

11-2004

Review of: LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present

Kevin Allen Leonard

Western Washington University, kevin.leonard@wwu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://cedar.wwu.edu/history_facpubs



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Leonard, Kevin Allen, "Review of: LA City Limits: African American Los Angeles From the Great Depression to the Present" (2004). *History*. 13.

https://cedar.wwu.edu/history_facpubs/13

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Humanities at Western CEDAR. It has been accepted for inclusion in History by an authorized administrator of Western CEDAR. For more information, please contact westerncedar@wwu.edu.

tions between Jews and Hispanics. The book also contains two photo/art essays and an article on early synagogue architecture. Not all of the essays are totally satisfying. For example, the article "The Challenge of Family, Identity, and Affiliations" provides a great variety of useful statistics comparing California to other regions of the country in categories such as population, residence by birth, synagogue membership, organizational and federation affiliation, and intermarriage. While long on statistics, it is short on analysis and includes some questionable conclusions. The author posits that lower intermarriage rates in California suggest the Jewish population there is becoming more mainstream than in other western states, but he does not allow that Jewish density and organizational infrastructure are significant elements that affect intermarriage rates. One frustration with the book is the preference of the Brandeis Series editors that articles not contain footnotes; the reader is not served well by the omission. Nevertheless, *California Jews* does present a new array of topics that promises to expand the scope of scholarly work on California Jewry.

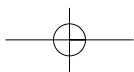
Family of Strangers and *California Jews* are welcome contributions to the corpus of western Jewish historiography. Both books are handsomely produced by good university presses, contain scores of photographs and other graphics, are highly accessible to lay readers, and should also serve scholars well. We can expect *California Jews* to be followed by an array of work from the contributing scholars. We can only hope that *Family of Strangers* spurs additional research on the Jews of Washington by scholars of western history as well.

Seattle Municipal Archives

SCOTT CLINE

L.A. City Limits: African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present. By Josh Sides. (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003. xiv + 288 pp. \$39.95)

Over the past twenty years a number of historians have attempted to explain why an African American "underclass" emerged in many U.S. cities after World War II. Most historians agree that racial discrimination in housing and employment and employers' decisions to relocate factories to suburbs, other regions, and other countries left large numbers of African Americans trapped in increasingly impoverished and dangerous neighborhoods near the centers of these cities. The studies of "the urban crisis," however, have focused primarily on northeastern cities. Josh Sides argues that



an examination of the experiences of African Americans in Los Angeles will change historians' understanding of this crisis. Sides supports his argument with evidence from a wide range of sources. Especially impressive is his use of demographic data. The broad chronological scope of *L.A. City Limits* allows Sides to explore the effects of long-term developments such as suburbanization and deindustrialization upon African Americans. It also leaves open to Sides and other historians the opportunity to explore in greater depth the experiences of African Americans at certain, critical points in time.

Sides shows that the experiences of African Americans in Los Angeles before World War II differed from those of African Americans in northern cities. Discrimination limited the housing available to members of all minority groups. As a result, most African Americans lived in the same neighborhoods as members of the nation's largest Mexican and Asian communities and the nation's second-largest Jewish community. The city's diversity worked against the employment prospects of African Americans. Many Los Angeles employers hired Mexican immigrants and Mexican Americans for low-status positions that African Americans filled in many other cities.

L.A. City Limits should spark a lively debate about regional differences in the emergence of the urban crisis. Sides argues that Los Angeles was unlike "rust belt" cities in that it experienced reindustrialization and deindustrialization simultaneously. Some scholars, however, might conclude that this difference was ultimately unimportant. After the war most African Americans found themselves living in black neighborhoods rather than the more diverse neighborhoods in which they had lived before the war. Some African Americans were able to move into previously "lily-white" suburbs such as Compton. They faced continued exclusion, however, from many suburbs and from much of the San Fernando Valley. Restricted educational opportunities and discrimination in employment and housing prevented most African Americans from gaining access to jobs in the new aerospace and electronics factories. When the older industrial plants that did employ African Americans closed in the 1960s and 1970s, many black workers were left unable to find comparable jobs. Civil rights activism and the election of African American city officials did not reverse the decline of black Los Angeles. In many respects, African American Los Angeles as depicted by Josh Sides seems very similar to African American Detroit as depicted by Thomas J. Sugrue in *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit* (1996).

Western Washington University

KEVIN ALLEN LEONARD

