when the whites-only South Coast Club purchased the land and opened its doors.\textsuperscript{118} In Los Angeles County, segregation of the beaches slowly declined after the NAACP swim-in and massive arrests on Manhattan Beach in 1927. But in the 1920s, supporters of segregation, including white landowners with expensive shorefront property, used the expansion of public ownership as a tool of exclusion rather than access.

\textbf{Conclusion: Business as the Voice of the Public}

Public ownership and access to the beaches seemed, on the face of it, a triumph of the public interest, in spite of the way that public beaches were used to halt development by and for African Americans. The public beach campaign was in part fueled by a broad, diffuse reaction against industrialization; development of city, county, and state beaches was guided by an image of the shore as a unique respite from the world of commerce. Elected officials, major newspapers, the Shoreline Planning Association, and voters not only targeted oil development as incompatible with recreation but also curbed more benign forms of privatism—beach clubs, some residential and commercial development, peddling—at the shore. Moreover, Los Angeles County refused the kinds of public-private partnerships at the beach that it celebrated in other aspects of postwar governance. The perception of the beach as uniquely public persisted through the 1920s; Los Angeles city and county planners received praise for advocating and coordinating public purchases of private beach property in years when other proposed expansions of public authority were loudly decried as dangerous, socialist, and un-American.

Although justified as protecting public prerogatives, the public beaches did not result from an inclusive political process. The members of the Shoreline Planning Association took it upon themselves to craft a public beach acquisition program for Los Angeles County. They had no
real expertise or official status but were well organized, astute, and reliable political allies. Goaded by public outcry against pier and shoreline drilling, local officials looked to the Shoreline Planning Association for policy recommendations. The SPA had proposals ready when public officials needed them. Its ability to respond proactively encouraged public officials to depend on the association. By 1945, this dependence permitted the SPA to write its influence into state legislation. This same combination of cooperation and support earned other business organizations comparable influence over a huge variety of local policy questions from air pollution and flood control to water resources planning and development.

The Shoreline Planning Association ultimately became the recognized authority on beach development and, in policy debates, the voice of the public. Broad public support for public, recreational beach development reinforced this status. But the relative lack of controversy reflected the special category of beaches rather than something unique about the relationship between the SPA and the larger Los Angeles public. The SPA, like other business groups, pursued its self-interests and protected its influence. The Shoreline Planning Association's board of directors included directors of the Los Angeles and suburban chambers of commerce and real estate organizations. The ties between the SPA and the real estate business make the group's self-interest obvious. The connections between these organizations made city, county, and state officials—already familiar with chambers of commerce and realty boards—predisposed to trust the Shoreline Planning Association. Close institutional affiliations also explain why the SPA's political strategies closely mimicked those of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. The relationship between the public and the SPA is more difficult to assess. The Los Angeles Times and other area newspapers focused their reporting on criticizing private ownership that barred Angelenos from the beaches; the media did not report negative reactions to the Shoreline Planning Association or its proposals. Angelenos did use beaches regularly, in huge numbers. They visited even filthy quarantined beaches by the millions in the 1940s. These numbers alone lend some credibility to the Shoreline Planning Association's allegation that people living throughout Los Angeles County supported the association's goals, or at the very least, welcomed whatever public beaches the SPA and city, county, or state governments created.

The biggest difference, then, between the public beach campaign and the policy issues to be discussed in the remainder of this book is not who proposed or influenced public policy but the fact that neither the Shoreline Planning Association's designation as a representative of the public interest nor the organization's goal of expanded public ownership seemed to have given rise to public acrimony or to have prompted other groups to challenge the SPA's political legitimacy between the 1920s and the 1950s. The story of Los Angeles's public beaches demonstrates how shaped Los Angeles politics and who did not: business and industry retained considerable clout in the city, even as Los Angeles struggled with the consequences of industrial growth and even as industry served as an easy rhetorical target for discontent. In more contentious policy debates, such as air pollution or flood control, it became harder to determine who could really claim to speak for the people as a whole. Nevertheless, business interests generally enjoyed unfettered access to policy debates and won contests over political legitimacy. In the case of the beaches, the business interests secured their status by selecting easy targets—oil rigs and private development on the shoreline—and then institutionalizing their own status in the shoreline planning process. The next chapters examine how the business community secured its influence in more contentious arenas.
fore more meritorious firms. In Los Angeles, this sentiment figured prominently in the oil fields as Los Angeles's small oil firms routinely criticized the Majors for promoting regulations that would force the Independents out of business. The images of oil companies as selfish corporate giants also defined campaigns to limit oil drilling on and near the beaches. The threat of bigness appeared on both sides in the Boulder Dam debate: proponents of the dam warned that big utilities were manipulating American politics, while opponents fretted that the dam would allow big California to take resources from little Arizona. Even as the appeal of using government power to counter corporate influence faltered, the habit of lauding small businesses while criticizing larger firms persisted. So, for example, critics nearly always blamed smog on Los Angeles's biggest industries and complained that the ACPD shielded big industry from regulation while cracking down on smaller firms. Opponents to Whittier Narrows Dam relied on their size, too, when they argued that flood control should not sacrifice the homes, acre-lot farms, and small businesses of El Monte to protect larger agricultural and industrial interests downstream. But by the 1940s, these arguments had greater rhetorical appeal than political force. They reflected American nostalgia for its agrarian past and culture of individualism, but they did not represent a significant challenge to business groups' pervasive political power or the localism that reinforced it and left so many citizens on the sidelines of American politics.
INTRODUCTION

1. The Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce is nearly always referred to as simply the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. The official title is reflected in the acronym L.A.C.C. In most cases, I have used the more common name.

2. Winship, Property Rights. See also Pisani, Redevelopment Bureau, National Water Policy, and the West, 203-34. Williams briefly describes the connection between waterworks and electric power generation and the private utilities' opposition to both in Energy and the Making of Modern California, 45-62. For more on the barriers to public enterprise generally, see Radford, "From Municipal Socialism to Public Authorities." For more on the relationships between business and government in Los Angeles, see Eise, "How the Urban West Was Won." See also Vietor, Energy Policy in America since 1945.

3. Hays, Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency, Jacoby, Crimes against Nature. Warren, Hunter's Game. Cumber, in Reasonable Use, discusses the transfer of resources from agriculture to industry and then to urban recreation in New England waterways. In contrast to these works, Judd traces the roots of conservation to New England communities seeking to preserve community rights; see Common Lands, Common People.

4. Broesamle, Reform and Reaction in Twentieth Century American Politics, 43-44.

5. See, for example, Linc, "What Happened to the Progressive Movement in the 1930s?" and Koppes, "Environmental Policy and American Liberalism." Iosel examined San Francisco and Los Angeles business leaders' efforts to counter the political power of labor and define public priorities in "Citizen Outside the Government."

6. Brickley has examined the transformation of American liberalism as a result of the integration of business executives into the federal bureaucracy in End of Reform and Liberalism and Its Discontents. Galambos and Pratt also note that labor unions and government were recognized as the protectors of the public good in the early twentieth century. Corporations, they argue, gained power as a result of political compromises and eventually proved themselves trustworthy; see Rise of the Corporate Commonwealth. Brock, in Americans for Democratic Action, blamed Disenfranchisement for weakening liberalism under President Truman. Broesamle, in Reform and Reaction in Twentieth Century American Politics, attributes the decline of Progressive-style liberalism to the Progressives' own emphasis on special interests, which, he explains, intensified interest group politics even during the Progressive Era and eventually sowed the seeds of a new politics based on interest group competition. See also Iosel, "Liberalism and Urban Policy in San Francisco from the 1930s to the 1960s" and "Business Power and Political Culture in San Francisco."

7. There is an extensive literature on "agency capture," the process by which regulatory agencies come to serve narrow private interests rather than regulate them. In environmental history, the bulk of these studies have treated the relationship between the timber and livestock industries and the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management. See, for example, Klyza, Who Controls Public Lands?

Raymond, "Localism in Environmental Policy; and Hirt, A Conspiracy of Optimism. Interest-group formation and influence has become an important field of study for political scientists since Dahl published Who Governs? See Moe, Organization of Interests, and Smith, Interest Group Interaction and Groundwater Policy Formation in the Southwest. Additional studies focus on the effectiveness, or lack thereof, of citizen participation in contemporary policy debates or on the difficulty that new groups experience in entering policy debates. See Beiele and Cayford, Democracy in Practice; Walter, "Critique of the Elitist Theory of Democracy"; and Lewis, End of Liberalism.

8. Hayden, Power of Place. Caltech and the University of Southern California have cosponsored the Los Angeles History Group in recent years.

9. Nicolaidos, My Bike Heaven; Wild, Street Meeting.

10. Flannery, Bound for Freedom; Sides, L.A. City Limits; Dowerell, Whitewashed Adobe.

11. According to Hine, Los Angeles' urban land use patterns grew out of a deliberate process of decentralization adopted by city and county officials and promoted by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. See, for example, Magnetic Los Angeles, and Fogelson, Fragmented Metropolis.

12. Both Nash and Lotchin attribute much of California's industrial economy to wartime military production. See Nash, Federal Landscape; World War II and the West; American West in the Twentieth Century; American West Transformed; and Crucial Era. In Bad City in the Good War, Lotchin emphasizes that wartime spending merely accelerated California's industrial development. See also Starks, Embittered Dreams, and Johnson, Second Gold Rush.

13. Los Angeles' reform politics have received far less attention than San Francisco's. For good work on key figures in Los Angeles, see Sitton, Los Angeles Transformed and John Randolph Haynes, California Progressive. On San Francisco, see Isbel and Chersey, San Francisco; Ethington, Public City and Clark, Defending Rights.


15. On flood control in Los Angeles, see Orni, Hazardous Metropolis; Gumprecht, Los Angeles River; and Bigger, Flood Control in Metropolitan Los Angeles. Two comprehensive works are Devery, Don't Breathe the Air, and Krier and Urban, Pollution and Policy.

16. The literature on water resources is among the most well-developed in environmental history. Some of the best works include Hunter's comprehensive Great Thirst; Wosten's classic Rivers of Empire; and Kuhly's Water and Power.
CHAPTER ONE

1. Growth has been a major theme in Los Angeles historiography, from Fogel's classic Fragmented Metropolis to studies of tourism, public infrastructure, race relations, and nearly every other possible topic. Works on boosterism and growth include Gish, "Growing and Selling Los Angeles"; Zimmerman, "Paradise Promoted"; and Overick, Los Angeles. In "How the Urban West Was Won," Erie examines the role of public infrastructure and the government institutions that ran them in Los Angeles's early twentieth-century growth. See also such varied works as Hise, Maplecroft, Los Angeles; Nicolaidis, My Blue Heaven; Flannery, Bound for Freedom; and Wild, Street Meeting.

2. Quarn-Wickham, in "Cities Sacrificed on the Altar of Oil," describes vividly the problems that oil development brought to Los Angeles's residential districts and the working-class movement to regulate the oil companies in the 1920s. See also Branch, "Oil Extraction, Urban Environment and City Planning."

3. Feinstein and Grannan, Oil in Troubled Waters, 15; Yergin, Price, 25, 28–29. Quarn-Wickham, in "Cities Sacrificed on the Altar of Oil," describes vividly the problems that oil development brought to Los Angeles's residential districts and the working-class movement to regulate the oil companies in the 1920s. See also Branch, "Oil Extraction, Urban Environment and City Planning."

4. Abstracts of Articles of Incorporation for California Oil Companies on File in Alameda, Bancroft Library, Berkeley, California.

5. Linda Vista Oil, Articles of Incorporation, 1907. Abstracts of Articles of Incorporation for California Oil Companies on File in Alameda, Bancroft Library.


6094. LACA. Rendler wrote on behalf of the Jonathan Club, still one of Los Angeles's most exclusive social clubs.

34. Guy W. Finney to John Anson Ford, 31 Aug. 1936, box 11, JAFF.
35. Ibid.
37. "City Planners Act Following Union Protest."
38. Finney to Ford, 31 Aug. 1936, JAFF. Finney was one of the organizers of this movement.
39. Glanton Reab to John Anson Ford, 15 Sept. 1936, box 11, JAFF. Glanton Reab wrote this letter on behalf of the Shoreline Planning Association, a civic group that advocated public beach acquisition and the 2,500-foot drilling setback.
40. Los Angeles required oil companies to cover the sides of their derricks to reduce noise and to keep oil from spraying onto nearby property. These measures were not always very successful. For pictures of covered derricks, see Franks and Lambert, Early California Oil, 113. 41. J. A. Ford to Glanton Roeb, 21 Sept. 1936, box 11, JAFF.
42. Glanton Reab to J. A. Ford, 15 Sept. 1936, box 11, JAFF.
43. Ibid.
44. Glanton Reab, "Warning! Our Beaches Are Threatened," undated broadside, box 11, JAFF; The ballot measure, known as Proposition 4, was narrowly defeated in Los Angeles, 455,160 to 434,899. See "City-County Vote," LAT, 4 Nov. 1936.
45. Some oil companies, unhappy with state leasing programs that seemed to give major oil corporations an unfair advantage, also argued that only city governments should issue drilling leases for nearshore oil. This, and a desire by the city government for oil royalties, prompted the Huntington Beach City Council to attempt to assert control over tides lands leasing in 1933. See "Tides Lands Oil Battle Opera."
46. Ellkind, "Public Oil, Private Oil," 131--34. See also "Origin and History of Tides Lands Case," 1331; "Conflicting State and Federal Claims of Title in Submerged Lands of the Continental Shelf;" and Bartley, Tideland Oil Controversy.
48. Young, Our First Century, 123--23.
49. For more on real estate development of Los Angeles's beach communities, see Davidson, "Before Surfurbia."
50. Olmsted Brothers and Barlowomew and Assoc., Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region, 19.
52. In "New Director Named for Junior Chamber," Redondo Reflex, 25 Oct. 1935, the Hermosa Beach Junior Chamber of Commerce's new director identified the beach as his community's chief economic asset.
53. Steno Reports, 1 Dec. 1936, i.
54. "City's Beach Permit Strips Wordly Battle," L.AE, 19 June 1938. The Los Angeles Playgrounds and Recreation Commission was an advocacy group that advised and pressured the Los Angeles City Playgrounds and Recreation Department and the Los Angeles Department of Parks and Recreation. The Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce from time to time also convened commissions to investigate or lobby for the development of recreational resources in the Los Angeles region. For information on the Pacific Coast Club's breakwater proposal, see "Right to Build Groynes Said Not Refused," Long Beach Press Telegram, 16 July 1930. Neither the beach club phenomenon nor conflicts between locals and beach clubs over ownership and access to the beach were confined to Southern California. A similar dispute erupted in New York in June 1930 when a hotel fenced off a beach and access road for the exclusive use of its guests. Local property owners asserted that they owned the beach, and they stampeded the disputed land armed with batons and hammers. See "Somebody's Trampling: Citizens Storm Beach Claimed by Hotelists," LAT, 5 June 1930.
59. "Surf and Sand Club Closing Threatened in Beach Row," LAT, 4 Oct. 1936. The Surf and Sand Club remained open, but in 1937 the Los Angeles Athletic Club leased out the unprofitable facility; the building was operated as the Hermosa Biltmore Hotel. The Los Angeles Athletic Club sold the building in 1945. See Young, Our First Century, 143--44.
60. "Acquisition of Beach Frontage for Public Use," Steno Reports, 24 July 1934, 10.
63. Letter to C. S. Lamb, 4 Sept. 1936, box Asso, attachment to commn. 12429, LACA.
64. Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Assoc., Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region, 69. For more on the Olmsted and Bartholomew plan, see Marguerite Shaffer, "Scenery as an Asset: Assessing the 1930 Los Angeles Regional Park Plan," Planning Perspectives, 16 (2001), 337--81.


67. Dean, Against the Tide, 44–45. Dean cites a 1961 article in the Municipal Engineers Journal on Convey Island erosion and beach improvements as the start of engineers’ awareness that groins and other beach structures caused more erosion than they prevented. For more on the problems caused by groins, breakwaters, and seawalls, see Dean, Against the Tide, 36–39. Groins and breakwaters do not merely cause erosion by starving the beach of sand. Because a wave carrying little or no sediment has more energy, it will pick up more sand from the beach than a similar wave carrying a normal amount of sediment. Thus structures that impede the movement of sediment along the shore actually increase erosion nearby.


69. For the attribution of erosion to yacht harbors, see A. G. Johnson, "The Vanishing Beaches of Southern California," Western City, May 1940, 23, and Griffin, Coastline Plant and Action, 14–15. See also Redhines and Tiltons, Los Angeles, 357–58.

70. In 1935, the Los Angeles Department of Public Works added a sewage disposal plant on Terminal Island for vats from the Wilmington, San Pedro, and Harbor City areas. In 1976 and 1989, the Los Angeles Department of Public Works added two water reclamation plants to treat sewage and produce reclaimed water for the San Fernando Valley. The Hyperion Point plant remains by far the largest and most important wastewater treatment facility for the city of Los Angeles.


74. "Beach Road Stirs Fight," LAT, 1 May 1951; "Ocean-Front Highway Opposed To..."
by Santa Monica City Council," LAT, 18 May 1935; "Beach Road Route Fixed," LAT, 14 June 1935; "Beach Land Deed Aired," LAT, 18 Apr. 1935. Rylko's organization, the Save the Beach Association, should not be confused with the 1931 Save the Beach League.

75. "League Formed to Fight against Beach Pollution," LAT, 22 Nov. 1931; "Beach Unit, Join Harks," LAT, 31 Jan. 1936.


77. Testimony of George Hefts, Beach Study Conference: Proceedings of a Meeting of Representatives of Governmental and Private Agencies called by Board of Supervisors to Consider Beach and Shoreline Problems, 12 Apr. 1940, box 17, JAFF.

78. Young, Our First Century, 220–24, 407–408 on the Deauville Club, see "Santa Monica Beach Unit Sold by LACU," LAT, 10 Sept. 1940.


80. "City to Be Given Beach Park," LAT, 10 May 1930.


82. Charles S. Lamb, Playgound and Recreation Commission, to Los Angeles City Council, "Subject: Acquisition of Certain Beach Properties at Venice." 9 Nov. 1935, box A167b, attachment to "Communication from Shoreline Planning Ann," commun. 4309, LACA.


84. SB 509—Appropriating $1,000,000 for Acquisition and Reforestation of Cutover Lands," Senate Reports, 15 Mar. 1943, 4.


86. "County to Seek State Beach Fund," LAT, 12 Dec. 1943.


89. "Public Beach Plan Passed." 


91. Ibid.

92. "County Beach Plans Bared."


94. City Planning Commission (Edith S. Jameson), Resolution, 11 Nov. 1952, box A169, commun. 56505, LACA.


99. "Countywide Shoreline Plan Sharply Debated at Hearing," LAT, 30 Mar. 1966; "Property Owners Protest: Supervisors Decide to Think Again about Plan for Beaches," LAT, 14 July 1966. Ironically, during this same period of time elsewhere in Southern California, voters came to see urban development along the shore as an increasing threat to public access. This trend not only reinforced the public ownership but in 1971 yielded the California Coastal Commission, which has restricted development in the coastal zone ever since. See Davidson, "Beach versus Blade Runner.

100. "Countywide Shoreline Plan Sharply Debated at Hearing," "Property Owners Protest: Supervisors Decide to Think Again about Plan for Beaches." The Redondo Beach City Council joined the opposition, petitioning to have a private yacht harbor in their community omitted from a revised master plan.

101. Douglas Flannery attributes the 1920s segregation movement, as did black Angelenos themselves, to increasing immigration of southern whites to Los Angeles. See Flannery, Bound for Freedom. See also Sidis, L.A. City Limits, and Boyle, Arc of Justice.


103. Ibid, 271–75.

104. Similar tactics were used to block black subdivisions as well. In one particularly notable case, a group of wealthy white landowners in southwestern Los Angeles convinced the county to condemn land slated for a black subdivision. The land eventually became Alondra Park. See ibid., 240–45.
108. Box A316, "Communication from City Clerk," commun. 698, LACA.
109. "Beach Suit Depending on Voters." 
110. "Beach Leases Fought."
116. "Inquiry Began in Club Blat."
118. "Ocean Front Site Is Purchased for New Clubhouse Project."
119. "Redondo Veterans Elect New Officer"; "Redondo Airs Civic Plans"; "Backers of Pension Plan Demand Ouster of Chamber Secretary"; "Hermosa Beach City Employee Who Fought ‘Funny Money’ Plan"; "Marked Gain in Attendance at Golden Gate Fair Reported"; "Shortridge for High Dam"; "Memorials Will Honor Peninsula Civic Leader."

CHAPTER TWO

1. H. G. Swartout to Board of Supervisors, 23 Sept. 1943, box 35, JAPP. Swartout was the Los Angeles County health officer. In his capacity as county health officer, he reported an increase in the number of traffic accidents downtown, "some of which are quite definitely due to eye irritation and consequent poor vision."
3. Soren in "Businessmen against Pollution in Late Nineteenth Century Chicago," considers the economic incentives that underlay the Chicago business community’s cooperation with antismoke efforts. In many cities, smoke control efforts pitted women reformers, who focused on public health and municipal housekeep-