

Reinventing Paradise



a modern history
of los angeles

By Rex M. Oppenheimer

chaptertwo

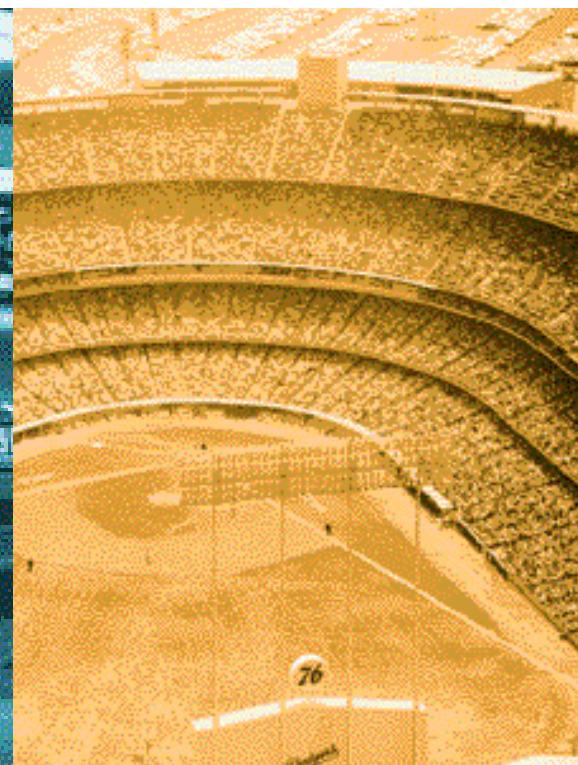
Freeways, Fastballs and Fantasyland



Los Angeles greeted the 1950s with the exuberance of a child running and splashing into the sea. The war years of the 40s were over. It was the beginning of a new decade, a new life, filled with hope. Things were improving all the time. Modern household conveniences, faster and sleeker cars — there seemed to be boundless energy and limitless possibilities. All that was needed was imagination, hard work and willpower.

No one better exemplified that winning, happy attitude than the creator of Mickey Mouse, Walt Disney. At 10 a.m., Monday, July 18, 1955, Disney greeted the first two families to enter his new amusement park, Disneyland.

Disney explained, “It started with taking my two kids around to zoos and parks. While they were on the merry-go-round riding 40 times or something, I’d be sitting there trying to figure out what you



Beatniks wanted to ban the bomb, parents wanted to ban Elvis' songs (and hips). Elvis Presley starring in the film *Jailhouse Rock*.
Photo Collection, Los Angeles Public Library



Transportation

L.A. sports fans were quite happy with reality in 1959 when the Dodgers won their first World Series pennant. Other things were looking up as well. In 1876 officials had driven a golden spike at Soledad Canyon

Los Angeles had to learn to ride the waves of change.
Los Angeles Times Photographic Archives, Department of Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA



to celebrate the railroad connection linking Los Angeles with San Francisco and the rest of the country. Now, 83 years later, the first jet service (connecting L.A. and New York) was inaugurated from Los Angeles International Airport.

Traffic on the ground, however, was getting worse. Smog, in spite of additional regulations, such as the 1957 banning of backyard trash incinerators, showed no signs of abating. In addition to the noxious pollutants, a sense of uncertainty also hung in the air. The arms race, the space race, the rat race, everybody seemed to be running, but few could see a finish line.

Beatniks wanted to ban the bomb, parents wanted to ban Elvis' songs (and hips). The Supreme Court had ordered school desegregation, but the majority of Angelenos were still more concerned with civil defense than civil rights.

Los Angeles had plunged into the decade with the wide-eyed enthusiasm of a child racing into the ocean. As the 1950s came to a close, the sea was becoming choppy. Waves of turbulence and tricky undercurrents began to toss and tug the town, and the country. Yet for many, there was hope on the horizon, as a new generation prepared to take charge.



The Theme Building at Los Angeles International Airport
Tom Zimmerman Photography