

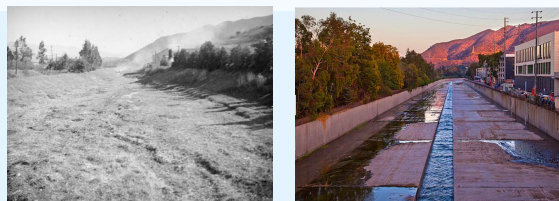
Water and Time: (Re)Imagining the Los Angeles River

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Abstract

In the early 1900's, the Los Angeles river was understood as both a vital resource and an unreliable hindrance to the city's development, leading to the outsourcing of water and the river bank's encasement in concrete. Recently, local efforts have been made to reimagine the river as either a local water supply in line with its historical use or a novel site of recreation. However, these contemporary proposals directly conflict with each other, leading to our current situation where the L.A. River remains unchanged, polluted, and largely forgotten within the metropolis. Additionally, they each speak to continued conceptions of the river as a utility.



(Left) An almost completely dry section in Studio City circa 1937. (Right) In 2015.

Methods and Protocols

We conducted our research through a close reading of the following selected sources from the Western Water Archives:

- A 1904 Letter to the Board of Directors of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce
- A 1904 Letter from William Mulholland to Charles D. Walcott
- A document from 1934, titled Report of the Los Angeles River Water Supply

We compared the themes of these sources to the themes conveyed in newspapers and municipal reports from the 2000's.

	CONSUMPTION. (Including West Side.) Gallons per day.	RIVER SUPPLY. Gallons per day.
1900.	26,780,000	34,804,000
1905.	33,800,000	20,947,000
1904.	34,000,000	27,878,000

Deficiency made up from Narrows Gallery Pump at Narrows & Pump at Jefferson St. Pumping Station

(Left) Table from a letter to the Board of Directors of the Chamber of commerce (12/28/1904)

Background and Perspectives

1904: Letter to Board of Directors of the Chamber of Commerce. "The sources from which the deficiency between supply and demand has been made up in the past two years cannot be strictly regarded as permanent sources"

1934: Report of the Los Angeles River Water supply. "In fact, greater diversions can greatly be made before the surplus of water now passing through the Narrows of the Los Angeles River will be materially affected."

2017: Whitewashing the Los Angeles River? Gente-fication not Gentrification. "There is growing evidence, however, that green displacement is destroying equal opportunity along the river."

1904: William Mulholland, Water Department of the City of Los Angeles. This letter contains a detailed description of water well usage and its ability to recover water during the wet season. This showcases the importance of utilizing the river as a water source in 1904, and the engineering lengths the city took to collect this water.

2000: Boys' Drowning Revive Debate on L.A. River Safety. The boys' drownings, "rekindled the debate over the safety of the Los Angeles River at a time when the county's main flood control channels [were] being increasingly opened up for recreation."

2018: What role should the L.A. River play in the future or Los Angeles. "It's going to be a tough tightrope to walk," said Mark Gold, "If we go all in on water recycling and stormwater infiltration and capture, then there's not going to be enough water left for a thriving river."

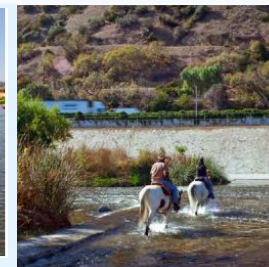


(Left) Compton Avenue, 1926; (right) in 2015. Before photos via Los Angeles Public Library photo collection; afters by Peter Bennett



Research Objective

Our objective is to discover and analyze the transformation of ideologies surrounding the Los Angeles River as an entity between the early 1900's and the contemporary era in order to consider the future of the Los Angeles River in all of its possible forms, as various stakeholders continue to pursue further manipulations of the river.



Rendering shows one design idea submitted as part of the city's Los Angeles River Revitalization Plan. (Image courtesy of the city of Los Angeles)

Conclusions

Persistent theme of L.A. River as a water source for the city of Los Angeles
 Persistent theme of the L.A. river as an unreliable hindrance to Los Angeles
 Emerging consideration for the L.A. River as a recreation space
 Imagining the future of the L.A. River reflects the historical pattern of the manipulation of the L.A. river for the benefit of the people of Los Angeles.

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