



L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City

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Other cities have histories. *Los Angeles* has legends.

Midcentury Los Angeles. A city sold to the world as "the white spot of America," a land of sunshine and orange groves, wholesome Midwestern values and Hollywood stars, protected by the world's most famous police force, the Dragnet-era LAPD. Behind this public image lies a hidden world of "pleasure girls" and crooked cops, ruthless newspaper tycoons, corrupt politicians, and East Coast gangsters on the make. Into this underworld came two men—one L.A.'s most notorious gangster, the other its most famous police chief—each prepared to battle the other for the soul of the city.

Former street thug turned featherweight boxer Mickey Cohen left the ring for the rackets, first as mobster Benjamin "Bugsy" Siegel's enforcer, then as his protégé. A fastidious dresser and unrepentant killer, the diminutive Cohen was Hollywood's favorite gangster—and L.A.'s preeminent underworld boss. Frank Sinatra, Robert Mitchum, and Sammy Davis Jr. palled around with him; TV journalist Mike Wallace wanted his stories; evangelist Billy Graham sought his soul.

William H. Parker was the proud son of a pioneering law-enforcement family from the fabled frontier town of Deadwood. As a rookie patrolman in the Roaring Twenties, he discovered that L.A. was ruled by a shadowy "Combination"—a triumvirate of tycoons, politicians, and underworld figures where alliances were shifting, loyalties uncertain, and politics were practiced with shotguns and dynamite. Parker's life mission became to topple it—and to create a police force that would never answer to elected officials again.

These two men, one morally unflinching, the other unflinchingly immoral, would soon come head-to-head in a struggle to control the city—a struggle that echoes unforgettably through the fiction of Raymond Chandler and movies such as *The Big Sleep*, *Chinatown*, and *L.A. Confidential*.

For more than three decades, from Prohibition through the Watts Riots, the battle between the underworld and the police played out amid the nightclubs of the Sunset Strip and the mansions of Beverly Hills, from the gritty streets of Boyle Heights to the manicured lawns of Brentwood, intersecting in the process with the agendas and ambitions of J. Edgar Hoover, Robert F. Kennedy, and Malcolm X. The outcome of this decades-long entanglement shaped modern American policing—for better and for worse—and helped create the Los Angeles we know today.

A fascinating examination of Los Angeles's underbelly, the Mob, and America's most admired—and reviled—police department, *L.A. Noir* is an enlightening, entertaining, and richly detailed narrative about the city originally known as El Pueblo de Nuestra Señora la Reina de los Angeles, "The Town of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels."

Frank Darabont has adapted this book for a TV series, *Mob City*.

L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City Details

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From Reader Review **L.A. Noir: The Struggle for the Soul of America's Most Seductive City** for online ebook

Kemper says

I always thought that James Ellroy was exaggerating the corrupt and scandalous nature of Los Angeles in his books. After reading this, I'm thinking that he may have actually toned it down.

This is essentially the parallel biographies of two men: Mickey Cohen and William Parker. Cohen was an illiterate small time thug who made a name for himself by working for the Capone mob before heading west and apprenticing under Bugsy Siegel and eventually becoming the head of organized crime from late '40s into the '60s. Parker joined a corrupt and highly politicized police force in the '20s and eventually worked his way up to the top position in 1950 through a mixture of incorruptibility and shrewd use of the bureaucracy

Buntin uses the lives of Cohen and Parker to tell the history of the city itself. Their combined story includes local politicians, Hollywood stars, presidents, gangsters and strippers just to name a few. The push and pull between the criminal element and the police would go on to shape the city in various ways. By the end of it, Buntin does a long section that details how Parker's refusal to acknowledge the legitimate grievances that minorities had with the police department created a culture that got passed on and had a hand in the Rodney King riots and other image issues that haunt the LAPD to this day.

It was an interesting way to tell the history of a city and includes a lot of interesting anecdotes and trivia. For example, Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry was a LAPD officer in their public relations department who wrote speeches for Parker, and it was his work reviewing scripts for the TV show *Dragnet* as part of their deal with the department for access to police files that got him into television.

Jimmy says

The history of the LAPD through the life of Chief Parker is told in this book along with the story of Mickey Cohen as a foil. Quite relevant in light of the recent rampage by former LAPD officer Chris Dorner who claimed LAPD is still the same as the Old School days. Contrary to Dorner's claim the history of LAPD past is crazier than today's LAPD: the department before Chief Parker was riddled with corruption and collaboration with the underworld, and the infamous reputation of LAPD of harsh policing came about as a result of Chief Parker's attempt to insulate LAPD from the pressures of corrupt politicians and directly from the underworld. The side effect of course is a police department with a culture that enjoyed little outside oversight and accountability. Fascinating read, one can't put it down till it's finished! Something I thought about as I read this book is the reality that when people with ambition get to the top, they really are not satisfied and is always trying to protect what they do have--and the discontentment they get in defending themselves both literally and rhetorically.

Sean O'Hara says

The dust jacket description of this book is highly misleading -- rather than being a sprawling epic about the struggle between the mafia and LAPD for control of Post War Los Angeles, but book is more of a dual biography of Mickey Cohen and Bill Parker. Certainly these two men deserve biographical attention, but they are an odd pair to sandwich together, what with the major portion of Cohen's career being over by the time Parker became chief of police -- nor did LAPD have any significant role in sending Cohen up, that being taken care of by the IRS.

Of the two halves, Cohen's is the weakest, marred by a lack of focus on his gangster career. Buntin often goes off on tangents, giving potted biographies of major figures who crossed paths with him and events in the US at large, while skimping on details about Cohen's associates in L.A. There's no reason why Mike Wallace's career deserves the extensive coverage it gets just because he conducted one noteworthy interview with Cohen, while Johnny Stompanato gets not even a quarter of that space. When Buntin discusses Cohen's role in the mafia, the focus is invariably upwards -- how he was a pain in the ass for Bugsy Siegel; how he worked with higher ups in the Syndicate -- and not on Cohen's underlings in L.A. We never get any clear idea of what Cohen did once he became head of mob activities in L.A. -- did his own men give him as much trouble as he used to cause, did he conduct any major crimes beyond number running?

The part of the book focused on Parker does better, but once he becomes chief the focus is firmly on the politics of running the LAPD and not on the operations of the force -- except in cases of major scandals. If you want a good idea of how the LAPD operated in the late '40s and '50s, you're better off with Jack Webb's *The Badge* -- even though Webb had his nose so far up Parker's ass that he could smell what he was having for breakfast while it was still cooking, you get a much better view of how things were on the street during the era, not to mention some good insights into Parker's thinking (his antipathy for all forms of gambling including church bingo, for example).

One thing I did really like about the book is the epilogue which connects Parker's legacy to the L.A. Riots of '92, particularly through his protege, Daryl Gates (whom I now realize was one of the models for Ed Exley in *L.A. Confidential*). By the end, Buntin has shown how many of Parker's policies -- which, ironically, were intended as reforms -- led to the problems that plagued the LAPD all the way into the '90s, more than a quarter century of Parker dropped dead.

CD says

A well done sharply focused work about the rise of the modern political world of Los Angeles. With the backdrop of several shady characters and selected criminal activities of Organized Crime, *L.A. Noir* is a very readable political history and biography of primarily LAPD Chief William Parker and the criminal Mickey Cohen.

John Buntin stays on track and with a few minor exceptions resists temptation to stray off onto the many juicy sub-plots that was L.A. from the Roaring twenties until the 1970's. Using primarily well vetted public and journalistic sources, author Buntin weaves a fascinating story through the dark undercurrents of the American City of Light and Angels. From pre-war LA to the LA of Tom Bradley and Darrell Gates, this is a rich tale.

Highly recommended for readers of history, crime, politics and stories of the American Dream. The real American Dream, not an idealized landscape but an urban swamp. *LA Noir* works without inclusion of most of the sordid and sensationalistic crimes solved and unsolved that have littered that western landscape. A few

shootings, riots, jealous lovers murders, political and mob hits are included but they all advance the story.

If any major flaw exists it is the almost total lack of inclusion of anything Hollywood and the related film industry. Hollywood is only peripheral to the general corruption that is the focus of the story line. A few of the Hollywood greats get mentioned if only in passing. I would like to see what this writer would do with the Hollywood story of the same historical period.

A goodread by all measures.

Deleted says

Mickey Cohen adds what little color there is to this book, making various guest appearances in what is really the history of the modern-day L.A.P.D. From James "Two Gun" Davis to Daryl Gates' resignation, and focusing particularly on William H. Parker, the department's relationship to the city of L.A. takes fascinating if not exactly the gaudy form promised. Though Buntin may not have intended it -- the book is at its best outlining the L.A.P.D.'s troubled history with racial minorities. For students of Los Angeles history, a good addition to the bookshelf.

Jeff says

This is an excellent "biography" of Los Angeles told thru the lens of the lives of two extremes: Mickey Cohen, the infamous gangster who ran the mob in LA after Bugsy Segel left to create Las Vegas and William Parker, who rose up thru the ranks of the LAPD to become its most famous police chief. From the early days of Prohibition to the Zoot Suit riots to Rodney King and beyond, its a fascinating look at the crime and corruption (political and otherwise) that build the City of Angels.

Recommend.

"Parker found in Los Angeles temptation. Instead of becoming a prominent attorney, he became a cop, a patrolman in the LAPD. Coldly cerebral (Star Trek creator Gene Roddenberry, a onetime LAPD officer and Parker speechwriter, reputedly based the character Mr. Spock on his former boss), intolerant of fools, and famously incorruptible (in a department that was famously corrupt), Parker persevered."

The poet Hart Crane on visiting LA in 1927; "The city itself was horrid, but the sex divine"

9/10

S: 7/17/16 - F: 8/1/16 (16 Days)

Jameson says

A year or so ago, my lady wife and I stumbled across a series on TNT called Mob City. It was an excellent, stylish tip of the hat to the classic film noir productions of Hollywood's golden era and to the kind of movies that came out of that era, movies that emphasized a world-weary, cynical view of life, where moral

ambiguity reigns and the hero typically loses more than he gains in his Pyrrhic victory over evil. Think of Humphrey Bogart or Robert Mitchum in film adaptations of novels by Raymond Chandler or James M. Cain directed by John Huston or Howard Hawks. I'm over-simplifying terribly, but you get the noir picture.

I was tottering around a bookstore recently with my friend Dan Bronson, a retired screen-writer and former professor of English and American literature, and we stumbled across the book upon which *Mob City* is based. To my surprise, the book, *L.A. Noir*, by John Buntin, is a non-fiction account of the Los Angeles Police Department as it grew and developed in response to, and in conjunction with, the growth and spread of organized crime in America.

Let me give you some perspective. The LAPD is considered one of the elite and premier law enforcement agencies in the world, the very best of the best. For many decades they took a sort of cynical pride in the fact that they were the smallest police force relative to the population they served anywhere in the civilized world. I believe that statistic may still be true. Due in part to the small number of officers, versus the large numbers of people in a vast amount of square miles of territory, they made a virtue of necessity and pioneered techniques that allowed them to get the job done, techniques that are now studied and imitated by law enforcement agencies around the world. There is a reason why retired LAPD officer (former SWAT-team member and firearms and tactical instructor for the elite Metro division) Scott Reitz's International Tactical Training Seminars is the go-to place for training for such entities as Navy Special Warfare Team Six and Army Delta Forces, as well as elite law enforcement agencies from around the world. Men and women who make their livings doing the dangerous things that allow the rest of us to sleep quietly at night train with the best, and that's Scott Reitz. That's the LAPD.

To call this book scholarly is an insult. I was still living in Los Angeles back during the Rodney King riots, and because I had and have friends in law enforcement, I was privy to a few details about those riots that were not commonly known. I was a little stunned to see some of those details in the closing pages of *L.A. Noir*. If Mr. Buntin was that thorough about all the research he did for the entire book, then this is more than merely scholarly; it practically qualifies as obsessively well-researched.

But it is also an insult to call it scholarly because that word—at least to me—carries the implication of dusty and jejune pedantry, and *L.A. Noir* reads like a Raymond Chandler or James M. Cain thriller. Mr. Buntin has the technique of the best of best investigative reporters, really of all good writers of non-fiction (think of Jared Diamond or the late Marc Reisner), finishing each chapter with a sentence or paragraph that leaves you desperate to find out what happens next.

Having said that, Buntin employs, very logically, the technique of (for the most part) using Chief William Parker and legendary gangster Mickey Cohen to drive his story, alternating back and forth as he follows their respective careers and how they intertwine. But look back at that sentence. "...Chief William Parker and legendary gangster Mickey Cohen..." If *L.A. Noir* has a weak spot it is due to William Parker. Yes, he was a brilliant, innovative police chief, but in his personal life he was about as exciting as yesterday's mashed potatoes, and the chapters that focus on him pale in comparison to the chapters that focus on the flamboyant, volatile, unpredictable, and always deadly Mickey Cohen. Think about it: if you're walking through your backyard and you suddenly see a garter snake on one side of you and a rattlesnake on the other, which one are you going to focus on?

Because Mickey Cohen was the colorful character he was, and because gambling was an important part of their operations, he and Bugsy Siegel both crossed paths, directly or indirectly, and in some cases mingled easily with, a who's-who of household names from that era: George Raft, Robert Mitchum, Columbia Pictures boss and despicable wannabe gangster Harry Cohn, Sam Goldwyn, Irving Thalberg, Darryl Zanuck, Lana Turner (with her gangster boyfriend Johnny Stompanato, who once made the mistake of pulling his tough guy routine on real-life tough guy Sean Connery and got knocked unconscious for his pains), Kim Novak, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., Ben Hecht, evangelist Billy Graham, and many others even as they crossed swords with Robert Kennedy, J. Edgar Hoover, Mike Wallace...

The list goes on, and I'm not even bothering to mention the forgotten names of the ruthless and bloody gangsters who were the Shorty Guzmans of their day.

The result is that L.A. Noir, while touted as, “a struggle for the soul of America’s most seductive city,” actually becomes a study of the rapine and venality not only of gangsters outside the law, but of the respectable gangsters who stayed inside the law and used their lawyers to pervert justice to their own ends. In short, L.A. Noir is a brilliant, fascinating, beautifully-written, and eminently readable portrait of a city and paradigm for an unchanging country.

There is one bad mark against this book, and that goes to the publisher of the paperback version, Broadway Books, an imprint of the Crown Publishing Group, a division of Random House, LLC, a Penguin Random House Company. I’ve taken the time to write out their full name because they should be ashamed of themselves. In an effort to be stingy and pinch the buffalo, they have made the print so preposterously small that it will almost certainly turn off all but the very young (who don’t read books anyway) or fanatically devoted book lovers like me who refuse to succumb to Kindle. I understand the publishing industry is in turmoil, thanks to a combination of mergers, e-books, declining reading habits, printing costs, and probably a bunch of other factors of which I am blissfully unaware, but for God’s sake, if you’re going to commit to publishing an actual printed book, then cowboy up and print a book worth buying, especially if it is as worthy of reading as L.A. Noir.

Liza Gilbert says

I had really been looking forward to this book. The time frame discussed in the work included corrupt cops, mobsters, prostitutes, film glamor, tabloid journalism, violence, blood, and lots of guns.

It was so dry. I almost fell asleep in the prologue. The prologue attempted to give background for the text. It felt disjointed and like the reader was being rushed through too much history. For a time and place that evoke a ton of drama, this was completely without.

Once I got into the book itself, I felt like I really was left without enough background information. The result was that these powerful, homicidal, corrupt figures had no weight in the text. Even the sympathetic and innocent characters elicited no sympathy because no reason was given why we should care about them.

The writing was downright puzzling as times. At one point the author was explaining how one person ratted out another, and how it would all be divulged via a wire tap tape in a seemingly unrelated court case. The author explained how the wire tap had been carried out, and then dropped the story. The reader never got to hear what was said on the tape, or how people reacted.

The whole text seemed like a sedate, confused tease that never delivered.

Eric says

Great history of LA by way of its most (in)famous police chief, William Parker, and his nemesis, underworld crime boss Mickey Cohen. If you've ever wondered why the LAPD seems to be on a level separate from most any other American police dept, with a reputation for both back-room corruption and bureaucratic detachment, this book goes a good way toward an explanation.

Jessica says

I recently took a downtown LA tour focusing on criminals and other underworld figures from the early half of the 1900s and it sparked my interest in LA in that time period. I wanted to find a book that was nonfiction but also fun and exciting. I settled on *LA Noir*, which promised to tell the sordid story of the battle of police chief William Parker vs. LA's most notable gangster Mickey Cohen.

And it delivered, to some degree. It did indeed tell the story of those two characters, although their lives intertwined a lot less than the blurb led me to believe. In truth the book focuses on the history of LA's police force, as well as the gangsters that ran the underworld, but a lot of it was more about race riots and politics than the gangster squad. I wanted Hollywood scandals, I wanted *LA Confidential* and *Chinatown* and the *Black Dahlia* and what I really got was an interesting story about the LAPD. I guess what I'm trying to say is I wanted more glamour and flashing lights. Still, that's not really the book's fault so much as it is mine in choosing it. It was still a fascinating book, well written and fast paced.

Jason Reeser says

I'm a big fan of old film noir, not such a fan of the old police docu-dramas. I've always loved watching the old TV shows like *S.W.A.T* and *CHiPs*, but I never enjoyed *Dragnet* or *Adam-12*. However...the new movie *Gangster Squad* really grabbed my attention, as did the recent video game *L.A. Noir*. So when I came across this book by John Buntin, I hoped it was as good as it looked. It was better, which is amazing, because that front cover is darned near perfect.

Buntin takes the story of LA's gangsters and the LAPD from the early 1900's up to the 1990's. He does so by following the careers of the two most prominent men from both sides of the law in Los Angeles: police officer Bill Parker and gangster Mickey Cohen. What follows is a fascinating tale of politics, crime, corruption, and the growth of a small California town into one of the largest and most racially complex cities in the United States.

What I liked most about this book was the way it bridged a number of eras into one seamless narrative. I look at the various eras of history through the lenses of movie and television cameras. The 1920's and 30's are characterized by the shaky, blurry black and white film that captured Los Angeles we know from movies like Charlie Chaplin's and early gangster flicks. There's the clearer yet darker film of the 1940's and 50's, showcasing the flashy yet dangerous L.A. of film noir. Early color TV and film was desaturated, low-keyed, as we watched Joe Friday and Malloy and Reed patrol the streets and track down criminals. A more colorful Los Angeles emerges in the 1970's and 80's, both racially and pop-culturally, midst the action of *S.W.A.T.* and *Hunter*, to name just a few TV shows, and countless movies. By the 1990's my view of Los Angeles was seen mostly through CNN, highlighted, or course, by the Rodney King beating and subsequent riots.

Why have I mentioned all of this? Because in *L.A. Noir*, the author ties all of these eras together, and you can see how crime and law grew and transformed along with this city. Yet, he does it through the viewpoints of two very unique people. Mickey Cohen is not your average gangster. He can be very peculiar, magnanimous, charming, and confounding. Parker, the career cop who becomes a Police Chief of legend, is just as strange. He is courageous in his youth, petulant to his superiors, naive to the ways of his fellow

officers, politically ambitious, petty, yet quite the visionary as an administrator. His racial biases contribute to the Watts riots, which directly effects the eventual troubles surrounding the Rodney King stories.

Of particular interest was the shocking end of both men. If you don't know what happened to them, as I didn't, don't spoil the book by looking it up on wikipedia. Just read the book. The story is compelling, frustrating, sensational, funny (yes, there are many humorous moments), unbelievable, and terribly tragic. But through it all you might just come away with a new perspective on a police force that has been historically reviled.

Kudos to John Buntin for his exhaustive research and craftsmanship with his pen.

Frank Stein says

This is a dual biography that compares the life of Jewish mobster Mickey Cohen and LA Police Chief William Parker, both of whom supposedly "struggled for the soul" of Los Angeles during their heyday in the 1950s and 60s. Like most dual biographies, this structure seems to be little more than a conceit to cut a new book out of already well-trodden territory. Thankfully both Cohen and Parker lived fascinating lives that are vividly portrayed against LA's exciting backdrop, even if they typically had little to do with one another.

The real value of this "biography" is in its depiction of LA at its mid-century chaotic best, when its seedy underworld would be the inspiration for countless film noir plots. The author convincingly shows that that grim noirish ambiance came right out of a city whose corruption and crime were unrivaled by any in the world. One great example: From 1933 to 1938 LA was run by Mayor Joe Shaw, who helped form a political-criminal "Combination" which used underworld gambling money to pay for costly but successful political campaigns. Although Shaw himself was elected as a "reformer" in the aftermath of Mayor Cryer's and Kent Parrot's corrupt 1920s "machine," which relied on bootleggers for campaign cash, Shaw himself was brought down by an even more spectacular corruption scandal. Apparently, a corrupt and twice-fired police officer named Harry Raymond uncovered some of the connections between the mayor, the police, and organized crime, and instead of turning the evidence in, he tried to blackmail the police department for cash. They responded by blowing up his car with a pipe bomb, covering him with shrapnel but leaving him alive enough to accuse the department. The agent the police assigned to investigate the explosion suggested that Raymond tried to blow himself up as a publicity stunt (the police had earlier suggested a grand jury investigator had tried to blow his own family up for similar reasons). This agent was later convicted of Raymond's attempted murder. The police chief at the time, James "Two Guns" Davis (William Parker's mentor), and numerous underlings were later forced to resign when the next mayor began illegally bugging police department phones and blackmailing the corrupt policemen to leave the force. These kind of shenanigans continued for decades in LA. No wonder the *Maltese Falcon* and *Out of the Past* had such a dark view of the police and of human nature.

Another great aspect of the book is its demonstration of how local Los Angeles issues continually had national implications, and an endless parade of national figures (both political and cultural) march through this supposedly local history. Bugsy Siegel and his New York mafia pals take over the Los Angeles rackets in the 1930s from local tough Jack Dragna, only leaving in the 1940s when "Bugsy" decides to muscle into the Flamingo hotel and basically create Las Vegas as we know it. The Reverend Billy Graham explodes onto the national scene in 1950 when political powerhouse and LA Times owner Harry Chandler tells his reporters to "puff him" during a Los Angeles tour. Senators Estes Kefauver and John McClellan make LA a prime stop in their respective eponymous committee hearings on organized crime, and they use it as a

quintessential example of decadent American society. Jack Webb creates the radio show (and later TV show) Dragnet using his authorized access to LA police files for stories, and he pays the force back by using the show to protest such perennial police bugbears as the "exclusion rule" (which appeared in California almost five years before Mapp v. Ohio). Chief William Parker, beloved by RFK, almost replaces Hoover at the FBI in 1961 (until Hoover lets the Kennedys know exactly how much dirt he has on them), yet he later becomes a national whipping boy when his supposedly harsh police tactics inspire the Watts riots in 1965 (his protege, and one-time driver, Daryl Gates later assumes the mantel of police chief; in a classic case of deja vu, his policing tactics are blamed for the 1992 LA riots). Clinton's first Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, earlier got involved in LA policing when he wrote the "McCone Report" on the Watts riot, and later the Report on Police Brutality after Rodney King beating (the first probably too soft, the second probably too hard on the cops). Perhaps most interestingly, Chief Parker, famously cold and logical, was probably used by Gene Roddenberry (a former LA cop) as the model for Spock in Star Trek (!).

This is an entertaining and informative read, one that reminds me that even the most corrupt administrations and the most untouchable gangsters of today pale before their forbearers.

Caitlin Constantine says

I picked up this book thinking it would be an interesting dissection of noir but instead found myself quickly immersed in an epic investigation of the history of Los Angeles and its relationships with organized crime and the LAPD. This is absolutely not the kind of book I ever read, not least of all because it had to do with organized crime, which is a topic that never fails to lose my interest (an opinion I recognize puts me in the minority of Americans). And yet I tore through this book in a few days.

Buntin needed a way to organize his narrative, so he focused on two pivotal iconoclasts - gangster Mickey Cohen and LAPD chief Bill Parker. Between these two men he was able to write about the extent to which organized crime wove itself into the fabric of American society (and in the process showing just how slender the line between crime and legitimate business truly was), about the history of problems faced by the LAPD in its dealings with Latino and black Angelenos, about the evolution of the modern police force, about the persistent fears of Communism and the way they shaped the perspectives of very powerful people. I particularly found it fascinating to see how a certain kind of police force was necessary to deal with organized crime, but how that kind of police work outlived its usefulness as the mob receded from prominence, and also to see how deep the roots of organized crime go in the history of the U.S.

The writing wasn't the best, unfortunately, but that shortcoming was amply compensated for by the fact that the story was just so fucking compelling. It was also very freaky at times, with debates over public safety and terrorist infiltrations and racism very closely mirroring the things we hear and see today. Seeing the language used today echoed by public officials who lived and worked half a century ago gives one quite a bit of historical context, which is something we are very much lacking in our modern dialogue about the world.

Jo Stafford says

Welcome to Los Angeles. But this is not the LA of sun-drenched beaches and Hollywood glamor. This is the LA of crooked cops, call girls, bookmakers, and hit men.

John Buntin guides the reader through both LA's criminal underbelly and the internal politics of the LAPD in this thoroughly absorbing account of the lives and times of police chief William Parker and gangster Mickey Cohen. Buntin traces the rise of both men to the top of their respective professions, providing a great deal of fascinating social history in the process. Gangsters always seem to be larger-than-life figures, and Cohen steals the show in this book. Dining with Billy Graham, being called by Randolph Hearst to negotiate the return of Patti Hearst from the SLA: you couldn't make this stuff up.

There are also interesting background sketches on two men who served in the LAPD under Parker and who would later play important roles in LA's history: Tom Bradley, the city's first African American mayor, and Daryl Gates, the police chief at the helm of the LAPD when the city's African American community exploded in anger in 1992 following the verdict in the trial of police officers indicted for savagely beating Black motorist Rodney King.

L.A. Noir is exhaustively researched and engrossing. After visiting the Los Angeles described in its pages, you'll see the city in a different light.

Michael Henley says

Finally got around to reading this...really really loved this well-researched piece of non-fiction about Los Angeles crime, telling a bifurcated story that ping-pongs between infamous gangster Mickey Cohen and police commissioner Jim Parker. Clean and concise prose manages to successfully tackle a sprawling, rich story with loads of characters and incidents. It ends up being a highly evocative snapshot of mid-century cops and criminals (with plenty of prologue and epilogue that contextualizes both older and more recent events as being much informed by the central period). The period details are so well-captured. If I have one complaint it's that I could easily have read a version of this that was twice as long.
