

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN



Eden by Design: The 1930 Olmsted-Bartholomew Plan for the Los Angeles Region

EDEN BY DESIGN: THE 1930 OLMSTED-BARTHOLOMEW PLAN FOR THE LOS ANGELES REGION / Greg Hise and William Deverell.-Berekeley, CA: The University of California Press, June 2000.-248 p.: ill.-ISBN 0-520-22414-0 (cl., alk. paper), ISBN 0-520-22415-9 (pa., alk. paper): \$48.00 (cl.), \$17.95 (pa.).

The authors tell a fascinating story of the 1930 "Parks, Playgrounds and Beaches for the Los Angeles Region" report, prepared by Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Associates, and submitted to the Los Angeles Citizen's Committee on Parks, Playgrounds, and Beaches. The grandiose plan was effectively killed by the Chamber of Commerce, who distributed just 200 copies. The plan was too daring in its scope for the fast growing communities of Los Angeles, and came at an inopportune time, the start of a major economic depression.

In a 60 page essay entitled "Private Power, Public Space," Hise and Deverell detail the fate of the report, analyze its contents, and place the Report within the context of the work of Olmsted Brothers and Bartholomew and Associates, two of the most important landscape and city development firms. Their essay is dotted with fascinating photographs of early Los Angeles that illustrate some of the developers' concepts. The authors describe how the report polarized the Los Angeles elite, both political and cultural. They argue persuasively that despite the passage of time, the publication is germane to current debates on urban development in region, the fragility of Southern California's ecosystems, and the fate of the region's prized amenities - its beaches and mountains. "It is a compelling document," Hise and Deverell write, "and readers might well be shocked to see the Los Angeles that was, and then amazed as they begin to imagine the Los Angeles that might have been..."

The authors reprint the report in its entirety. It is a fascinating document, both sweeping in its scope and future forecasting and specific in its numerous recommendations for local recreation facilities, playgrounds, and recreation parks. It is generously illustrated with diagrams, maps, and photographs.

Hise and Deverell also reprint an interview they conducted with Laurie Olin, a pre-eminent Los Angeles landscape architect. This interview is recommended reading for anyone with an interest in landscape architecture, as Olin discusses the development of the profession, and contributes his assessment of Olmsted's and Bartholomew's work and of their recommendations for the Los Angeles region. Contemporary thought on the urban landscape is juxtaposed with the vision set forth in the historic report.

This book is recommended for research level collections, particularly ones with interest in urban studies and in the history of California and the West. The book has an index, and the essay by Hise and Deverell is accompanied by footnotes. The photographs used to illustrate the essay come from the University of Southern California Regional History collection. This volume will be useful in any urban studies collection, as it provides a benchmark for a vision of urban development that can be applied to many cities in the United States.

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