

Bringing Wealth and Water to the City of Angels: Transforming Los Angeles' physical landscape into an Anglo Vision 1908-1960

By Cambria Rodriguez

Los Angeles today continues to undergo massive land and city development to sustain and provide for the growing city. The city has become a multi-ethnic metropolis, housing and providing for diverse communities as it has since the beginning of development. The city resides between the Pacific Coast, Sierra Nevada, and San Gabriel mountains making it a prime region for real estate. Its desirable flat region is crucial in the construction of massive building projects. However, the landscape did not always prove prosperous for the Anglican community. Los Angeles' geographical features and water supply were not always manageable and the Anglican communities that resided within suffered hardships for many generations. For almost a hundred years Mexicans who settled into Los Angeles prior to the Mexican American War adapted to the natural, physical landscape and the water supply it provided. However, when Anglo Americans came to the Los Angeles basin after California was declared a state in 1848, decades of physical landscape changes to the region's coast and water supply began to transform the City of Angels according to an "Anglo Vision" at the social and human cost of the displaced and exploited indigenous and Mexican descent populations who resided there.

There is an extensive amount of scholarship, current and past, that details Anglo alterations within the Los Angeles region's communities and landscape in addition to the human and environmental cost that accompanied. However, there is little scholarship pertaining to the physical landscape changes Anglo Americans enforced that specifically affected the indigenous and Mexican descended communities within Los Angeles which is why my research provides historical significance. The scholarship in my research is diverse and comes from an array of academic and professional disciplines that strengthens and provides perceptive evidence to my paper.

Many of my primary sources derive from city maps dating back to 1888 that display the evolution of physical landscape and community alterations as well as photographs and newspaper articles during the periods of reconstruction many of which, were supplied by the California State University, Dominguez Hills archives. In addition, sociologist John Walton's *Western Times and Water Wars* included beneficial statistics, maps, newspaper articles, first-

hand accounts and many additional resources that depicts the hardships indigenous and Mexican communities faced during the construction of the Owen's River Valley Aqueduct. A collective of authors from scientific, ecological, biochemical, and geographic backgrounds included in the *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain* SCCWRP Technical Report, provided insight into social, landscape and ecological effects of the Los Angeles Anglo Vision. Historians William Deverell, Blake Gumprecht and Greg Hise were also important contributors to my research. These authors focus on the social, political and economic impacts the Anglo Vision forced onto the Los Angeles region and its multiethnic communities. Literature prior to 1990 focuses on the Anglo point of view and Anglo successes in building the city of their dreams, which was not necessarily beneficial to my studies. The sources in my research were all published within the last twenty years, which substantiates the premise that the impact the Anglo vision had on ethnic communities and the landscape is a relatively recent historical research phenomenon.

Los Angeles Communities Prior to Anglo Arrival

In order to comprehend the dramatic social and cultural changes that the Los Angeles indigenous and Mexican communities endured during the years of Anglo transformation, it is important to recall the past communities of influence which can be found in author Blake Gumprecht's *The Los Angeles River: its life, death, and possible rebirth*. According to Gumprecht, the first inhabitants of the region were the Tongva Indians. The Tongva Indians were hunters and gatherers who once inhabited the valleys and coastal plains of the Los Angeles region. The water supplied from the Los Angeles river and streams that birthed out of it, were crucial to their life and culture. The Tongva used the river to drink and bathe in the pools along its banks. The natural landscape provided them with animals to hunt, acorns and other native food sources, and materials to make their huts, clothing and tools.^[1] The Tongva Indians adapted to and moved with the natural landscape and respected what it provided for them. The Tongva traveled according to the season to search for food and selected sites for their villages according to the location and sources of water, which provided all that the Tongva needed to survive. Because the Tongva understood the region's waterways and their dangers, many settlements remained a safe distance from the region's rivers and streams, on high ground. Gumprecht concludes that this understanding and syncretism to the Los Angeles landscape is apparent among the Tongva culture and was passed on to future generations and new inhabitants.

In 1768, an expedition was ordered by the Spanish government to occupy Monterey, California. The expedition was led by Baja governor, Captain Gaspar de Portola. Two members of the expedition kept diaries of their experiences; Engineer Michael Costanso and Father Juan Crespi.^[2] It is in these daily accounts, that the first sightings of the Los Angeles region are documented and recorded. As Father Juan Crespi noted while camping along the Los Angeles River, “It has good land for planting all kinds of grain and seeds, and is the most suitable site of all that we have seen for a mission, for it has all the requisites for a large settlement.”^[3] Indeed, by 1781, colonial Spain, intrigued by the plentiful supply of water, established El Pueblo de la Reina de Los Angeles.

As the Spaniards settled into the Los Angeles region in 1781, they soon realized their agricultural dreamland was illusory. ^[4] The inability to control and effectively irrigate the water supply within the region led the Spaniards to adopt Tongva Indian agricultural labor skills and expertise of the region’s soil. In addition, the Spaniards also adopted the Tongva’s understanding of the irregularities of the rivers and streams. Along with their farm labor, the Indians were used to maintain the Pueblo’s water ditches.^[5] The Spaniards continued adopting “primitive” traditions that proved vital within the Spanish outpost after the Mexican Revolution against Spain in 1821. With the forced labor of the region’s Indigenous community and adaptation of their geographical traditions, the Spaniards flourished and thrived within the Los Angeles basin for decades.

According to Andrew Rolle’s book *Los Angeles: From Pueblo to City of the Future*, the era of the *Californios* evolved due to the distance and difficulty of communication between Mexico City and California in addition to strong local pride. ^[6] The open and available lands, in addition to the demand for labor and rancheros drew Mexican migrants north to “El Pueblo”.^[7] Rolle claims the migrants not only introduced new Central Mexican species to the foreign lands, but also their traditions and relationships to nature. Coming from lands with tropical climates and good soil, the Mexican migrants were essentially forced to adopt old native traditions in order to survive in the region. The 2007 *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain* SCCWRP technical report #499, from 1825 to about 1831, discusses the severe droughts the Los Angeles region suffered.^[8] Indians who left Mission life served as laborers and ranch hands on the *Californio* estates and ranchos. The *Californios* learned a great deal from them about the Los Angeles province and volatile water sources. The elite *Californios* were vulnerable, and lacked the supplies and economic

backing to produce an advanced system of irrigation. Thus, they depended on native labor and land knowledge for their success.^[9]

Despite Indian labor abuse, and cultural exclusion, the Spanish and Mexican generations continued local Indian traditions, knowledge and respect of the Los Angeles region. The *Californio* society was built on the experiences, successes and losses of those who came before them. The water continued to flow in its own directions while the developing communities adapted alongside. However, as noted by Rolle, everything changed after the Mexican-American War. In 1847 Los Angeles was occupied, and by 1848 California was officially a part of the United States quickly becoming an immigrant center.^[10] “El Pueblo” was Americanized fairly quickly, and Anglos began to displace the region’s Mexican heritage. Ideologies would soon change from humans conforming to the land, to conforming the land for the Anglos.

Anglo Los Angeles

The discovery of gold near Sacramento in 1848 initiated the transformation of Los Angeles into a center for trade and materials, resulting in more southern Mexican migrants and curious Anglos migrating from the east. Eastern migration erupted exponentially after California officially became a state later that year.^[11] In his book, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*, historian William Deverell claims that the end of the war between the Republic of Mexico and United States pressured not only the Manifest Destiny’s right for Anglo American expansion westward, but also the postulation that racial and national supremacy were in collusion.^[12] In addition to the economic promises California provided, there were outward racial migration factors supported by Manifest Destiny that enticed Anglo migrants into the Los Angeles region. Deverell asserts that Manifest Destiny’s Anglican racial privilege and ethnocentrism promoted Anglo confidence to conquer and exploit “The City of Destiny.”^[13]

Another factor for Anglo migration into the Los Angeles region is mentioned in the *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain* SCCWRP Technical report. According to the 2007 report, in 1851, The United States congress established the California Land Act, which set up a land commission to adjudicate between what was legitimate and illegitimate land claims in California. Proof of land ownership, was often difficult to attain due to different requirements under Mexican law. Ultimately, many rancheros were forced to sell all or most of their land to the U.S. government or Anglo migrants.^[14] In addition to the discovery of gold and

acquisition of land, the report claims that the completion of the Santa Fe Railroad was also an Anglo immigration pull factor to Southern California. At its completion in 1886, not only was Los Angeles officially opened to eastern and mid-west Anglo Americans, but to markets in the east as well. Due to increased railroad developments and connections, by the end of the decade, Los Angeles was connected and accessible to the entire country.^[15] However, the newly arriving Anglo migrants to Los Angeles did not tolerate the “primitive” conditions that characterized the young Pueblo.

Although many Mexican-Americans lost their lands after the war, their population in Southern California increased due to early industrialization in Los Angeles and Anglo demands for cheap and knowledgeable labor in agriculture. As soon as Anglo Americans settled into the new frontier, their prospects for creating a more “developed” Anglo city became aggressively clear. In *Whitewashed Adobe*, Deverell confirms that Anglo society took over the Mexican pueblo almost instantly, and set out to create cultural and physical boundaries in order to contain its growing population. Deverell emphasizes that at this point, Mexican ethnicity coincided with class, guaranteeing Mexican presence in the bottommost ranks and cheapest wages of manual or agricultural labor.^[16] Clashes of culture and cultural space were eminent and Anglos pressured to control not only those who resided in Los Angeles, but the physical landscape and water supply that had, for generations, disrupted agricultural and city developments. Anglo immigrants demanded better-constructed streets, sanitation, fire protection, police, schools, and most importantly, readily-accessible water piped directly to their homes.^[17] Anglos wanted to conform the land and water to benefit their own economic, social, and political goals, and began formulating a plan to transform the city’s coast and water supply, a plan which was enacted at the expense of its Mexican American and indigenous populations. The Anglo vision and goals for Los Angeles outlined by Deverell in *Whitewashed Adobe* clearly defines the contrast between Indigenous and Mexican and Anglo values, and displacement and marginalization of Mexican Americans to make room for the Anglo vision.

The swelling population created an increase in demand for water accessibility. According to the *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain* SCCWRP Technical Report, Anglos pushed Mexican communities away from the prime residency near the river to the outskirts of Los Angeles and into the valleys. While the Los Angeles rail system provided accessibility for trade and immigration, due to the lack of understanding of the land, Anglo city planners and railroad companies built bridges over the unpredictable rivers of Los Angeles which created severe and

deadly consequences during flood seasons. As cost of residency along the desired water source increased, it became available only for the wealthy Anglo settlers- another example of how ethnicity and class concurred within the Los Angeles Anglo frontier. Yet again, their decision to reside along the river without any knowledge of the land and its water supply would eventually doom Anglos and ultimately force them to seek help from those who best understood the landscape, Mexican-Americans.^[18]

In a climate marked by erratically extreme droughts or torrential rains and a rapidly growing population, control of the water supply and its threats became a top priority for Anglo city planners. As noted in the SCCWRP 2007 Technical Report *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain*, 1861 was marked by heavy rainfall which flooded the San Gabriel River, forging new channels and washing away resident's crops, livestock and homes. Two years later, a severe drought occurred, which dried up grasslands, starving cattle to death. Consequently, the new American Ranchers quickly went broke and were foreclosed upon.^[19] In 1867, the climatic history of floods and droughts repeated once again altering the landscape and challenging communities.^[20] For decades to come, Anglos came to realization that they held no power over the native landscape and climates of the Los Angeles region. As Anglos suffered economically, the push for landscape alterations was at the forefront of city developments.

The Owens River Valley Aqueduct: 1908-1913

The first large-scale geographic alteration constructed and enforced by Anglo city officials was that of the Owens River Valley Aqueduct, which was completed in 1913. The Aqueduct was anticipated to bring in a substantial amount of water to the city of Los Angeles and sustain the growing population. John Walton's *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, provides an extensive outlook on how the construction of the Owens River Valley Aqueduct intensively affected indigenous populations of the region using historical statistics and censuses as evidence. Prior to 1885, The Owens River Valley's population consisted of twelve percent of "indigenous Californios" and Mexican migrants.^[21] Apache Mexican migrant Frank Olivas first settled into Los Angeles and shortly moved to the Valley where he became a packer and miner. In addition to the promises of mining riches, the massive farm lands also attracted Mexican migrants as well as other non-white inhabitants, who made up forty percent of the Owens River Valley population.^[22] Anglo Americans flooded into the valley region based on their vision of American cultural promises of social mobility and the idea of frontier affluence.^[23] Due to the Eurocentric views of the newly migrated

Anglos, the valley fell victim to social divisions based not just gender, but on national origin and ethnicity as well.



Walton, John. *Western times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Image: courtesy of the Eastern California Museum, "Cerro Gordo Mine". 77

The social structure of the Owens River Valley affected the degrading class of the indigenous and Mexican populations that resided there prior to Anglo migration. Mexicans, the largest single ethnic group among miners, constituted one third of the mining population. The remaining indigenous community, the Paiutes, were predominantly farmers, sharing most of the farm land with white males, or laborers on farms where their expertise and methods proved successful and essential for survival. Many Paiutes assimilated into Anglo culture by attending school and supporting Anglo fashion as depicted in the image below. [24]A majority of the white settlers, if not owning land, learned the trade of coal mining quickly monopolized it.[25] The California Land Act in 1851, suggested by Walton, assisted white male farmers in owning most of the land which increased their status and wealth. The class situation in the valley would continue to diminish Mexican and

indigenous reputations as the Anglo vision, backed by the Manifest Destiny, promoted their right of conquest and utopic society. [26]



Forbes, Andrew. “*Paiutes, Bishop*” Indian School. Courtesy of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 1903-1916

Class tensions and the protection of lands pushed indigenous Paiutes and White farmers into a period described as the “Indian Wars,” which spanned a period of forty years between 1870 and 1910. John Walton claims in his novel that during this period, as a method of social protests against class relations, arson became common. In addition, due to the lack of authoritative and government presence in the valley, the citizens of the Owens Valley region used their own forms of justice to settle quarrels, including arson.[27] Paiutes started fires on their employer’s farmlands, and Mexican miners burned workplaces and businesses while farmers constantly took revenge on each other over property disputes.[28] Many of the disputes between the classes erupted over arguments of water rights as well as expropriative interferences from Los Angeles. However, not long after the Indian Wars, citizens formed alliances from 1904 to 1928 to contest the local struggle against Los Angeles’s Anglo city elite’s ambitions to expand 240 miles north and acquire the rights to their lands and water supply.[29] The vision of Anglo urban progress would continue to confront the Mexican and Indigenous communities of the Owens River Valley as the desire to build channels to divert water into Los Angeles became the forefront of Anglo prospects.

The Department of Water and Power led by chief engineer William Mulholland and Los Angeles business leaders believed the 240-mile Aqueduct would stimulate Los Angeles's growing urban economy and be a source of employment for the region.[30] However much of the Aqueduct construction was made possible by mule and horse power and not employed citizens.[31] Author Les Standiford, who recently published a biography on William Mulholland's master Aqueduct planning and construction in *Water to the Angeles: William Mulholland, His Monumental Aqueduct and the Rise of Los Angeles*, claimed that Mulholland asserted that the well-established communities in the Owens Valley region had no legal pueblo rights to the land and thus made it possible for him to enforce his vision and tear apart the communities in the underdeveloped valley that did not measure up to the fast, urban developing Los Angeles landscape.[32] This context is an example of how Mulholland's city planning was visibly promoted by the Anglo vision and Anglo racial authoritative rights to the lands. Mulholland was one of many powerful, wealthy Anglo city developers in Los Angeles that since the established rights of Manifest Destiny, believed lands in the west were reserved for white males.

Many farmers and ranchers, willingly sold part or all of their land in 1908 to the city of Los Angeles when construction for the Aqueduct began. [33] Indigenous Paiute lands were endowed with water rights under federal law and deemed agriculturally valueless to Los Angeles Anglo elites.[34] In 1902 and 1912, separate federal grants set aside 69,000 acres of land for Paiute home relocation sites north of the town of Bishop.[35] Paiutes suffered the most from the city's expropriation and economic collapse. The Indigenous community of the Paiutes who once had eighty-three percent employment in 1880, were only thirty-one percent employed by 1930. Out of the thirty Paiutes that still owned land in the valley, nineteen sold, five leased, and just four maintained land ownerships. In addition, farm labor, the principal source of Indigenous employment, essentially disappeared under the Los Angeles water-conserving lease arrangements. Anglicans viewed the Paiutes of the region to be a nuisance, "bad publicity" and a future problem for city developments. This racial and class deprivation along with displacement deriving from the Anglo vision became an occurring trend for Mexican Americans and other ethnic communities within Los Angeles. John Walton's *Western Times and Water Wars* includes the United States Senate committee DWP official statement in 1932 to support this argument,

“The majority of the Indians are destitute, primarily from the lack of a local labor market...a large number of them do not have home-site allotments and are objects of charity...to correct this condition it is suggested that the Indians be moved from the Owens Valley to new locations”^[36]

The Owen’s River Valley Aqueduct was a natural geographic landscape alteration that brought in massive amounts of water to the city of Los Angeles at the ultimate cost of the indigenous residents and farmers who fell victim to a Eurocentric class system, economic depression and displacement. The Mexican miners and settlers of the region were somewhat more tolerant to the Anglican settlers than the indigenous settlers of the valley. In his book, Walton declares that Mexicans easily integrated within the Owen Valley’s white society, which romanticized their culture and ceremonial celebrations such as Mexican Independence Day for touristic values. Mexican miners were acknowledged by white society as experts in their trade which was essential to the Anglo economy and prosperity.^[37] The Mexican communities, as emphasized by Walton,

“enjoyed the tolerance and fellowship of white society, lending a kind of cosmopolitanism to their segregated communities and providing a buffer with Indian society through Hispanic marriages in both directions.”^[38]

Mexican Americans and Indigenous communities of the region were treated with racial abuse and suffered under the Anglo class system and city development. The Owens River Valley Aqueduct project is an example of Indigenous and Mexican American displacement as a consequence of the Anglo vision.



Deadman's Island, 1864.

Silka, Henry P. *San Pedro: A Pictorial History Updated Through 1990*. San Pedro, California. San Pedro Bay Historical Society, 1993. Print

La Isle De Los Muertos: 1929

The second alteration to Los Angeles' geographic features to support the Anglo vision included in my research, is that of Deadman's Island (Pictured above). Named by the Spaniards *La Isla de los Muertos* and later Americanized to *Deadman's Island* according to the Los Angeles Corral's *Westerners Brand Book* supplied by the California State University Dominguez Hills Archives, was an approximately eight hundred feet long, two hundred and fifty feet wide and over sixty feet high island stationed in the inner harbor of San Pedro Bay. The island would disappear not long after Anglo immigration into the region. The prominent natural landscape feature holding rich history for generations of Tongva, Spanish and Mexican residents was destroyed to achieve the Anglo vision of Los Angeles.

La Isle De Los Muertos did not fail to live up to its name however. From 1810-1850 the island served as a cemetery to shelter the dead from pillaging

coyotes. [39] Legends claim that Spanish vessels buried unwanted crew members on the island. Legends also assert that men were stranded on the island and died from hunger. A Los Angeles Times article from 1914 titled, “*California Landmark to be Obliterated*”, claims that when the island removal construction began, ten skeletal remains were found buried on the island: a lost sailor, an English sea captain, five Marine’s crew, two passengers from an 1851 Panamanian ship, and one female named Mrs. Parker, the wife of Capitan Parker of the Schooner Laura Bevia.[40] In addition to being a symbol of the taking of California and major revolutionary battles in the 1840’s, the island also has rare paleontological significance as well. [41] Nevertheless, the positioning of the island itself within the harbor was dangerous as many ships, underestimating the island’s size, crashed into the monumental landmark. Deadman’s island came under attack from Anglo revitalization targets. Legendary to the Indigenous, Spanish and Mexican communities, Deadman’s Island was a danger and threat to Anglo economic prospects and trade. [42]

As Mexicans saw the removal of the island to be a loss of tradition and value, the Anglo community initially saw it for its potential touristic value. In 1891, the *San Pedro Times* pleaded for the island’s conservation. Anglo conservationists proclaimed,

“In the near future, owing to the new railroad interest heading this way, San Pedro will enter a new era of prosperity. Visitors will flock here, as well as commerce and so place will have more charm for the tourists, than to land on, and to examine, this old, historic island. It really would not be out of place to have a neat monument placed on top of the island in memory of the ones who were buried there in the years gone by, no doubt, United States Soldiers. Let us urge this matter, and try to save what is left of the old island, ere it too, be washed away and lost in the depths of the sea.”[43]

The argument deemed valid to city officials, and the island served as a tourist and advertisement object until its demolition in 1929. After the U.S. government exhumed skeletal remains, the island was covered with billboards promoting hotels, banks and more as seen in the postcard below.[44]



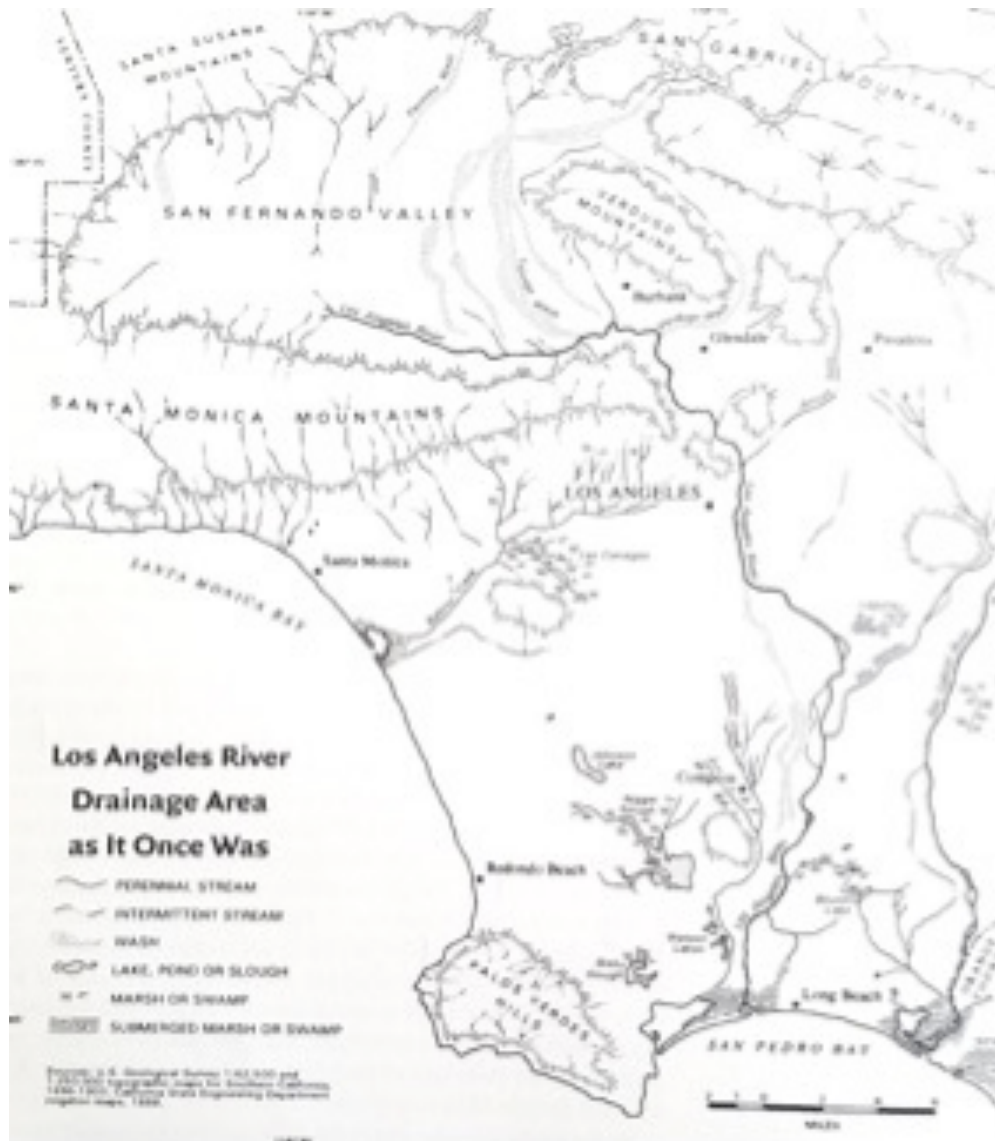
McKinzie, Joe. *San Pedro Bay: Postcard History Series*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Pub., 2005. Print

In addition to using Deadman's island as an advertising post, the San Pedro Anglo community quickly romanticized its melancholy and deathly history. In 1916 Harold Lloyd filmed "Lonesome Luke's Wild Women" on Deadman's island. The film was about a shipwrecked sailor portrayed by Harold himself. Harold was stranded on the island with an Indian and his many wives. The film, although giving insight on the lost geographic feature, severely stereotypes the indigenous communities that resided there prior to Anglo arrival.[45] In addition, Richard Henry Dana Jr. romantically describes the island himself in "*Two Years Before the Mast*" published in 1840,

“[T]he only ... thing which broke the surface of the great bay was a small, dreary-looking island, steep and conical, of a clayey soil, and without the sign of vegetable life upon it, yet which had a peculiar and melancholy interest, for on the top of it were buried the remains of an Englishman, the commander of a small merchant brig, who died while lying in this port. It was always a solemn and affecting spot to me. There it stood, desolate, and in the midst of desolation; and there were the remains of one who died and was buried alone and friendless. Had it been a common burying-place, it would have been nothing. The single body corresponded well with the solitary character of everything around. It was the only spot in California that impressed me with anything like poetic interest. Then, too, the man died far from home, without a friend near him,— by poison, it was suspected, and no one to inquire into it,— and without proper funeral rites; the mate (as I was told), glad to have him out of the way, hurrying him up the hill and into the ground, without a word or a prayer.”[46]

It seemed as if the history of the island prior to Anglo arrival in San Pedro Bay suddenly disappeared. All that was left of the island was the melancholy, romanticized memories of the English sailors that perished on the island. Those memories, along with Hollywood films like “Lonesome Luke’s Wild Women” not only blindsided the Mexican ties to the island but served for the sole purpose of attracting tourism and money into San Pedro Bay.

In 1917, when the first World War broke out, weaponry and soldiers were stationed on Deadman’s island as protection for the harbor. By the 1920’s, the island’s inaccessibility and geography made it a hotspot for delinquents to store alcohol which had been outlawed during the era of Prohibition. By 1929, due to Anglo ambitions to build a prosperous port of Los Angeles, the island—and all its history was to be completely removed, an act funded by the United Dredging Company of Los Angeles and the San Francisco Bridge Company.^[47] *La Isla de los Muertes* was once a Tongva sacred site that protected their dead. Deadman’s Island is an example of the loss of traditions for Indigenous and Mexican American descended communities by Anglos. It served as a symbol for Spanish conquest and Mexican liberation, and upon Anglo arrival, it fell victim an Anglo vision that desired to construct a utopian American city in Los Angeles. Anglos were quick to romanticize the legends of the island to promote tourism and used it for capitalistic goals before they obliterated it entirely, thus erasing Mexican Los Angeles history and tradition.



California State Engineering Department. *Los Angeles River Drainage Area as it Once Was*. 1888. Topographic Maps for Southern California, 1896-1903, U.S. Geological Survey.

Los Angeles River Re-channeling Project: 1917-1960

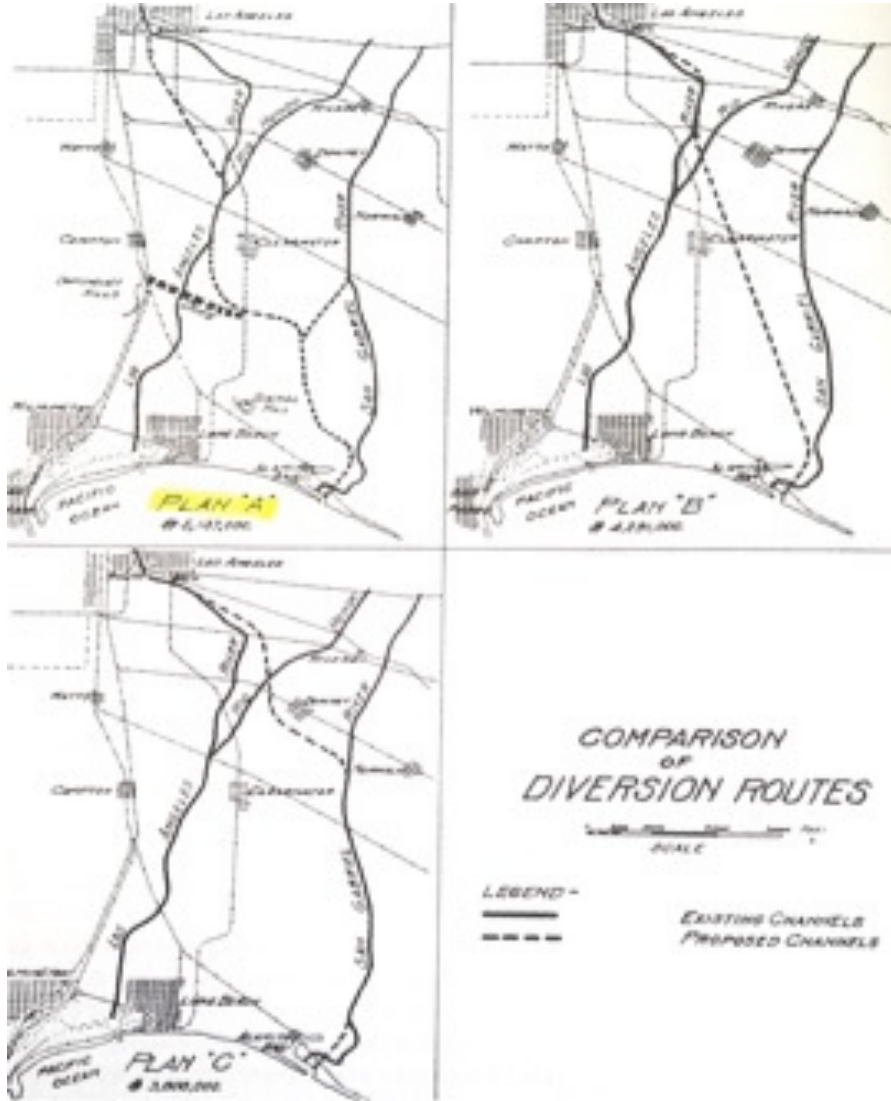
The final and most sacred landscape feature to Indigenous and Mexican descendants to be harmed by the Anglo's to succeed in their utopic societal vision, was that of the Los Angeles River mapped in the figure above. Los Angeles Mexican residents not only lived near the river, but they moved along with the river. Once again referring to William Deverell's *Whitewashed Adobe*, Mexicans knew and understood the River, its courses, movements and temperament which had become their own.^[48] The Los Angeles River and *zanjas*, which were water diversion ditches dug out by Indigenous and Mexican labor, was the sole source of the city's water prior to Anglo

immigration.^[49] The Mexican relationship to the Los Angeles' river characterized Mexicans as primitive and close to nature under the ethnocentric and racial beliefs implemented by Anglo Americans. This also led Anglos to the perception that Mexicans had proximate knowledge of the River. The Los Angeles River was and always had been at the heart of communities, past and present, within the region. From the Tongva villages, to the Spanish outpost, Mexican pueblo, and finally the American "City of Desire", the River supplied residents with water to consume, bathe in, and feed their crops. In addition, Deverell claims it played an increasingly essential role as a dividing line between racially and socio economically defined neighborhoods.^[50]

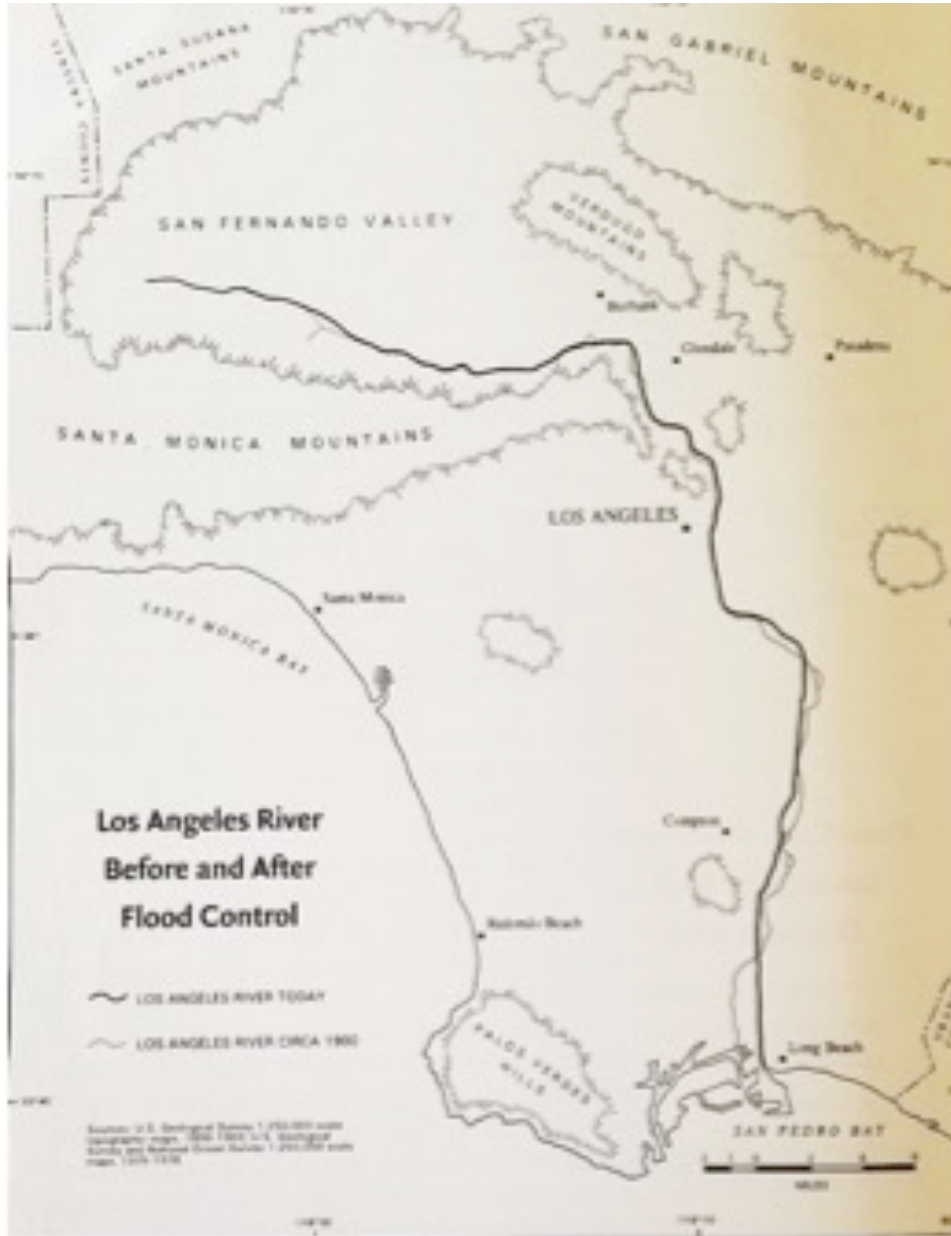
Author Blake Grumprecht confirms in his 1999 book, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, that William G. Dryden, a clerk of the Common Council and former country judge, was the first Anglo city official to propose the dispersal of water directly to homes in Los Angeles through pipes in 1853. He requested a 21-year franchise for the water system and nearly nine thousand acres of land. His offer was rejected and didn't reach a renegotiation and approval until four years later. Dryden established the Los Angeles Water Works Company in 1858 and produced a forty-foot water wheel and fifteen-by-thirty-foot brick reservoir in the plaza. The water, which ran through underground pipes, supplied the homes of the city's Anglo elite.^[51] However, Dryden's success as a town hero did not last. By 1861, tragic storms destroyed his water wheel and a water-diverging dam. This turning point marked the time when the city finally decided to develop its own domestic water system.^[52]

William G. Dryden's story is essential to the development of the Los Angeles River rechanneling project because it is the first time in Los Angeles history that an elite, white male proposed to capitalize on the city's natural resources and attempt to physically alter the geography of Los Angeles. Dryden's vision would feed into those of William Mulholland and other Anglos that played a large role in reconstruction of the Los Angeles landscape and exploitation of Indigenous and Mexican communities and their knowledge of the region's natural resources. In addition, as the city population continued to grow immensely, real-estate along the city's water supply skyrocketed leaving residency available only to those who could afford it-Anglo elites who did not appreciate the aesthetic of the river and were ignorant to its potential dangers. In contrast, Mexicans, who understood the irregular nature of the streams, were continuously pushed further away from the river, which for generations, had been a way of life for them.^[53] Dryden's work, although failed, began a disparaging trend among the Anglo city elites, like William Mulholland, which complemented their Anglo utopic vision.

Dryden's failures proved a necessity to involve, but not give credit to, local knowledge of the Mexican residents with river planning.^[54] Great floods that often occurred, most importantly that of 1914, served as a catalyst for flood control programs but also slowed developments. However, Anglos boasted that their agricultural prowess would soon eliminate droughts and their engineers would eradicate floods completely.^[55] In the early 1900's city engineers set out to map the region and record rain and drought seasons. They realized they did not know the history of the landscape, particularly the "pre-history" of Mexican Los Angeles. Interviewers were given the job to find the oldest Mexicans and extract the history of which part of the river flowed where, when and with how much vigor in order to cement the riverbed(s) in once and for all.^[56] Finally, by 1917, costing \$3.3 million between the federal government and Los Angeles County and years of deliberation over various proposed plans, the Los Angeles river construction to diverge the river away from the harbor began and was completed by 1921. Options for diversion routes are seen in the figure on the following page. The river itself was shifted a mile east. In addition, river channels were straightened and filled with concrete and aligned with wire fences.^[57] By May 1924, an additional \$35.3 million was spent on flood control improvements.^[58]



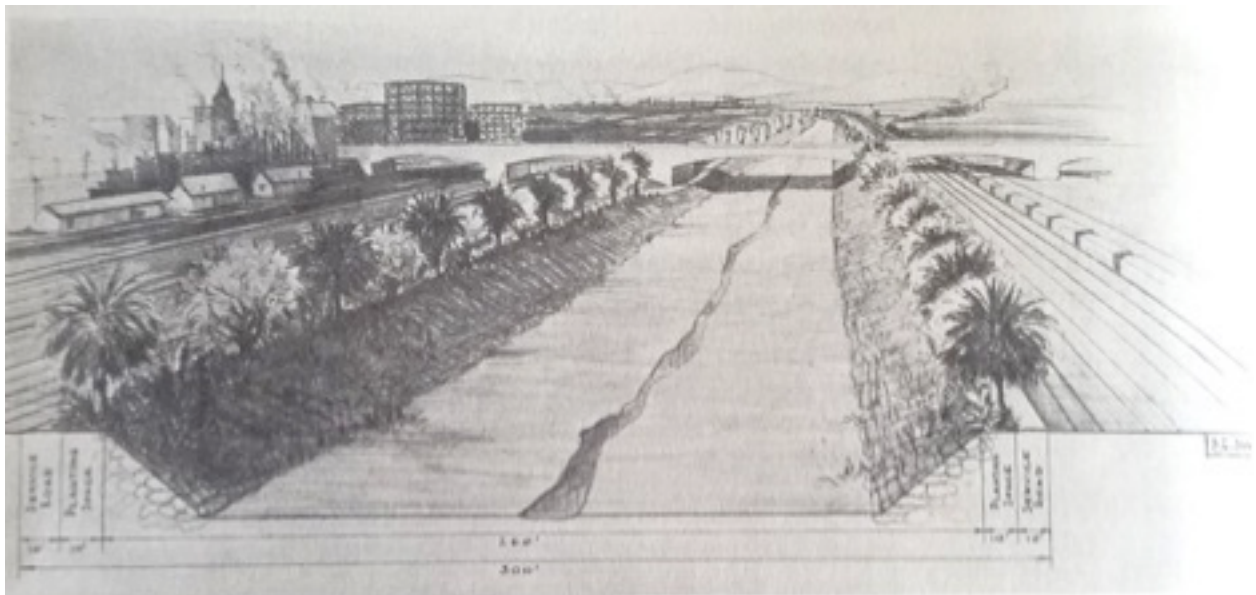
Leeds, Charles and H. Hawgood to U.S. Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, 27 August 1915, Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Technical Library, Alhambra, Calif., LACBEFC, *Report of the Board of Engineers, II, Image: Comparison of Diversion Routes, 222.*



California State Engineering Department. *Los Angeles River Before and After Flood Control*. 1896-1903. Topographic Maps for Southern California, 1975-1978, U.S. Geological Survey.

The flood of 1938 proved to be the most damaging in the River's history killing eighty-seven people and costing \$78 million (\$888.8 million in today's currency) in damages. Once again, the Anglo vision did not stand a chance when it came to the natural forces of the Los Angeles landscape. However, they did not give up on their vision and would never succumb to defeat. In their eyes, Anglo's were above nature and could conform nature to their needs rather than conform to nature itself. After 20 years, more than \$1 billion dollars, 3.5 million barrels of cement, 147 million pounds of reinforced steel,

years of labor and exploitation of Mexican river knowledge, the Los Angeles River paving and sculpting project retrofitted 278 miles of river by 1960.^[59]



Los Angeles City Council, Los Angeles Board of Commissioners, Annual Report (Los Angeles, 1933), 24.

What was once a winding, threatening, source of life for the Indigenous and Mexican communities quickly became a concrete, fenced off, dumping target and eye-sore that for decades would undergo many “beautification” initiatives as depicted in the image above. The river was once viewed as an asset or natural beauty necessary to survive. When the Anglos arrived, it was an annoying, deadly hazard that had to be controlled.

The Aftermath of the Vision

The indigenous communities of Los Angeles appreciated and had great knowledge of the natural, physical landscape of the Los Angeles region and its resources. Their understanding of the region’s erraticism was consistently proven to be sacred and informative in order to maintain prosperity and survival during the occupation of the Spanish and into the days of the Mexican Pueblo. When Anglo Americans arrived abundantly after the Santa Fe Railroad completion in 1885, along with the landscape of Los Angeles, Indigenous and Mexican communities’ livelihood and traditions were threatened. The Anglo vision promoted Los Angeles to be the city of the future; the American dream. However, the classist and racial boundaries produced by the vision degraded and displaced Indigenous and Mexican communities especially during the construction of the Owens River Valley Aqueduct. In addition, when Anglo city elites planned to demolish a landmark

sacred to those of Indigenous and Mexican descent in order to develop a large harbor and promote economic prosperity for the city, traditions buried deep within *La Isla de los Muertos* were removed from history. The Anglo vision also promoted white superiority not just over race and class, but nature as well. When Anglo migrants arrived in Los Angeles they soon realized the river that brought them life and sustenance was dangerous to their utopic success and existence. Not only did Anglo city planners physically move the Los Angeles River to suit their vision of the city, they exploited the knowledge of Mexican elders in order to make the project possible and successful without giving them credit or allowing them to assist in project development.

It is apparent that since 1885, these three massive geographic reconstruction projects, the Owens Valley Aqueduct, the demolition of Deadman's Island, and the Los Angeles River rechanneling project have made it possible to sustain the growing population and metropolis Los Angeles has become today. However, since the Anglo arrival into the region, Indigenous and Mexican communities have been displaced and exploited for their labor and knowledge. Anglos wanted to conform the land's water supply and coast to benefit their own economic, social and political goals. In addition, the decades of geographic changes to the region's coast and water supply in order to transform Los Angeles according to an Anglo Vision was only possible due to the social and human cost of the indigenous and Mexican descent populations who resided there. This time in history should not go unnoticed especially from the point of view of the Indigenous and Mexican descended communities, who, like the landscape, are still suffering the costs of the Anglo vision today. Due to the alterations and divides the Anglo vision brought upon the landscape and its communities from their arrival to the end of the Los Angeles River construction project in 1960, class- and race-based social divides, climatic changes and threats to the ecosystem continue to cause conflicts within the Los Angeles region.

Footnotes:

[1] Blake Gumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*(Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 26.

[2] *Ibid*, 36.

[3] Herbert Eugene Bolton, *Fray Juan Crespi, Missionary Explorer on the Pacific Coast, 1769-1774* (New York: AMS Pr., 1971), 147.

[4] *Ibid.*, 42.

[5] Ibid, 46.

[6] Andrew F. Rolle, *Los Angeles: from Pueblo to City of the Future* (San Francisco: MTL, 1995), 12.

[7] Rolle, *Los Angeles: From Pueblo to City of the Future*, 17.

[8] Eric Stein, Shawna Dark, Travis Longcore, Nicholas Hali, Robin Grossinger, Jason Cassanova, and Martha Sutula, *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and*

Floodplain (Scswrp technical report #499: Greenvisions.usc.edu., 2007) Web. 26 Feb. 2017. 22.

[9] Eric Stein, Shawna Dark, Travis Longcore, Nicholas Hali, Robin Grossinger, Jason Cassanova, and Martha Sutula, *Historical ecology and landscape change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain*, 9.

[10] Rolle, *Los Angeles: From Pueblo to City of the Future*, 20.

[11] Grumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, 56.

[12] William Deverell, *Whitewashed adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), 12.

[13] Deverell, *Whitewashed adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*, 2.

[14] Eric Stein, Shawna Dark, Travis Longcore, Nicholas Hali, Robin Grossinger, Jason Cassanova, and Martha Sutula, *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain*, 13.

[15] Ibid., 14.

[16] Deverell, *Whitewashed adobe: the rise of Los Angeles and the remaking of its Mexican past*, 31.

[17] Grumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, 56.

[18] Eric Stein, Shawna Dark, Travis Longcore, Nicholas Hali, Robin Grossinger, Jason Cassanova, and Martha Sutula, *Historical Ecology and Landscape Change of the San Gabriel River and Floodplain*, 14.

[19] *Ibid.*, 12.

[20] *Ibid.*, 13.

[21] John Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 60.

[22] Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, 61.

[23] *Ibid.*, 63.

[24] *Ibid.*, 67.

[25] Forbes, Andrew. “*Paiutes, Bishop*” Indian School. Courtesy of the Seaver Center for Western History Research, Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, 1903-1916.

[26] Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, 64.

[27] Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California.*, 118.

[28] *Ibid.*, 109.

[29] Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, 131.

[30] *Ibid.*, 152.

[31] *Owens River Christmas Gift to Los Angeles*, (Los Angeles Times (1886-1922) Dec 25, 1906).

[32] Les Standiford, *Water to the Angeles: William Mulholland, His Monumental Aqueduct and the Rise of Los Angeles* (New York: Collins Publishers, 2015), 85.

[33] John Walton, Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, 152.

[34] *Ibid.*, 209.

[35] *Ibid.*, 208.

[36] *Ibid.*, 206.

[37] Walton, *Western Times and Water Wars: State, Culture, and Rebellion in California*, 124.

[38] *Ibid.*, 310.

[39] Westerners Los Angeles Corral, *The Westerners Brand Book* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Westerners, 1947), 62.

[40] *California Landmark to be Obliterated* (Los Angeles Times (1886-1922) March 1, 1914).

[41] Westerners Los Angeles Corral, *The Westerners Brand Book* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Westerners, 1947), 63.

[42] *Ibid.*, 69.

[43] San Pedro Times, October 10, 1891.

[44] Joe Mckinzie, *San Pedro Bay: Postcard History Series* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2005), 36.

[45] Bengtson, John. "Harold Lloyd on Deadman's Island." Chaplin-Keaton-Lloyd film locations (and more). February 02, 2016.

[46] Bengtson, John. "Harold Lloyd on Deadman's Island." Chaplin-Keaton-Lloyd film locations (and more). February 02, 2016.

[47] Westerners Los Angeles Corral, *The Westerners Brand Book* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Westerners, 1947), 71.

[48] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and The Remaking of its Mexican Past*, 92.

[49] *Ibid.*, 98.

[50] Ibid., 93.

[51] Blake Grumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, 63.

[52] Ibid., 64.

[53] Blake Grumprecht, *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*, (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 130-131.

[54] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*, 99.

[55] William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past*, 100.

[56] Ibid., 117.

[57] Charles Leeds and H. Hawgood to U.S. Board of Engineers for Rivers and Harbors, *Report of the Board of Engineers, II, Image: Comparison of Diversion Routes*, (Los Angeles County Department of Public Works Technical Library, 1915), 222.

[58] Blake Grumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, 192.

[59] Blake Grumprecht, *The Los Angeles River: its Life, Death, and Possible Rebirth*, 232-233.

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