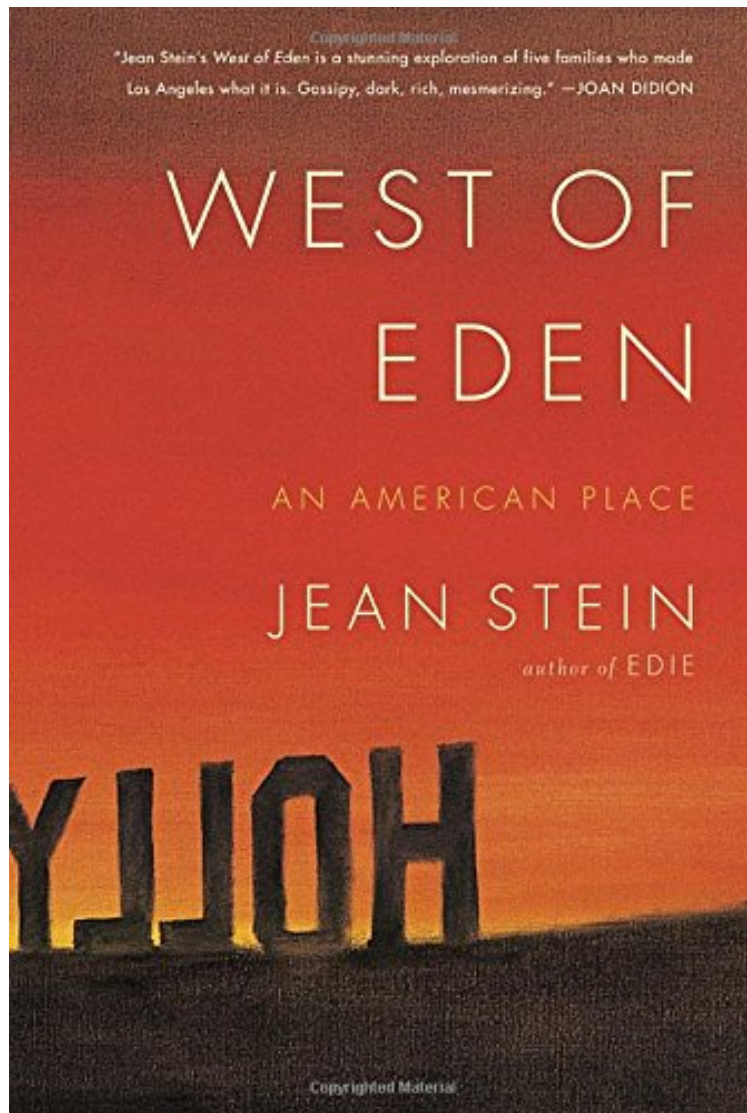


[Ebook pdf] West of Eden: An American Place

West of Eden: An American Place

Jean Stein

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Jean Stein : West of Eden: An American Place before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised West of Eden: An American Place:

65 of 67 people found the following review helpful. Unhappy familiesBy Phelps GatesWhile reading this, I was continually reminded of Tolstoy's well-known sentence "All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. The families in the book enjoyed fabulous wealth and their members often had rewarding and creative careers, but oh, brother... what unhappiness! Murder, suicide, mental illness, financial disasters, etc., etc. You name it.

The only exception was Jean Stein's own family, and perhaps that's just because she didn't talk about it (and even for them there was a kidnapping threat). As a third-generation native of Los Angeles (since escaped), I'm perpetually amazed by the goings-on there. My father was a reporter in Los Angeles in the thirties, and he used to regale us with stories of the rich and famous and their quirks. Stein's book gives us a fascinating picture, with all the important gossip, in a rather unusual format: quotations (often less than a page) from people who actually were there are cleverly strung together in a way that draws the reader inexorably along. Read it, then read some Raymond Chandler, and then go see L.A. Confidential. 5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. A must read for anyone interested in what shaped Hollywood culture. By T CAs a native of Southern California, I've heard the majority of these events and even knew some of the people and places involved. What made this book unique and fascinating was having so many of the people involved tell how not only how they themselves were impacted by these events but also the generations that that followed dealt with the fallout. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Four Stars By Cecilia Almeida Only because it is heavy on Jennifer Jones. It saved the book for me.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER An epic, mesmerizing oral history of Hollywood and Los Angeles from the author of the contemporary classic *Edie* Jean Stein transformed the art of oral history in her groundbreaking book *Edie: American Girl*, an indelible portrait of Andy Warhol superstar Edie Sedgwick, which was edited with George Plimpton. Now, in *West of Eden*, she turns to Los Angeles, the city of her childhood. Stein vividly captures a mythic cast of characters: their ambitions and triumphs as well as their desolation and grief. These stories illuminate the bold aspirations of five larger-than-life individuals and their families. *West of Eden* is a work of history both grand in scale and intimate in detail. At the center of each family is a dreamer who finds fortune and strife in Southern California: Edward Doheny, the Wisconsin-born oil tycoon whose corruption destroyed the reputation of a U.S. president and led to his own sons violent death; Jack Warner, the son of Polish-Jewish immigrants, who together with his brothers founded one of the worlds most iconic film studios; Jane Garland, the troubled daughter of an aspiring actress who could never escape her mothers schemes; Jennifer Jones, an actress from Oklahoma who won the Academy Award at twenty-five but struggled with despair amid her fame and glamour. Finally, Stein chronicles the ascent of her own father, Jules Stein, an eye doctor born in Indiana who transformed Hollywood with the creation of an unrivaled agency and studio. In each chapter, Stein paints a portrait of an outsider who pins his or her hopes on the nascent power and promise of Los Angeles. Each individuals unyielding intensity pushes loved ones, especially children, toward a perilous threshold. *West of Eden* depicts the city that has projected its own image of America onto the world, in all its idealism and paradox. As she did in *Edie*, Jean Stein weaves together the personal recollections of an array of individuals to create an astonishing tapestry of a place like no other. Praise for *West of Eden* Compulsively readable, capturing not just a vibrant part of the history of Los Angeles that uniquely American Place Stein refers to in her subtitle but also the real drama of this town . . . Its like being at an insiders cocktail party where the most delicious gossip about the rich and powerful is being dished by smart people, such as Gore Vidal, Joan Didion, Arthur Miller and Dennis Hopper. . . . Mesmerizing. Los Angeles Times Perhaps the most surprising thing that emerges from this riveting book is a glimpse of what seems like deep truth. Its possible that oral history as Stein practices it . . . is as close as were going to come to the real story of anything. The New York Times Book Review Enthralling . . . brings some of [L.A.s] biggest personalities to life . . . As she did for Edie Sedgwick in *Edie: American Girl*, [Stein] harnesses a gossipy chorus of voices. Vogue Even if youre a connoisseur of Hollywood tales, youve probably never heard these. . . . As ever, gaudy, debauched, merciless Hollywood has the power to enthrall its audience. The Wall Street Journal The tales of jaw-dropping excess, cruelty, and betrayal are the stuff of movies, and the pleasures are immense. Vanity Fair This riveting oral history chronicles the development of Los Angeles, from oil boomtown to Tinseltown. Entertainment Weekly (Must List)

West of Eden is compulsively readable, capturing not just a vibrant part of the history of Los Angeles that uniquely American Place [Jean] Stein refers to in her subtitle but also the real drama of this town, as reflected in the lives of some of its most powerful players. . . . Its like being at an insiders cocktail party where the most delicious gossip about the rich and powerful is being dished by smart people, such as Gore Vidal, Joan Didion, Arthur Miller and Dennis Hopper. The result is a mesmerizing book. Los Angeles Times Perhaps the most surprising thing that emerges from this riveting book is a glimpse of what seems like deep truth. Its possible that oral history as Stein practices it . . . is as close as were going to come to the real story of anything. . . . In a book thats a study of the fleeting nature of worldly power, Stein, now eight-two, has grabbed for herself the only kind that lasts: Shes the one left standing, who gets to tell the story. The New York Times Book Jean Steins enthralling new oral history, *West of Eden: An American Place*, brings some of [Los Angeless] biggest personalities to life. . . . As she did for Edie Sedgwick in *Edie: American Girl*, the former Grand Street editor harnesses a gossipy chorus of voices. Vogue Even if youre a connoisseur of Hollywood tales, youve probably never heard these. . . . As ever, gaudy, debauched, merciless Hollywood has the power to enthrall its audience. The Wall Street Journal Stein expertly orchestrates a chorus of voices rich and famous and not-so to create a picture of Hollywood through the lives of five of its most powerful families, drawn to the promise of

unmined riches in the oil fields and the fools-gold sparkle of stardom. The tales of jaw-dropping excess, cruelty, and betrayal are the stuff of movies, and the pleasures are immense. *Vanity Fair* This riveting oral history chronicles the development of Los Angeles, from oil boomtown to Tinseltown, told through the stories of five prominent families. *Entertainment Weekly* (Must List) If there is anyone still laboring under the delusion that great wealth and a couple of palm trees bring happiness, Jean Stein's long-awaited oral history of Los Angeles, *West of Eden*, should put that notion to rest. . . . It is probably not an exaggeration to say that *West of Eden* is the most intelligent, painstakingly researched work of schadenfreude yet produced. *Katie Roiphe, Town Country* In a masterfully conducted symphony of voices, Stein tells the story of a coterie of families including her own in Malibu and Beverly Hills, each profile centered on someone who came with a burst of energy from nowhere to invent a life of riches and fame. Stein's polyvalent oral narrative documents the indelible beauty and giddy decadence of Hollywood's twentieth-century golden age, complete with a parade of glamorous personalities and intrigues worthy of Henry James. *Interview* Spellbinding. *New Statesman* By far one of the best books ever written about Hollywood. *Gaby Wood, The Telegraph* Jean Stein's *West of Eden* is a stunning exploration of five families who made Los Angeles what it is. Gossipy, dark, rich, mesmerizing. *Joan Didion* In times past, in an effort to capture the edge and feel of Hollywood during its golden age of glamour and noir, Nathanael West, Raymond Chandler, Carey McWilliams, and Joan Didion stretched language and genre to their limits. Jean Stein and *West of Eden* belong in this company. *Kevin Starr, former California State Librarian and author of California: A History* [A] compelling, occasionally gossipy, informative chronicle of the flamboyant personalities from a storybook Hollywood era . . . [West of Eden] rivets. *Kirkus* sAbout the Author Jean Stein was the longtime editor of *Grand Street* magazine and a former editor at *The Paris* . She was the author of *American Journey: The Times of Robert Kennedy*, an oral history with interviews by Stein and edited by George Plimpton; *Edie: American Girl*, which was edited with Plimpton; and *West of Eden: An American Place*, an oral history of Hollywood and Los Angeles. Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. A winding driveway dropped down between retaining walls to the open iron gates. Beyond the fence the hill sloped for several miles. On this lower level faint and far off I could just barely see some of the old wooden derricks of the oilfield from which the Sternwoods had made their money. . . . A little of it was still producing in groups of wells pumping five or six barrels a day. The Sternwoods, having moved up the hill, could no longer smell the stale sump water or the oil, but they could still look out of their front windows and see what had made them rich. If they wanted to. I didn't suppose they would want to. *Raymond Chandler, The Big Sleep* Richard Rayner: The nature of scandals is that once Pandora's box has been opened, it always ends up murkier, more intestinal, more twisted, and much bigger and longer than anyone could have imagined before they opened the box. And the story of Edward L. Doheny is centered around a Pandora's box that unleashed an extraordinary sequence of events, enthralling the nation for a decade. It involved the fall and death of a president. It involved millions and millions of dollars paid to some of the most gifted lawyers in the country. It involved two slayings intimately connected to Doheny in circumstances that are still very murky. And it ended in the fall from grace for Doheny at one point the richest man in America who died in 1935 broken and disgraced, very much by his own actions and his determination to protect himself. *Patrick Ned Doheny: My great-grandfather was shocked at the way that everything spun out. When you think about a guy that strong being broken, you have to wonder what it must have been like to have had to deal with all those elements, who you had to be in order to survive it. It was a tragedy, but the history books have always done a hatchet job on him. Its the heartlessness that I find the most bitter about the interpretation of our family. And it upsets me that someone like my great-grandfather, who was such a seminal figure, gets supplanted by a cardboard stick figure. Thats madness. What my great-grandfather did is almost beyond conception in terms of the amount of money that he made, the success that he enjoyed, and the wildness of his adventure. That whole business with *There Will Be Blood*, however, was completely apocryphal. Theres not a shred of truth in it. The only true part of the film was at the beginning, with him in the mine shaft by himself: he did always say he once fell down a mine shaft and broke his legs. But all the rest of it is utter horseshit. All these people* *Upton Sinclair with Oil!* and later the movie people had a vested interest in furthering their own agendas, and its ludicrous to confuse those agendas with history. I enjoyed the movie, and I thought Daniel Day-Lewis was outrageously good. But it had nothing to do with my people at all. The actual story itself is so much more interesting than anything they might have come up with. Shuffle the cards, and deal a new round of poker hands: they differ in every way from the previous round, and yet it is the same pack of cards, and the same game, with the same spirit, the players grim-faced and silent, surrounded by a haze of tobacco-smoke. *Upton Sinclair, Oil!* Richard Rayner: The Doheny saga is central to L.A. history in all sorts of ways. One thinks of Mulholland as being the twisted godfather who summoned L.A. into existence because he brought the water that allowed it to grow. But Doheny symbolizes the other way wealth was acquired in the first thirty years when L.A. was really growing. Between 1900 and 1930, the population went from something like one hundred thousand to one million and a quarter. *Mike Davis: The recent history of Los Angeles had been an exhilarating then terrifying roller-coaster ride. In late 1885 the arrival of the Santa Fe railroad in Southern California broke the decade-long monopoly of the Southern Pacific. By March the most extraordinary rate war in American history began with fares from Chicago dropping to an absurd one dollar then stabilizing at ten dollars. Two hundred thousand curious visitors took advantage of the cheap fares to come visit the Land of Sunshine and dip their*

toes into the Pacific. First, however, they had to run a gauntlet of realtors and their sandwich-board boys waiting outside the stations to sell them a dream lot in one of the new garden suburbs or in the barren hills around the city. Los Angeles was laying ultramodern concrete sidewalks, but its main streets remained dirt and gravel and too often mud. But an old prospector like Doheny was probably happier with bare rock and exposed ground. He also may have enjoyed the ineradicable wildness everywhere on the city's edges. Los Angeles had little water, no coal, no improved harbor, no manufacturing, a still largely undeveloped hinterland, and a permanent shortage of capital. But these comprehensive disadvantages were the secret of the locals; the newcomers, having seen Eden, were easily convinced to buy a piece of it.

Richard Rayner: The population was driven by oil, and Doheny was the guy who created the L.A. oil industry, even though he made the vast part of his fortune in Mexico. In the 1920s L.A. produced 20 percent of the world's oil. When you look at pictures of the great forests of oil derricks studded all over the city or read Upton Sinclair's *Oil!*, you see it. It's absolutely staggering, and Doheny was responsible for that. But there are all these years of his life before that period about which not much is known, when he was roaming around the West in the 1870s and 1880s. We don't really start to get to know him until he's in his forties. I suspect he was quite desperate by then, because everything had failed. But we do know the story of his first wife, whom he left alone and it's quite dark.

MaryAnn Bonino: Edward Doheny married his first wife, Carrie Wilkins, in Kingston, New Mexico, in 1883. She never knew her father, a Civil War surgeon who went off to war when she was an infant and didn't come back. She and her mother lived the life of pioneers and it was a very hard life, in particular for women on their own. In spite of all of that, Carrie seems to have been a woman of considerable sensitivity. She was active in the Episcopal church and also an engaging amateur singer, taking a large audience by storm when she and Edward lived in Kingston, and also later in Silver City. After they moved to Los Angeles in 1891, their emotional and financial lives were marked with highs and lows. Their son, Ned, was born in 1893, but their seven-year-old daughter, Eileen, died one year earlier of a rheumatic heart condition. Edward discovered oil in Los Angeles and Orange County, but as he took on new business risks things became financially rocky which might explain why between 1895 and 1899 they changed their residence every single year. In late April 1899, Carrie decided to take some time away, going to San Francisco and taking Ned with her. It may be that she went north because Edward himself was moving to Kern County, where he had just found oil. But since Carrie never came back, she may have left for another reason. It was during this time that Estelle Betzold, who would later become Edward's second wife, was working as a telephone operator most likely in the same building as his office. The story goes that Edward heard Estelle's voice and was charmed by it. She did have a charming voice everyone said that and a playful and sassy style. It may be that Carrie's departure coincided with an initial flirtation between Estelle and Edward. Carrie didn't divorce Edward until eleven months after she left him. Even then, and after moving to Oakland, she must have retained some feelings for him. In late September 1900 about a month after Edward married Estelle, and three weeks after he brought his new bride to San Francisco (and probably across the bay to Oakland) Carrie killed herself. The published biographies of Doheny suggest strongly that Carrie was in some way disturbed, but the facts suggest otherwise.

Carole Wells Doheny: Carrie got so despondent over him getting married that she killed herself. The family later got depression from her. It's a very cruel thing that happens to people. But nobody really talks about her.

MaryAnn Bonino: She drank battery fluid. According to the women who worked for her, she confused it for a cold medication she had ordered from the pharmacy. She may have staged it to look like a mistake. Ned was probably there. She took the poison during the morning when he was very likely at school, but he would certainly have been around for the aftermath and heard the reports of her violent screaming, which went on for some hours. And on top of all that, Ned remained in that same house for almost ten months after her death. Perhaps Edward and Estelle thought it would be better to leave Ned in Oakland with familiar staff and a routine he was accustomed to. They themselves were overwhelmed by events. In addition to the shock of Carrie's suicide, their own marriage of barely a month was completely unplanned, they had no home of their own, and Edward faced an enormous amount of work resulting from his otherwise incredible piece of luck his discovery of oil in Mexico. But that plan clearly didn't work because Ned was acting up and kicking his governess black and blue. By the end of July 1901, Estelle was in Oakland taking care of him herself, and two weeks later she wrote to Edward, You and I would've been condemned for murder if we hadn't come to the rescue by this time.

Richard Rayner: The story of Doheny's involvement in Mexico is utterly amazing. It's both this wonderful entrepreneurial swashbuckling adventure and an absolutely naked act of imperial manipulation and theft. Doheny serially bribed his way upwards through the Mexican government until he became friendly with President Porfirio Daz, from whom he secured exclusive rights to drill for oil in an area near the town of Tampico that held the richest oil deposits in the world at that time. And after the fall of his buddy Daz in the Mexican Revolution, he managed to maneuver through the various political changes and insurgencies that followed and maintain his holdings.

Patrick Ned Doheny: Regarding the whole business with the oil lands in Mexico, my god, there were whole countries angling for that. The British were in there, and the Germans were in there, too. That's where we get ranchero music, which is basically oompa music from Germany. That's why Mexican beer is so good, too. Everybody was trying to back whatever petty tyrant they could, to ensure that they could get their hands on whatever natural resources were there.

Richard Rayner: From 1903 to 1918, Doheny took sixty-five trips to Mexico, suborning and turning a huge area covering 450,000 acres of the countryside into a personal fiefdom with a clear-cut

apartheid system. It was a microcosm and an exaggeration of what America tried to pretend that it wasn't at the time. Not surprisingly, he was resented and hated by a lot of people in Mexico. Reports at that time from the Bureau of Investigation, the precursor to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, note various Mexican revolutionaries hanging around outside Doheny's mansion in L.A. on Chester Place. At least one historian, Dan La Botz, even thinks that Doheny might later have been behind the assassination of Venustiano Carranza, Mexico's constitutional president who had wanted to nationalize the oil industry. True or not, early on Doheny clearly saw that the leftist movement in Mexico could threaten him, so he eventually built a private army to protect his massive holdings, especially when Mexico was in the throes of a revolution. But his real aim was to get the U.S. Marines to occupy Mexico so that he wouldn't have to protect everything himself. Through it all, Doheny managed to hold on through various means. And he caused a lot of anger down there.

John Creel: Edward Doheny realized how useful my great-uncle, Enrique Creel, could be for his agenda, since Enrique was a very prominent statesman and banker in Mexico with strong connections to President Díaz. When Enrique was the Mexican ambassador to the United States, Doheny gave a banquet in his honor at the exclusive Alexandria Hotel in Los Angeles. The event, called one of the most notable ever given in California, by the Los Angeles Examiner, featured Caviar Imperiale D'Astrakhan as a starter. Doheny even arranged for special fountains on the elliptical dinner table that spouted streams of red, white, and green, with the voice of Caruso serenading the guests from underneath the table. The event cost easily \$150 a plate in 1907 dollars and was referred to as a riot of extravagance by the Examiner's rival, the Los Angeles Times. I would have loved to have been there. They knew how to entertain, didn't they?

Richard Rayner: Perhaps not coincidentally, a week before Doheny threw the banquet for Enrique Creel, private detectives in L.A. under orders from Creel brutally arrested the fugitive Mexican intellectual Ricardo Flores Magón, a leading anarchist who advocated for land reform in Mexico. Doheny managed to hold on to his bit of Mexico through an extraordinary dance of daring and corruption. It's Doheny at his boldest.

Patrick Ned Doheny: Estelle was holding on for dear life then, with these periods of incredible loneliness when she never saw this person she'd married and then boom, he would come back from Mexico. He was probably the richest man in the United States. Can you imagine what it would have been like to have found yourself in that situation, in that time? For God's sake, you go from being a telephone operator to having Steinway make you a piano with a bust of your child on either side of the keyboard? You can go look in the Steinway catalog. They made a piano with Ned's head carved into it. This is not reality; this is an altered state.

Carole Wells Doheny: Edward and Estelle were in San Francisco at the World's Fair, and she saw this wonderful display from Pompeii with pink-and-black marble pillars. Eighteen of these pillars were in an oblong circle, and she said, I would love to have that as a ballroom. So he had it all dismantled and taken to Chester Place, where they made it into the ballroom. Wouldn't you love to be able to say, I'd love to have that, and it was done?

Richard Rayner: Doheny's house doesn't look like the kind of place you could imagine living in, but what they were aspiring to was really some sort of Gilded Age fantasy.