

Book Reviews

George J. Sánchez. *Boyle Heights: How a Los Angeles Neighborhood Became the Future of American Democracy*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2021. Pp. 392. Hardcover \$29.95.

George Sánchez, Professor of American Studies and Ethnicity at USC, claims that Boyle Heights (and the greater Los Angeles area) became a thriving community because of the many ethnicities that live there, supporting one another and organizing to counter social and political injustices targeting all non-white immigrant communities. Focusing on twentieth-century Boyle Heights, Sánchez explains that the history of Los Angeles has been “whitewashed” and misremembered, so that the city can keep its aura of glamour that hides its discriminatory origins.

Self-segregation as well as prejudiced urban policies led to the sizable foreign-born population in Boyle Heights, with a mix of Italians, Mexicans, Japanese, Russians, Jews, African Americans and others. Sanchez argues that many ethnicities did not just leave or stay in certain neighborhoods by choice, but that restrictive covenants and other discriminatory policies and projects either forced out residents or relegated them into certain areas. For example, lenders and planners used “redlining” to deny mortgages in neighborhoods associated with particular ethnic groups and the Federal Housing Authority (FHA) reinforced those patterns by treating any non-whites as a financial “risk” in ways that protected white neighborhoods from integration. Officials delayed or abandoned housing improvements in Boyle Heights, and routed freeways, factories, and industrial development through minority neighborhoods. Larger movements and events such as Mexican repatriation during the late 1920s and early 1930s Japanese internment during World War II are also pointed to as ways that non-white residents were displaced.

The book succeeds in showing how culture is power and vividly describes the challenges, displacement, and discrimination of the immigrant population within Boyle Heights. Sánchez displays strength in solidarity with communities coming together to advocate for the right to housing, keep industrial development out, and civil

rights. Although many of these initiatives failed at the time, it still portrays the fight for equality. This highlights migrant populations actively resisted and would advocate for change through labor unions, community centers such as churches, and protests like the 1960s Chicano walkouts.

Sánchez relies on official city government archival records including city council meeting records, court case documents, Federal Housing Authority documents, newspapers, and photos. Interviews from various former Boyle Heights residents are also cited in the bibliography, which are used to document their experiences living through biased policy. Other interviews were conducted with the Japanese American National Museum, focusing specifically on displaced Japanese residents.

Boyle Heights is fascinating and was culturally illuminating to me as a Mexican American. As a native Angeleno, I was inspired to pursue graduate studies at Cal State LA after reading this title. It is an engaging and well-sourced account of how multiethnic communities formed in Los Angeles and how public policy constrained their lives. The book should be valuable to historians, undergraduate students, and Los Angeles natives seeking insight into the history of Boyle Heights and the city at large.

Kevin Avila

Joel Mokyr. *A Culture of Growth: The Origins of the Modern Economy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. Pp. 403. Paperback \$12.80.

Economic historian Joel Mokyr received the 2025 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences in part for his latest book, which furthered his award-winning research on the historical impact of technological and scientific innovations to include the role of culture. His work demonstrates how early modern European society evolved from 1500 to 1700 laid the foundations for the tremendous gains witnessed in the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. The analysis is driven by the question of why sustained economic growth did not occur in the period before 1700 despite new technology, more effective mar-