



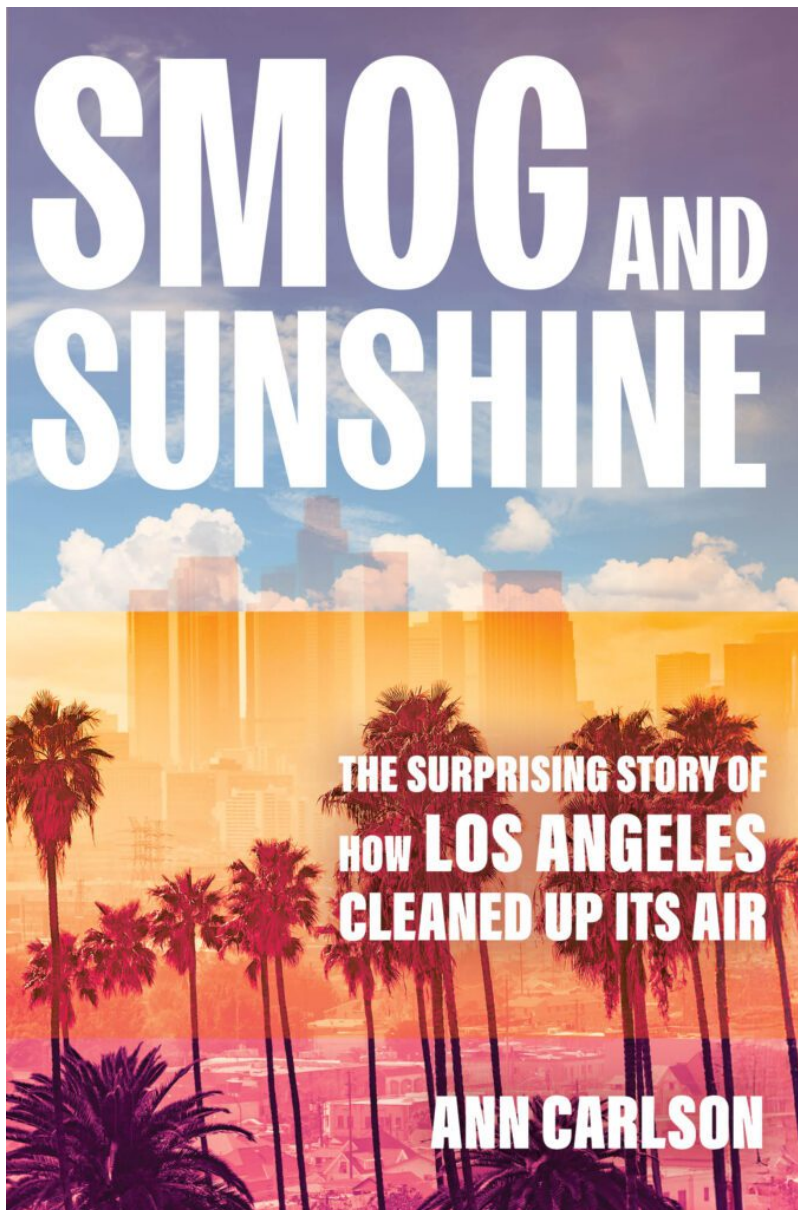
A man walks down the street in Los Angeles wearing a gas mask in 1958.

Credit: Los Angeles Public Library

A few years back, a colleague of mine, who I very much wanted to remain at UCLA, approached me because he was contemplating accepting an offer at a Washington, D.C. law

school. He feared remaining in Los Angeles, even though he wanted to stay, because he didn’t want his young daughter exposed to the southland’s legendary air pollution. He sought my counsel about whether his fears were valid. I sent him to a website that showed him — much to his surprise — that the air quality surrounding his west LA home was better than the air quality in the DC neighborhood he was considering moving to. Thankfully, he remains on our faculty today.

His story, and many more like it, motivated me to write my forthcoming book, *Smog and Sunshine: The Surprising Story of How Los Angeles Cleaned Up Its Air*, to dispel the many myths about LA air pollution.



Publication date: Spring 2026

It isn't that we don't still have air pollution problems. We do. But many people here and around the country don't seem to know just what the region has accomplished in dramatically reducing lead, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter, and even ozone (from which we continue to suffer). It's an extraordinary story, and I hope you'll read all about it when UC Press releases my book next spring.

But if you want a head start on some of the issues I cover in my book, you're in luck. On Tuesday, August 26 at 9:00 pm (8:00 central) you should tune in to PBS to watch a

remarkable new documentary, *Clearing the Air: The War on Smog*. It starts in July 1943. “Dark, smoky clouds suddenly descended over Los Angeles, causing residents to complain of burning eyes, nausea, and difficulty breathing. People couldn’t see across the street and visibility was so bad that cars crashed.” You’ll see incredible footage of the horrible smog that plagued Southern California for decades; hear the stories of those who fought to clean it up; learn of attacks on the science of smog, and the scientist who proved how ozone pollution was formed; see evidence that car companies colluded to keep smog control technology off the market; and watch just how much the region’s air has improved over the years.

It’s an important story to tell and share right now, reminding us of what motivates environmental regulation and how individuals of different ideological stripes have come together in the past to make their communities healthier. Former California Air Resources Board Chair Mary Nichols — now my UCLA colleague — and I help narrate the documentary, so you’ll see us on screen too. The film is directed by Peter Yost, produced and written by Yost and Edna Alburquerque. The film crew spent a couple days in Los Angeles this past January interviewing us. If you miss it on Tuesday, it will be streaming online afterward. I hope you’ll watch!

Here’s a clip to whet your appetite.