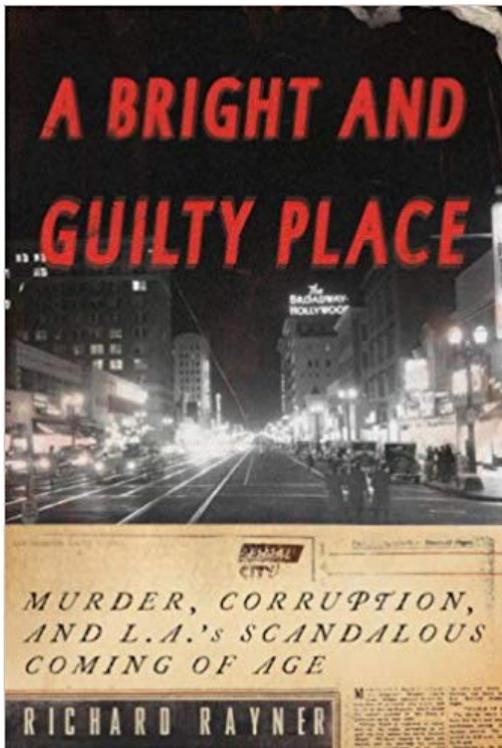


A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder, Corruption, and L.A.'s Scandalous Coming of Age by Richard Rayner



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Best Book of the Year *The Los Angeles Times* • *The Washington Post* Los Angeles was the fastest growing city in the world, mad with oil fever, get-rich-quick schemes, and celebrity scandals. It was also rife with organized crime, with a mayor in the pocket of the syndicates and a DA taking bribes to throw trials. In *A Bright and Guilty Place*, Richard Rayner narrates the entwined lives of two men, Dave Clark and Leslie White, who were caught up in the crimes, murders, and swindles of the day. Over a few transformative years, as the boom times shaded into the Depression, the adventures of Clark and White would inspire pulp fiction and replace L.A.'s reckless optimism with a new cynicism. Together, theirs is the tale of how the city of sunshine went noir.



Reviews of the **A Bright and Guilty Place: Murder,**

Corruption, and L.A.'s Scandalous Coming of Age *by* Richard Rayner

Unh

If this book had been a straightforward narrative account of L.A.'s history from the end of the First World War through the Great Depression, it could have been brilliant. The two central characters, in all their indulgences and idiosyncrasies, beautifully embody the tale of crime and corruption, fame and its misfortunes, all under the brilliant lights of Hollywood.

But *A Bright and Guilty Place* is two books, really. One is that account from an experienced Los Angeles journalist, a tensely written history that deftly conveys a distant reality through the intersecting paths of two men, one an investigator-turned-pulp fiction writer, the other a promising attorney seduced by the glitter of Los Angeles. The other is a work of literary analysis, with the author dissecting the works of Raymond Chandler, Erle Stanley Gardner, and other lesser-known L.A. writers who established the conventions of the "hard-boiled detective novel" -- and attempting to add depth and insight to the history by citing their observations.

The story at the center of *A Bright and Guilty Place* is that of Leslie White (the investigator) and Dave Clark (the lawyer), and it focuses on the two-year period in which they collaborated in the office of the Los Angeles District Attorney on a series of celebrated trials. The characters for whom they worked -- as well as the ones they brought to justice -- were straight out of Chinatown, which the author seems to regard as a faithful portrait of official L.A. in the 1920s and 1930s. "The System" ruled. At its helm was a crime boss, Charlie Crawford, who never looked the part, and rarely acted it, either. Charlie called the shots, with the mayor, the police chief, the D.A., and practically everyone else who mattered in official L.A. doing his bidding -- right up until someone shot and killed him with a .38 revolver. But who killed Charlie Crawford was never much of a mystery. The man who did it was none other than celebrated trial attorney Dave Clark. Therein lies the tale.

(From Mal Warwick's Blog on Books)

NiceOne

Excellent, informative book about the history of Los Angeles and what went on

Phalaken

I write novels set in California, some of them during the early years of the 20th century. So I read lots of books about that period. One of the best is Richard Rayner's *A Bright and Guilty Place*.

Rayner tells the life stories of an investigator and a lawyer, both employed by the District Attorney's office. One of them is heroic, one deeply flawed. Through their exploits and antics, Mr. Rayner exposes L.A.'s rampant and systemic corruption, the endemic collusion between government, law enforcement, and capitalists of all sorts including crime bosses.

What's more, if we stop to think, we may realize how universal is this social structure, which is rigged so that a select and avaricious few wallow in privilege and abundance while the rest serve as pawns and star-struck voyeurs.

At that point, some of us might pause and go for a drink, or mumble, "Damn, I don't think anything's changed."

A Bright and Guilty Place should be required reading for all who vote. It's that enlightening, as well as being a compelling story.

Vathennece

I always find it interesting to discover facts about people and places that I had never known before. Having seen the movie "Chinatown" many years ago, I had a small feel for the ambiance and corruption of L.A. in the early 20th century. This well-written book has given me much more insight into the area and what was happening there.

The book is almost like a "Who's Who" of the famous and infamous of L.A. in the first thirty or so years of the 20th century. Movie stars, politicians (both honest and corrupt), cops (also both honest and corrupt), famous writers, extremely wealthy folks, scientists, lawyers, etc., move quite easily through the pages. The work is written in a light, sprightly manner, and that makes it very easy to read and enjoy.

I've never been to L.A. (although my daughter has lived there for several years), but this book only heightened my interest in travelling there and seeing some of the sights that still exist even today from that time of almost a century ago.

If you like your social and political history light but interesting and entertaining, this book is definitely for you!

Dukinos

One of the best books in this genre I've read in a very long time. The author ranks up there with Sebastian Junger and Erik Larson for his story telling ability.

Mautaxe

Excellent read!

Zahisan

Author, Richard Rayner's, A BRIGHT AND GUILTY PLACE has exquisitely recaptured both L.A.'s moods and methods from the 1920's and 30's. Rayner has done his homework, and to his great credit, his research is obsessively ON-POINT and ACCURATE. (Any author that starts out with correctly spelling "Angelenos," has a huge leg-up in my world.) Rayner uses two percipient witnesses from the period, Deputy D.A., Dave Clark and DA Investigator, Leslie White to help tell his story. We get to hear their actual words, as they interview and prosecute crime-lord bosses, and major film-stars. We partner with Les White and ride with him down the Sunset Strip in route to his history making investigation at the Doheny Graystone mansion. Murder or Suicide? We witness the corruption and trickery of both cops and robbers, and in the end, get to understand why Los Angeles became the NOIR capitol of the world--all is smoke and mirrors. Nothing is as it seems.

To my mind, the book's highest accomplishment is in its description and explanation of how "The System" (control and corruption by a few bad men) worked in Los Angeles. Gangsterism's M.O was uniquely different in L.A. than say Chicago, New York, or Detroit and Rayner does an excellent job of helping understand it from the inside.

A BRIGHT AND GUILTY PLACE is a great read and comes highly recommended. Gets my vote for an Edgar Nominee in the FACT BASED category.

Steve Hodel, Los Angeles

Bestselling author of, Black Dahlia Avenger: A Genius for Murder

Interesting history of LA

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