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ARTHIS 165D

07 February 2025

The Land of Sunshine: Southern California...



The West, particularly Southern California, carried the essence of “Eden Refound”, where White Americans could escape to pleasure themselves with the leisure nature of “The Land of Sunshine”. There was a machinery when it came to imagining Los Angeles through its “paradise” like advertisement that sold individuals of its romantic personality. In 1876, a railroad opened up in Los Angeles, making the city's economy based on immigration at that time. Due to the nature of this fiscal market, it was imperative to sell LA as a fantasy of “the relaxing backyard”. The image above, a book cover to Harry Ellington Brook’s *Land of Sunshine*:

Southern California: an Authentic Description of its Natural Features, Resources and Prospects (1893), depicts pastoral scenic images of LA, having an organic connection with the natural paradise itself. It is a carefully constructed image of LA being the “Garden City”, a horticulture paradise of a city. The man-made farmland in the background, with the woman draped in an excess of fabric, endorses the environment of commercial and economic possibility. Essentially things will grow here, and after figuring out how to properly irrigate the land, agriculture becomes Southern California’s main monopoly. Fruit is hard to grow in other parts of the United States, so produce like oranges, like the woman is holding, becomes a huge commodity for farmers and businesses. Southern California starts to transform into the “Cornucopia of the World”, and bounties of wealth start pouring out of this southern region. This attracted a lot of potential settlers, and by utilizing the railroad that opened up in LA in the late 19th century, many immigrants from Iowa arrived. After making the journey across miles of tracks, these new arrivals would be greeted with the warm climate and picturesque landscape scenes of tall palm trees dominating the topography. Palm trees were not native to California, and were imported from the mid 19th centuries onward, illustrating the rhetoric of the carefully curated image of LA. Palm trees have a specific iconographic resonance, using landscape to make a moral point. Notable American landscape artists such as Thomas Cole and Fredric Edwin Church, were influenced by these palm plants and were featured in some of their works such as Figure 1 and Figure 2. The presence of these palm trees evoked a sense of an untouched paradise, reinforcing the idealized origins of humanity. To them, this is what creation looked like to them, using nature to convey spiritual reflections on the human condition. LA was essentially urban fabric built out of rural fabric. It was not naturally fostered as an urban space, and the size of the grand land seems overwhelming to new settlers. Due to the racial purification rhetoric during this time

period, many White Protestant urban developers asked, “How can the land be developed in a non-Mexican way?”. In order to control the vast de-centralized sprawl of these previous cattle ranches and acres of farmland, entrepreneurs focused on getting the land gridded off, while simultaneously focusing on an in town trading operation.. The emphasis on structured grids helped facilitate rapid economic growth, but also contributed to lasting spatial inequalities. The cover for *Land of Sunshine*, is not just a visual representation of a natural paradise, but rather an obscurity to a city built on romanticized advertisement and selective inclusion and exclusion.



Figure 1.
Thomas Cole, *The Garden of Eden*, 1828



Figure 2.
Fredric Edwin Church, *Tropical Landscape*, c. 1855