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"ONE OF THE BEST PICTURES OF 2006."
★★★★ BRILLIANT.
A WORTHY TRIBUTE TO A

THE STORY OF HOLLYWOOD

Gregory Paul Williams
BL Press; 416 Pgs.; \$49.95

By TED JOHNSON

Looking like yet another nostalgia-themed coffee table book, Gregory Paul Williams' "The Story of Hollywood" is instead a meticulously detailed, anecdote-filled urban history of Tinseltown, an ultimately depressing tale of how one of the world's most famous places fell into such a state of blight.

As anyone in Los Angeles knows, Hollywood, the industry, long ago detached from Hollywood, the place. As early as the 1940s there were signs of seediness, as once-elegant nightspots moved west to Sunset and Beverly Hills, and Southern California's auto culture siphoned middle-class residents to the suburbs. By 1948, a downtrodden D.W. Griffith could be found wandering Hollywood Boulevard, unrec-

ognized, on strolls from the Knickerbocker Hotel suite where he lived.

By the 1950s, the decline of Hollywood was so great that the Chamber of Commerce tried to resuscitate the district with the pink-terrazzo stars of the Walk of Fame, but it ultimately didn't halt the exodus of studios and shoppers. Nor did the many other schemes and projects through the years, ill-fated plans that promised way more than they could deliver.

Williams, a puppeteer by trade who was born and raised near the Hollywood sign, pins much of the blame on misguided and policies of city officials, particularly that of the Community Redevelopment Agency, as opposed to the studios that abandoned the industry's California birthplace. He points to garish public art displays — like a gazebo at Hollywood & La Brea with statuettes of

famous actresses as its pillars — and the poorly designed Hollywood & Highland complex, along with myriad historic buildings wiped away.

And he's skeptical that, despite all the talk of Hollywood's comeback, with new hotels, condos and nightclubs rising from places where klieg lights once beamed, it ultimately will mean much. As he points out, the exodus continues: Fox's Wilton Place studios have been torn down, CBS is leaving its Art Deco Sunset studios and the Tribune Co.'s problems cast doubt on the future of its studio, where Al Jolson shot the first talkie, "The Jazz Singer."

Tourist-minded boosters would certainly disagree, and why shouldn't they? It's what area leaders have always done best. "The Story of Hollywood" outlines how hype created the world-famous place, then did it in and, ultimately, may be the key to reviving its long tarnished image.

