

A photograph of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, viewed from a low angle looking up at the bridge's structure. The bridge's red-orange steel beams and suspension cables are prominent against a clear blue sky. In the background, the bridge spans across the water towards a hilly coastline with some buildings and a small sailboat visible in the distance.

MATTHEW ALAN CAHN

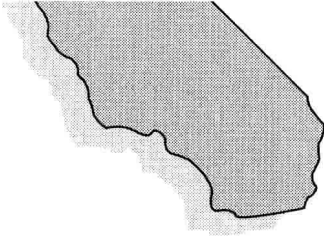
H. ERIC SCHOCKMAN

DAVID M. SHAFIE

RETHINKING CALIFORNIA

Politics & Policy in the Golden State

Rethinking California:
Politics & Policy
in the Golden State



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*This book is dedicated to the legacy of Governor Edmund G. “Pat” Brown,
whose vision of a great state and whose passion for elevating everyday people
provided the leadership to build California’s robust infrastructure,
which sees us through both good times and bad.*

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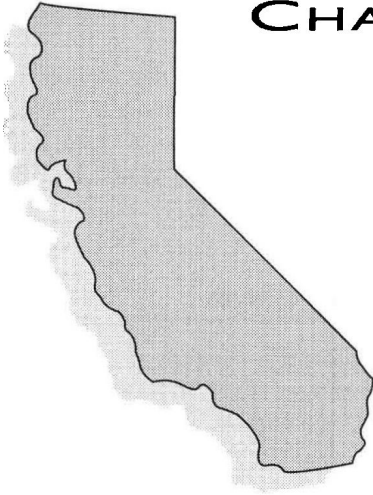
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CHAPTER I

The Three States of California: An Introduction



Featured Reading / Pages 7–9

Joan Didion

Notes from a Native Daughter

[Many people] have been to Los Angeles or to San Francisco, have driven through a giant redwood and have seen the Pacific glazed by the afternoon sun off Big Sur, and they naturally tend to believe that they have in fact been to California. They have not been, and they probably never will be, for it is a longer and in many more ways a more difficult trip than they might want to undertake, one of those trips on which the destination flickers chimerically on the horizon, ever receding, ever diminishing.

—Joan Didion, from *Notes from a Native Daughter*

California has always been considered somewhat different from the rest of the nation. It is, as Theodore Roosevelt pointed out, “west of the West.” Yet California has emerged as a dominant trendsetter, establishing models and approaches that are emulated throughout the nation. California may be west of the traditional centers of power, but its size and influence have surpassed all other states. Stretching 825 miles from Crescent City to San Diego and 215 miles from Monterey to Mono Lake, California comprises 164,000 square miles and 32 million people—12.3 percent of the total U.S. population.¹

Captured by the United States in 1846, with statehood bestowed in 1850, California was a latecomer to national politics. As a consequence of both its distance from the established power centers of the East and its “frontier” culture, California was seen more as a repository of rich natural resources than as a partner in policy. California was a terrain contested by three nations and dozens of Native-American communities. Between Cabrillo’s claims on the Pacific Coast in 1542 and the Mexican-American War in 1846, Spain, Mexico, and the United States maneuvered, battled, and manipulated to gain control.

Spanish colonization of California began in 1769 when Junipero Serra established El Camino Real, the Mission Trail—nine missions whose central function was to control Indian land on behalf of Spain and convert native civilizations to Christianity. Spain actively recruited settlers from Mexico, drawing fundamentally from the poorest *mestizo* communities.² Spain’s hold on California was weak, with only 3,000 settlers—most of whom were Mexican. When Mexico became independent of Spain in 1821, California became a Mexican territory. City names like Mendocino, Sonoma, San Francisco, San

Jose, Santa Cruz, Monterey, San Luis Obispo, Los Angeles, and San Diego reflect its Native-American, Spanish, and Mexican heritage—and its ethnic ambivalence. The 46 original settlers of Los Angeles, for example, were *mestizos* of Indian, African, and Spanish ancestry.³ This ambivalence runs deep in part because the U.S. claim on California was pushed by American squatters in what was then Mexico.⁴

THE THREE STATES OF CALIFORNIA

Many observers have noted that California, with its complex network of communities and regional resources, may in fact be composed of three states. If one were to explore how California's many communities related to each other, it would be possible to identify clear regional cultures within which unique subcultures interacted. Politically, economically, socially, philosophically, even ethnically, California is actually three different places: Southern California (San Diego north to San Luis Obispo County); Northern California (Monterey County up through Humboldt County); and the Central Valley (Kern and Inyo Counties north to Oregon). Each of these regions maintain unique economies, idiosyncratic political cultures, unique microclimates, even distinct language patterns and cultural reference points. To fully understand California one must understand its separate regional identities.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

Southern California may be characterized as densely populated urban coastline, particularly between Ventura and Orange Counties. With the notable exception of Los Angeles and Santa Barbara Counties, Southern California tends to vote Republican. As a consequence of the large metropolitan areas, Southern California remains ethnically and religiously diverse. Traditional Southern California economic engines have been manufacturing and light industry. Since the 1970s, however, the Southern California economy has become more service oriented and corporate in nature. The archetypal Southern California job in the 1950s was industrial (shipyards, tire manufacturing). The archetypal Southern California job in the 1990s is service sector (low paying jobs include food service and retail; high paying jobs include international banking and consulting).

Add to these structural phenomena the unique architectural and cultural edifices and the Southern California character is complete. Since the region grew extremely quickly—exponentially increasing in population between 1940 and 1990—effectively planning the infrastructure was impossible. The result is evident in both land planning and transportation. The mini-mall, a Southern California invention, has come to dominate the landscape. These strip malls, which typically include some combination of convenience store, donut shop, dry cleaners, and hair & nail shop, were in many ways predetermined by Southern California's geography. Quick growth and conservative politics tend to preclude land and architectural planning; warm weather encourages convenience shopping in open air storefronts; the reliance on cars makes parking lots a necessity; and the relatively cheap land in outlying areas encourages the construction of multi-unit retail space (e.g., mini-malls) on speculation by small investors.

Southern California is defined in many ways by its freeways. This, however, was

not always the case. As early as 1924, Southern California's Red Car system carried 100 million riders annually between San Fernando, Newport Beach, Pasadena, and San Bernardino—covering an area from Los Angeles and out some 75 miles in all directions. The fate of mass transit in Southern California was doomed, however, for two reasons. First, the short-term success of the Red Car actually prevented long-term success because the system encouraged building out rather than building up, as in most cities. Home builders built large tracts on cheap land, advertising “live in the country, work in the city.” The Red Car made it possible to buy a house in an inexpensive area, while commuting into the city. However, as development grew beyond train stations in outlying areas, mass transit became less attractive. By the 1940s, home builders were advertising garages with driveways rather than proximity to train stations.

Second, as a relatively new urban area, Southern California's major investment in its transportation infrastructure came at a time when cars were increasingly inexpensive and roads were relatively uncongested. Related issues such as energy and air quality were not yet significant concerns. In 1926, when Angelenos were asked to vote on bond measures that would define Southern California's transportation infrastructure for the next century, rail construction lost out to freeway construction. This was perhaps preordained. Who in 1926 could have predicted the growth Southern California would achieve over the next half century?

In addition, Southern California's weather—with a year-round median temperature in the mid-70s and little rainfall—encourages an outdoor lifestyle. The architecture reflects this, as does the fashion and the vernacular. Housing tracts—with two-bedroom Spanish-style bungalows in the 1920s and 1930s, larger “modern” ranch-style houses boasting three bedrooms and two bathrooms in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, and even larger Mediterranean styles in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s—suggest a Southern California style. Front yards are dominated by garages and driveways, with the notable absence of porches, suggesting a space of utility rather than socializing with neighbors. Backyards are dominated by “family space,” including BBQ areas, swingsets, and dog runs.

The warm weather and proximity to a swimmable coastline ensures an enduring relationship with the beach and ocean. While the Aloha shirt may or may not be fashionable throughout the state, it has never lost favor in Southern California. Southern California vernacular has consistently included outdoor references. From the Annette Funicello/ Frankie Avalon beach party movies to “Baywatch,” Southern Californians have long had to balance externally imposed stereotypes with organic, homegrown lifestyles. This hasn't been easy, in large part because the Southern California media persists in celebrating the “Baywatch” ideal and because of the high number of transplants who have flocked to Southern California in search of this idealized lifestyle. While many outsiders see Malibu or Santa Monica as quintessential Southern California, the real Southern California is a quilt of cultures, alive and well in places like Ventura and Oxnard, San Fernando, Inglewood, Monterey Park, San Pedro, Long Beach, San Clemente, and Oceanside.

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA

Mark Twain once commented that the coldest winter he ever spent was a summer in San Francisco. Where Southern California is often warm and dry, Northern California is often cold and damp. But the differences go far beyond weather. Northern California

tends to vote Democratic, albeit with distinct enclaves of conservative voters. While architecture dominates the Southern California landscape, in Northern California landscape dominates architecture. The “Little Boxes” that dot Daly City’s residential tracts are necessitated by the urban density of the San Francisco peninsula. Bordered by the bay and the ocean, the available space to build is severely limited.

The earth tones of Marin architecture and the unobtrusive style of Big Sur architecture reflect the region’s comfort with nature. This is a function of lower density and cooler weather. Southern Californians spend much of the year indoors to avoid the heat. Northern Californians spend much of the year indoors to avoid the rain. Each climate requires different architecture. Functional fashion may also be a result: Hiking boots and flannel make more sense in Humboldt than in San Diego.

Northern California may itself represent two different places. The Bay Area is distinctly different from the northern coast. The high-tech industries along the San Jose-San Francisco corridor lead the nation in new technology research and development and in high-tech manufacturing. The income generated in Silicon Valley is illustrated by a local housing market that is two to three times higher than in the Bay Area generally. At the same time, the timber-based economy of the North is extremely vulnerable. Median income in Santa Clara County (including Silicon Valley) is \$54,672. Median income in Glenn County is \$25,648.⁵

In the same way, Northern California’s urban centers mirror the diversity of Southern California, but its rural northwest does not. The Bay Area is extremely diverse, incorporating strong and politicized black, Latino, Asian, and Native American communities. Cities like Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose are among the nation’s premier multicultural centers. At the same time, the northwest coast from Mendocino to Crescent City looks more like Oregon than California—predominantly white, modest incomes, and largely Christian.

If there is a Northern California vernacular it may be due to politicized university students from Santa Cruz, Stanford, Berkeley, San Francisco, San Jose, Hayward, Sonoma, and Humboldt State. These institutions have a long history of activism, particularly with regard to environmental issues and civil rights. A case in point: The tired phrase “politically correct” originated on Northern California campuses as an affectionate jab by campus leftists at their more programmatic colleagues. In a bit of Orwellian double-speak, it has since been highjacked by conservatives to marginalize progressive concerns.

THE CENTRAL VALLEY

The Central Valley is California’s Heartland. It is primarily agricultural, with small cities separated by miles of farmland. Density is low outside of its major cities. It is the home of the Central Valley Project, the primary delivery system for agricultural water diverted from the Sacramento Delta. The relatively narrow valley, bordered east and west by mountains, is home to a thick fog every winter. This Tule fog is both an institution and a hazard. Most Californians know the Central Valley at 70 mph as they drive between the Bay Area and Southern California along Interstate 5. Relatively few travel off the interstate, making the Valley unknown to most Californians.

The Central Valley includes vast rural areas, with growing urban areas in Bakersfield, Fresno, and, of course, the greater Sacramento area. Fresno and Sacramento are

among the state's ten largest cities, with populations of 405,100 and 396,000, respectively. Fresno County is one of the state's fastest growing areas, predicted to grow from its current population of 765,000 to 2.5 million over the next 40 years.⁶ And, while many small cities in the Central Valley are predominately white and Latino, the larger cities are extremely diverse. Bakersfield, Fresno, Stockton, and Sacramento reflect the diversity of the rest of the state. Stockton, for example, is 23 percent Asian, compared to San Francisco's 29 percent, and Los Angeles' 9.6 percent. Fifty-five percent of Stockton's 48,000 Asians are Vietnamese, Cambodian, Hmong, and Laotian.⁷

Politically, the Central Valley tends to be split. The agricultural counties tend to vote Republican, the urban counties vote Democratic. The Central Valley's economic engine is primarily agricultural, from the farms in Kern, Kings, and Fresno Counties in the south up to the northern counties that unfold along the Sacramento River—Colusa, Butte, and Tehama Counties. Stockton and Sacramento remain active port cities, with light industry and related services. The Sacramento, American, and Feather Rivers spill into the Sacramento Delta, a vast maze of bayous and tributaries, invoking the flavor of Louisiana in California.

If there is a "belway" in California, it is Sacramento. With the high number of state offices and the influx of representatives, staff, lobbyists, and the public, Sacramento at times looks more like Washington than the sleepy Central Valley river town it once was. As the political nexus of the state, downtown Sacramento has been able to remake itself in the image of every Californian. This is remarkable considering how different Californians are from one another. The warm weather and urban sprawl are familiar to Southern Californians, the heavy tree covering and lush gardens are familiar to Northern Californians, and to the Central Valley, Sacramento is—well, home.

HOW MANY CALIFORNIAS?

Some observers see even more than three states within California's borders. Philip Fradkin, for example, identifies seven.⁸ Fradkin sees differing landscapes as critical determinants of cultural expression. Fradkin's first California is the deserts, along the southeastern corridor of the state from Mono Lake south to the Salton Sea. The deserts are defined by drought, little population, untamed open space, and ghosts of past civilizations. His second California is the Sierra, encompassing the Sierra Nevada from Donner Pass to Bakersfield. This 430-mile-long mountain region is distinguished by vast wilderness, even fewer people, and characterized by a pioneer past. The Sierra Nevadas, while never tamed, had to be understood to allow westward immigration. The hard lessons of the Donner Party⁹ underscore life in this California.

Fradkin's third California, "the Land of Fire," is the volcanic Cascade region in the northeasternmost section of the state. His fourth California, "the Land of Water," is the northwest coastal area from Crescent City to Point Arena. This California is dominated by forests, wind, fog, and rain. The population is centered in Crescent City, Arcata, Humboldt, and Eureka. Separated by thick forests from the rest of the state, there is a palpable sense of isolation. California number five is the "Great Valley." The central valley between Redding and Bakersfield is the state's bread basket, making up