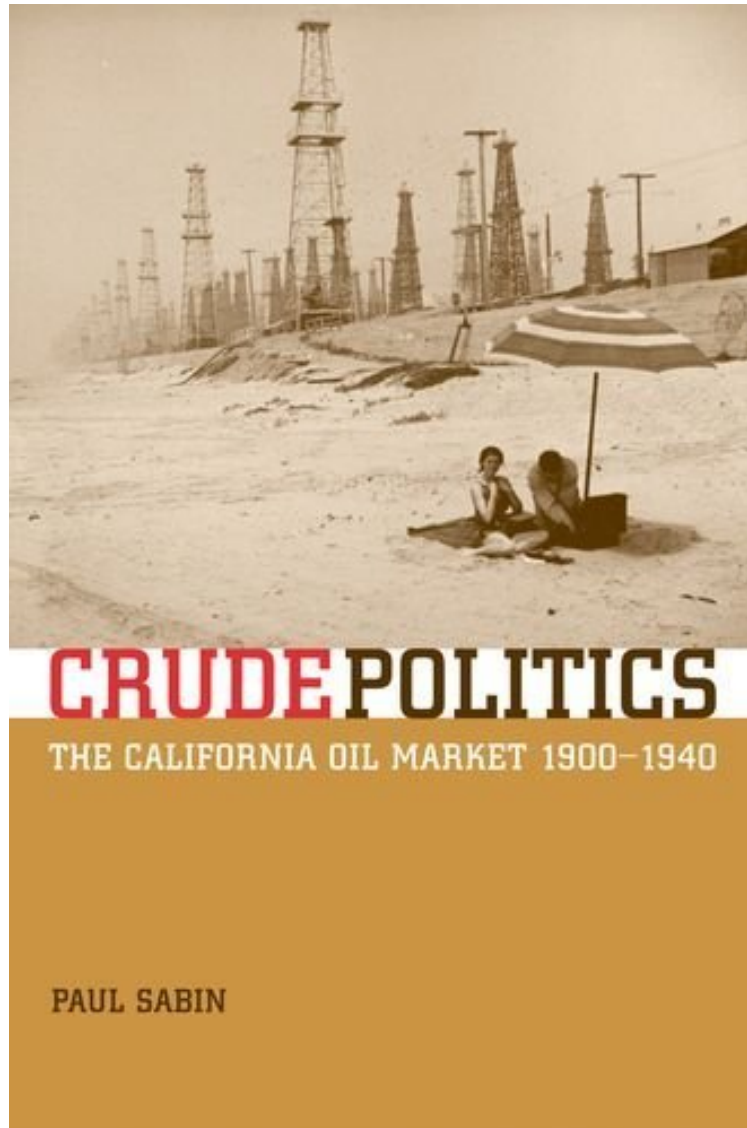


## Crude Politics: The California Oil Market, 1900-1940

*Paul Sabin*

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Energy shortages, climate change, and the debate over national security have thrust oil policy to the forefront of

American politics. How did Americans grow so dependent on petroleum, and what can we learn from our history that will help us craft successful policies for the future? In this timely and absorbing book, Paul Sabin challenges us to see politics and law as crucial forces behind the dramatic growth of the U.S. oil market during the twentieth century. Using World War II California as a case study of oil production and consumption, Sabin demonstrates how struggles in the legislature and courts over property rights, regulatory law, and public investment determined the shape of the state's petroleum landscape. Sabin provides a powerful corrective to the enduring myth of "free markets" by demonstrating how political decisions affected the institutions that underlie California's oil economy and how the oil market and price structure depend significantly on the ways in which policy questions were answered before World War II. His concise and probing analysis casts fresh light on the historical relationship between business and government and on the origins of contemporary problems such as climate change and urban sprawl. Incisive, engaging, and meticulously researched, *Crude Politics* illuminates an important chapter in U.S. environmental, legal, business, and political history and the history of the American West.

From the Inside Flap "Paul Sabin has written a brilliant case study of how legal and political choices construct 'free markets'. He shows how battles over property rights, regulation, taxes, and highway and environmental policy shaped the oil market and with it the future of California's cities, roads, coastline and public finance. Clear-headed, meticulous, and filled with the drama of momentous conflicts between public and private interests, *Crude Politics* is legal-economic history at its best."—Robert W. Gordon, Chancellor Kent Professor of Law and Legal History, Yale University "Paul Sabin's lucid analysis of how the oil industry and the auto industry shaped California's environment is a wonderful blending of political economy and environmental history. Sabin convincingly demonstrates how the market for oil, like all modern markets, was a political creation whose ramifying and surprising effects from freeways and pollution to state parks and public access to beaches are all too often unrecognized."—Richard White, Margaret Byrne Professor of American History, Stanford University "To a much greater degree than most Americans usually appreciate, the central story of the past century was the story of oil. Paul Sabin's *Crude Politics* is a pioneering effort to trace for a single key state—California—the evolving web of relationships needed to sustain the production, distribution, and consumption of a critical resource on which virtually every aspect of modern life now depends. As we contemplate the waning future of that resource in the twenty-first century, we would do well to heed the insights about its twentieth-century past offered by this important book."—William Cronon, author of *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* "Getting energy prices right is key to addressing our global climate crisis. With graceful prose and forceful argument, Paul Sabin shows how petroleum prices today are a product of more than a century of fierce political struggle over oil supply and demand. Anyone who wants to understand the political and economic factors that have created our present dependence on cheap oil should read this book."—James Gustave Speth, author of *Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment*