

# **CALIFORNIA CIVILIZATION**

**Beyond the United States of America**

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## **Beyond the United States of America**

*A political billet doux*

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Around the recent turn of the millennium an economic fact occurred that is worth noting. Passing the proud Republic of France, the American state of California became the fifth economic power in the world (cf. Appendix 1). Admittedly, as of the date of this lecture, that same Californian economy has undergone more difficult times that show no clear signs of letup. Still, as of the end of calendar 2001 -- the last full roundup of relevant international and national statistics -- California had widened its lead over France and was closing fast on number four power Great Britain (which in fact had declined from 2000 to 2001). Granted that Britain is within range, and that number three power Germany is not all that significantly ahead, another great surge of the Californian economy, comparable to the last burst of the dotcom 1990s, could conceivably place California behind only two other world economic powers: Japan and, of course, the rest of the United States of America.

Naturally it could be argued that this surge, quite apart from the usual controversy over the validity of the indices used, whether GNP, GDP or GSP, is ephemeral. However, excepting the steady advance of another new economic power, China, into the Valhalla of economic supremacy, it is difficult to claim possibilities of future expansion for California's immediate rivals on a scale that would match California's own constantly increasing wealth, crucial Pacific location, strategic position in all the distinctly postmodern economic sectors from high tech and media to agribusiness and university research, not to speak of the growth of a multiethnic population that, were it to advance from the present 34 million to 50 million in the next quarter-century, a highly likely probability, would fuel further qualitative advances that could easily raise California to permanent status as third most potent economic power in the world.

At the same time, California has never been granted its deserved autonomy as a force to be reckoned with in world history. This myopia is often clouded by such pejorative references to Californian civilization as "Lalaland," "Dreamland," "the Great Extreme," even where these same references often enough carry the underlying concern that perhaps California is really here to stay -- with, no doubt, deleterious effects on the rest of innocent humankind. Moreover, in cases of more favorable classifications, the best that such boosterism is able to articulate is the status of California as a "regional

civilization” rather than a civilization in itself.<sup>1</sup>

The authentic student of world history cannot afford such provincial readings. The purpose of the following lecture, which is directed to such students, is, first, to claim the fact of a distinctly Californian civilization different from (and possibly superior to) the United States of America; and, second, to indicate the contours of a history and character that students of twenty-first-century economics, politics and culture need increasingly to take into account if their reflections and predictions are not to grow at variance with the facts of national and international reality. Those contours, far from being summed up by synonyms of material wealth which seem to be the conventional stance towards Californian uniqueness, require far more comprehensive terms of art. Properly applied, such terms of art may help to reveal that California is possibly the only distinctively twenty-first century civilization worth recording today.

What single set of signifiers helps set off the unique characteristics of California? Once California had settled into American rule around the late nineteenth century, the first serious efforts to capture those characteristics by a host of Californian writers, thinkers, explorers and academics settled on the majesty and towering presence of the Californian nature – along with the danger that human and social life would always sense its inadequacy before such natural greatness.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most imposing such statement, certainly the most prestigious at the time, is the lecture given by Harvard philosopher George Santayana to the Berkeley Philosophical Union in 1911 in which Santayana asked his California audience to pay more attention to the mountains and redwoods of their environment as stimuli to break what he called “the genteel tradition” in American philosophy and inaugurate a California philosophy reflective of its natural grandeur. In the presence of such “a virgin and prodigious world,” Californians

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<sup>1</sup> In the recent California History Sequiscentennial Series edited by Richard J. Orsi, the general preface launching the series by Michael McCone and Richard J. Orsi does state that “it is incumbent on Californians to take stock of their civilization.” Gutiérrez and Orsi [1998], ix. In his mammoth and crafted study of California up to 1950 (as of the date of this lecture), a work that I largely follow, Kevin Starr generally speaks of California as a “regional civilization” or “regional society” (in this paper references to his texts utilize abbreviations). Cf. also DeWitt [1989] who is more direct in his references to “California civilization” (vii).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the account in ACD, 417-33, specifically drawing on George Santayana, Joseph Le Conte, and Luther Burbank. Also cf. the excellent study of Californian landscape and imagination in Wyatt [1986].

must sense “a non-human beauty and peace” which should “stir the sub-human depths and the superhuman possibilities of your own spirit,” since “everywhere is beauty and nowhere permanence, everywhere an incipient harmony, nowhere an intention, nor a responsibility, nor a plan.” In short, Californians must learn “to salute the wild, indifferent, non-censorious infinity of nature,” as a consequence of which they would be simultaneously inspired to “speculation.”<sup>3</sup>

According to California’s historian, Kevin Starr, Santayana’s suggestion may be read to claim that “the true key to the success of California as a civilization” would be “its interior life in relationship to its environment.”<sup>4</sup> Taking Santayana’s cue as our starting-point, let us flesh out the vagueness of this reference. Certainly, if California is something other than an economic statistic, it must reside in features discernible in its flora and fauna, its environment or *patria*. Considering, first, the ecosystem prior to human habitation, it has been unanimously claimed by ecological and environmental investigators that “California has environmental diversity and richness unparalleled anywhere in the world.” Moreover, “this astounding array of Californian vegetation exists in close juxtaposition.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, “there is more climatic and topographic variation in California than in any region of comparable size in the United States.”<sup>6</sup> Belonging to the Mediterranean climate group, California displays far greater variety in species and landscape than other similarly classified regions of the world. As a result, it has eleven of the world’s major soil groups and ten percent of all soil types in the United States, some of which are astonishingly old. Each vegetation group has its own habitat, soil and local climate, resulting in fifty types of vegetation, in a landscape that encompasses the highest as well as lowest points in the contiguous United States.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “The Genteel Tradition in American Philosophy [1911],” in Santayana [1967], 62, 63, 64.

<sup>4</sup> ACD 423.

<sup>5</sup> M. Kat Anderson, Michael G. Barbour, and Valerie Whitworth, “A World of Balance and Plenty: Land, Plants, Animals, and Humans in a Pre-European California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 12.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Schoenherr [1992].

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, Barbour & Whitworth, “A World of Balance and Plenty: Land, Plants, Animals, and Humans in a Pre-European California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 12-47; Bakker [1971]; Schonherr [1992].

Turning next to the human addition to this ecosystem, it is noteworthy that California has been occupied for at least fifteen thousand years by native Californians who cared for it in a manner that shaped its appearance for the Spanish conquistadores who began its conquest from outside after 1535. This native Californian population formed the most populous native American region north of Mexico – possibly 310,000 at the time of European intrusion – and lived in small groupings of two to five hundred individuals “in small well-defined territories under the tradition and authority of a leader who almost always was a male.” What is of even greater significance is that, as a result, “California is one of the most linguistically diverse areas in the world” with “perhaps as many as one hundred mutually unintelligible languages.”<sup>8</sup>

The argument of this paper regarding Californian uniqueness begins, then, with the juxtaposition of these natural and human indices. What gives “California” its unity and constancy is the fact that historically its environmental diversity was matched by its human diversity down to the presence of a uniquely rich variety of languages. That native Californians related to their natural environment in small groupings and developed languages that replicated the diversity they experienced over a vast aeon of time is the key to understanding Californian history and destiny. Once the longevity of this uniqueness is grasped, it becomes no accident that contemporary California is presently interpreted as posing the challenge to world history of a “new society of the new millennium” reflecting “the state’s growing diversity,” or, in short: the overall “viability of a multicultural society.”<sup>9</sup>

For the inner historical “essence” of “California” *is*: Biodiversity.

## [1]

To grasp the continuity of this thread from its beginnings, it is vital not to begin a history of California from its somewhat disgraceful absorption into the United States of America between 1848 and 1850, nor even to start with the arrival of the archetypal conquistador Hernán Cortés at La Paz, Baja California, on the third of May 1535, but with the fifteen thousand years of native Californian stewardship

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<sup>8</sup> William S. Simmons, “Indian Peoples of California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 56, 48.

<sup>9</sup> Rawls & Bean [2003], 552; Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], ix,

that established the matrices for humankind's affair with California. This wider context means, of course, that "California" as a reality and event precedes the United States of America, as well as even New Spain (and Republic of Mexico) -- the political entities that first baptised the ecosystem as "California" -- initiating European exploitation of this world; and therefore that there is no intrinsic logic why California might not supersede such cultural and political limitations in the future.

Taking this "native" California as our necessary point of departure, one important fact needs underscoring. The California ecosystem with which we are familiar was dramatically transformed after 1850 by European and American incursions. In contrast, the California that the conquistadores first encountered in 1535 and 1542, and then more sedentarily during the 1769-1823 period of the construction of the Alta California missions, reflected millennia of productive interchange between humans and wilderness:

What is labeled as "wilderness" in today's popular imagination and on current topographic maps actually harbored human gathering and hunting sites, burial grounds, work sites, sacred areas, trails, and village sites. Today's wilderness was then human homeland.<sup>10</sup>

By their constant allusions to natural spaces as gardens, parks or orchards, the earliest non-native Californian descriptions of this landscape confirm awareness that the environments had been already modified by humans. Judiciously tended by native Californians, the forests had been more like tended gardens – cultivated woodland – with clear open spaces allowing for remarkable vegetative, fruit and floral growth while at the same time facilitating a human way of life that was neither "agriculturist" nor "hunter-gathering," as conventional anthropology would have it, but true "wildland management," transforming the ecosystem into a category "between true wilderness and the domesticated garden" – a condition attested to by the earliest explorers' descriptions of California "as unsurpassed in beauty and biological wealth." In short, what native Californians proved, once and for all, for the fate of California civilization was the innate possibility "for humans to tend and use wildland resources *and* coexist as part of sustainable and diverse ecosystems."<sup>11</sup> This possibility, it should be re-emphasized, covers some fifteen

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<sup>10</sup> The following summary is based entirely on the stimulating essay by M. Kat Anderson, Michael G. Barbour, and Valerie Whitworth, "A World of Balance and Plenty," in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 14.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 38 (emphasis in original). Cf. also the essay by William S. Simmons, "Indian Peoples of California," pointing out "how closely and responsibly California hunter-gatherers identified with the animals, plants, and

thousand years of Californian history in comparison with which the destruction of this ecology that began gradually with the Spanish conquest and was then more forcefully advanced by the American conquest has merely covered the last two centuries.

Hence, when Hernán Cortés, the recent conqueror and destroyer of Mesoamerica's mightiest power, Tenochtitlán, baptised the land that his exploring fleets first discovered on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, 1535 in Baja California as "California," the identification was propitious. Cortés was drawing very probably on the "pulp fiction" of his day, the interminably long best-seller romance begun as *Amadis de Gaula* in the late fifteenth century and continued in 1510 by Garcí Rodríguez Ordóñez de Montalvo as *Las sergas de Esplandián*, which included a chapter on the miraculous, if "infidel," island of California: "Know ye that on the right hand of the Indies there is an island called California, very near the Terrestrial Paradise," ruled by the black "infidel" Amazon queen Calafia and her female Amazon warriors and marked by plentiful gold and griffons. Since the intrepid recorder of Cortés' triumphs over the Mexica, Bernal Díaz del Castillo, had already compared the grand vision of the Aztecs' capital city, with its countless towers, pyramids and civic spaces, to the images in *Amadis de Gaula*,<sup>12</sup> it is understandable that Cortés should apply the name of a mythical island recorded in Montalvo's sequel to what appeared to be an extensive island in reality. This misinterpretation of the Baja California peninsula was faithfully recorded in canonical maps of the subsequent two centuries characteristically displaying an "Isle of California" west of the North American continent, notwithstanding practical confirmation of Baja's peninsular status as early as 1539, and required the official statement of the Spanish government as late as 1747 that "California is not an island."<sup>13</sup>

Yet the insular allusion would appear quite appropriate, whether or not the application, as

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physical terrains of their tribelet worlds (72).

<sup>12</sup> "These great towers and cues and buildings rising from the water, all made of stone, seemed like an enchanted vision from the tale of Amadis." Díaz del Castillo [1963], 214. *Historia verdadera de la conquista de Nueva España*, , 1904, II, 418.

<sup>13</sup> Ferdinand VII issued a royal decree in 1747 that stated: "California is not an island." Cited in Iris H. W. Engstrand, "Seekers of the 'Northern Mystery': European Exploration of California and the Pacific," in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 105 (note 7).

differing interpretations contend, reflected admiration or irony over the land that had been just discovered by Cortes's original squadron, for such a baptism contains rather more than is generally acknowledged. Montalvo located Queen Calafia and her Amazons on the infidel side of the Christian-Moorish spectrum. Eventually, she is defeated by Prince Esplandián and converted to Christianity, but her realm, at least for the conquistadores, deeply bears the patina of the Islamic world, which had just been roundly defeated by the conquest of Islamic Granada in 1492 as a partial counter to the Ottoman conquest of Christian Constantinople in 1453, the scene of the great struggles of the *Amadis de Gaula* pageantry. The very term "conquistador" refers originally to the Spanish destroyers of the magnificent Islamic domain of al-Andalus (Andalusia), and its final conquest in 1492 released new energies, but also similar attitudes to Islamic grandeur, that the primarily Andalusian crews carried with them to the New World.<sup>14</sup> However Montalvo came up with the word "California," it had already appeared in such Christian-epic texts as the *Song of Roland* as a domain within the Islamic world.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, the most reliable theory of its underlying meaning is as an Old Persian word *Kār-Ī-farn*, specifically meaning "Mountain of Paradise" and linked in Persian mythology with the magical mountain of Qaf beloved of Persian chivalry and Persian Sufi aspirations.<sup>16</sup> All the more appropriate is it that the conquistadores, in later reflective works, recalled how deeply their quests and adventures had been driven from youth on by literature drawing on Greek romance and Persian chivalry.<sup>17</sup>

The bare word ("California", "Kār-ī-farn") itself therefore gives us "island" and "paradise." What is remarkably coincidental is that, as has been earlier noted, the ecosystem of native California already reveals itself as a "paradise," if by paradise we understand the original Persian meaning of the

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<sup>14</sup> Cf. Thomas [1993], 293, 359; for statistics on the predominantly Andalusian contingent of New World explorers, cf. 58, 652 (note 17)

<sup>15</sup> In a list of oriental people arrayed against Charlemagne, the eleventh-century poet of the *Chanson de Roland* includes "E cil d'Affrike e cil de Califerne" (line 2924).

<sup>16</sup> Carnoy [1922], 227; Polk [1991], 131, describing this reading as "the most interestingly plausible"; McWilliams [1949], 3.

<sup>17</sup> Thomas refers to Francisco Auqilar's reminiscences of the 1560s. Thomas [1993], 61.

word as a “walled garden.”<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the fact that the “enclosure” itself – very close to the meaning of “mountain” in Old Persian in terms of a sacred celestial space – was an “island” is confirmed by specific ecological facts. Studies of California, whether concerned with its human history or its ecology, like to play with this notion of “island,”<sup>19</sup> and all things considered, it is not an inappropriate way of describing the Californian ecosystem: “there is ecological validity in thinking of California in insular terms.” Relatively “isolated by sea, mountain range, and desert, this area has developed in its own way and at its own pace; evolutionary history here has woven numerous distinctive patterns of interaction between life form and the land.” In this sense, it “is truly an ‘island called California,’ a singular piece of country with extremes unknown in more temperate or less diverse regions.”<sup>20</sup> Even though the colonial processes initiated by Columbus which eventually disrupted all habitats in the New World also reached California from the earliest conquistadorean presence, California’s remoteness and “its unique physical and cultural geography” delayed the process to well after its effects on the rest of the New World: “California – because of its distance from the initial European colonial emphasis in the Caribbean and Mesoamerica – was spared for 277 years the ravages of change that accompanied the founding of missions, presidios, and pueblos.”<sup>21</sup> Eventually, it is true, invasive peoples, cultures, germs, plants and animals succeeded in forever changing the California ecosystem that had prospered at the hands of native Californians, but the delay itself is part of the story of Californian uniqueness. Even in the late nineteenth century travellers encountering California for the first time saw fit to extol its relative climatic and topographic remoteness: “The United States has here, then, a unique corner of the earth, without its like in its own vast territory, and unparalleled, so far as I know, in the world.... Except a tidal wave from Japan, nothing would seem to be able to affect or disturb it.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> For the etymology of “pairidaeza,” the basis for the Greek “paradeisos,” cf. Moynihan [1979], 1-2.

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Bakker [1971], McWilliams [1973], Polk [1991].

<sup>20</sup> Bakker [1971], xi, 309.

<sup>21</sup> William Preston, “Serpent in the Garden: Environmental Change in Colonial California,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998], 260.

<sup>22</sup> Warner [1891], 5.

## [2]

As with the rest of European colonization of the New World, the coming of Hispanic imperial priorities to California proved disastrous for the native population as well as habitat. In considering the three stages leading to Alta California eventually becoming part of the United States in 1848 and a U.S. state in 1850, the process of natural and human depletion needs to be borne in mind. At the same time, the factor of unprecedented acceleration of this process after 1848 is of equal significance after we survey these three preliminary stages as (1) the period of Spanish “benign neglect” from 1535 to 1769, (2) the activist period of Spanish colonization from 1769 to 1823, and (3) the establishment of the Republic of Mexico after 1821.

From 1535 – or more specifically 1542 when the Spanish explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo landed in what became San Diego harbor or “Alta California” – to 1769 the Spanish government took minimal interest in its westernmost American province. Between 1769 and 1823, however, following on the building of missions in Baja California starting in 1697, the Bourbon regime, replicating patterns of increasing imperial efficiency by the European powers in the eighteenth century, constructed 21 missions establishing a concrete presence on Californian soil. If their primary aim was to forestall the potential incursion of French and Russian forces into this region, it also began the gradual process of assimilating the native Californians, bringing in the first fruits of an Hispanic Mediterranean economy, and producing in time a modest yet distinctive population that would eventually be known as the “Californios.”<sup>23</sup>

In 1804 the Spanish government established separate administrations for Alta (Upper) and Baja (Lower) California, which is why the term *Las Californias* was often employed for the entire region. However, by 1821 the breakup of New Spain led to the creation of an independent Mexico, and in 1822 both Alta and Baja California were made part of a single Alta California within the Mexican republic. Both Spain, and subsequently Mexico, negotiated with the United States on border treaties, the American acquisition of the Louisiana Purchase from Napoleonic France in 1803 having established the U.S. as the predominant outside power bordering on Alta California. The 1819 U.S.-Spanish Treaty – which

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Osio [1996] and Beebe & Senkewicz [2001] for translations of primary Hispanic and Californio texts.

included the sale of Florida to the U.S. – confirmed the line of the 42<sup>nd</sup> degree latitude, and these negotiations also served in the 1828 U.S.-Mexican Treaty for the international boundary as running from the Rocky Mountains along the Sabine River north to the 42<sup>nd</sup> degree all the way to the Pacific Ocean.

When the U.S. crippled Mexico in the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War, these boundaries became the point of negotiation in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo which conceded the entire Mexican northwest to the Americans. According to the official map (See Appendix 2) used for negotiations, Alta and Baja California (“Las Californias”) covered all of the present U.S. state of California, Nevada, substantial portions of Utah and upper Arizona, as well as Baja California. U.S. negotiators, although originally intending to include Baja California, dropped that claim, and the United States eventually carved out a series of territories out of Alta California.

To this larger region of California, we propose to use the term “Greater California” and, for pragmatic reasons, shall restrict this study of “California” to what became the U.S. state of California. It is nonetheless worth recalling that this “Greater California” continues to be profoundly marked if not controlled by the predominant economic strength of the U.S. state of California over its former ancillary territories, and the task of this lecture to encourage recognition of Californian civilization is also intended to point out in passing the broader ambit of Greater California for future theoretical articulation.

Both Spanish and Mexican rules accelerated the process of displacement and diminution of native Californian culture. Particularly the Mexican period of secularization of the missions, which paradoxically abandoned native Californians formerly working on the missions to Californio exploitation, and the granting of huge tracts of land to what became a ranchero economy based on cattle caused serious depletion of the native population from around 300,000 to less than half that figure immediately prior to the American intrusion. Californios, a sparsely populated yet emphatically hierarchical society reflecting Hispanic class patterns, were quick to distinguish themselves as “men of reason” (*gente de razón*) from native Californian “savages” (*gente sin razón*), and did not hold back from sending out hunting parties to scatter and dissolve the native Californians. On the favorable side, these same Californios acquired an apparently deserved reputation among outsiders for the largesse of their hospitality and an elaborate code

of ritual and festivity.<sup>24</sup> The legacy of this reputation, especially to be found among visiting English speakers throughout the early nineteenth century, helped strengthen the later American myth of a lost Californio high culture.

Mexican rule over California remained highly volatile, however, Not only did the Californios stay close to the coast in relatively small kin, social and communal groupings, thereby abandoning the hinterland of mountains and the Great California Valley to the growing invasion of American settlers crossing the American continent in search of the Pacific, but also gubernatorial rivalries among Alta California clans stimulated autonomist tendencies among Californio patriarchs that further unraveled Mexican control over its most outlying province. Around 1845 these variegated tendencies meshed on the eve of the Mexican-American War of 1846-8 to create a flurry of factional politics within Alta California that might well have led to a breakaway Californio Republic. At the same time *agents provocateurs* sent in by the U.S. government found ready allies among American settlers in the hinterland to dismantle Mexican rule by first declaring a “Bear Flag Republic” and then helping to bring in direct U.S. control through a series of political and military moves that culminated in the solid defeat and treaty surrender of Mexican forces by early 1846. Two years later the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo transferred almost all of “Greater California” to direct U.S. rule.

### [3]

In 1848 Alta California became part of the United States; in 1850 Congress accepted California as a U.S. state. In between, American Californians gathered in 1849 to frame a constitution among themselves, to decide upon what became the present boundaries of American California, and -- in terms of the blazing dispute at that time between “free” and “slave” states in the American Union and the overall issue of secession -- to resolve firmly to constitute a free state, with no barriers toward immigration by “free negroes,” in their aim of becoming “a model instrument of liberal and enlightened principles.”<sup>25</sup> Although some members of Congress were indignant over the Californians’ presumption in

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<sup>24</sup> Douglas Monroy, “The Creation and Re-creation of Californio Society,” in Gutiérrez & Orsi [1998, 178, 173-195; and more generally Pitt [1966].

<sup>25</sup> On this Monterey constitutional assembly, cf. the entertaining account in Brands [2002], 281, 269-304. As Brands notes, it was in fact these Californians who decided to restrict California to its present boundaries, partly

constituting themselves as a political organization without prior federal involvement, let alone guidance and control, important pressures that arose exactly at the same time led to the unprecedented acceptance of California – without any intervening period as a federal territory -- as the thirty-first state (hence breaking the exact tie between the 15 “free” and 15 “slave” states).

Those pressures stemmed from a unique event that occurred at exactly the same two-year period of transition from occupation to statehood: the discovery in January 1848 of gold in California. By the time the constitutional representatives had arrived in Washington, D.C., California’s population well exceeded the required number for statehood, and a massive economic transformation had been initiated through the flood of “argonauts” in search of gold that transformed California overnight into a functional advanced economy – at least in comparison with any territory west of the Mississippi River. In the singular words of Californian historian Carey McWilliams: “in California the lights went on all at once, in a blaze, and they have never dimmed.”<sup>26</sup> As thousands of argonauts, utilizing any available means of transport from overland caravans to sea passages around the tip of South America or through the Panama isthmus, poured into California, an infrastructure sprang up to support their countless needs and to serve the mining operations that became overnight necessary. These immigrants came from every part of the world, coincidentally including refugees from the recent European revolutions of 1848 as well as, in increasing numbers, the massive Chinese Taiping rebellion of the same period. Suddenly a new kind of multiethnic “diversity” became part and parcel of Californian history.

It came, however, at the fatal cost of another kind of diversity. The prior inhabitants – primarily the native Californians, who after a discrete period of attempting to benefit from the gold profits were forcefully driven out of their lands and increasingly fell victim to new strains of disease, and the Hispanic Californios, who notwithstanding international treaty assurances were soon deprived of their property by cunning Yankee appropriation of land claims through court proceedings -- both found themselves

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because of discomfort of association with the Mormon presence in Utah and also partly because of the desire to avoid involvement in slave-state issues associated with what became the territory of New Mexico. California, it was early determined, would be resolutely a “free” state.

<sup>26</sup> McWilliams [1949], 25.

relegated to subordinate minority status. Thus the transition to a new political order, which might have meant a less violent absorption of newcomer Americans into the more steady patterns of Californio rule and, however much attenuated, native Californian handling of much of the ecosystem, became a signal for the entirely new mode of social, economic and political life that not only shocked California into the dramatic fast pace of development that has since marked it, but also jolted American society overall and, in turn, world history proper over the next half-century.

On the pragmatic level, this change can be relatively easily recorded. A vast range of entrepreneurial activities were almost immediately launched in both manufacturing and service industries. Housing and mining industries took off as the rapidly growing population created a huge demand for food, clothing, and shelter. California agriculture and farming expanded both in staple products and in efforts to develop consumer interest in an increasing variety of crops, vegetables and fruits. Mining, business and agriculture, in turn, stimulated the development of banks and financial institutions not only for California but also for adjoining territories. Eventually pressure developed for the alliance of government and railroads to connect California with the rest of the nation by 1869, thus propelling a further leap in the Californian economy as breadbasket for the U.S. and also enabling the U.S. itself to embark on a period of unprecedented industrial growth that by the end of the nineteenth century had raised the latter to its present status of a world economic superpower. These multiplier effects, it is not surprising to note, no less affected economies in Latin America, Asia and Europe. Finally, the injection of California gold into circulation provided a worldwide boost to the liquidities of industrial capitalism. Small wonder then that an intrepid columnist for the New York Herald Tribune in the 1850s, one Karl Marx, attributed his most recent empirical reflections on capitalism to the stimulus of the Gold Rush beginning in California, and by 1880 Marx was even pinpointing California as the “shameless” edge to the American capitalist experience.<sup>27</sup>

But the impact of the Gold Rush on both California and America also provokes broader speculation. If the United States had flirted with becoming a fully entrepreneurial society well before this

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<sup>27</sup> Gerald D. Nash, “The Global Economic Significance of the California Gold Rush,” in Rawls & Orsi [1999], 276-292; on Marx: 288-9. Marx-Engels [1927-32], 34 (5 xi 1880), 478.

historical stage, it is really only after the Gold Rush and its multiplier effects that, as at least one commentator has pointed out, the Puritan ideal of the “City on a Hill” was permanently replaced by the entrepreneurial standard of “El Dorado,” an unabashed militancy on behalf of the “pursuit of happiness” by a consumer society less concerned with merit and sin than riches acquired at (almost) any cost. This “new dream” of “instant wealth, won in a twinkling by audacity and good luck” as represented by the agonies of the argonauts, became the “American Dream,” of which the “California Dream” would constitute its most radical expression. To be sure, the “no-fault ethos” of this “new era of the entrepreneurial spirit” brought unprecedented wealth and comfort for many, indeed for much of the rest of the world in the next century and later; but it also meant wholly new forms of “speculation, corruption, and consolidation on a scale unimaginable before” discovery of that first fatal gleaming nugget.<sup>28</sup>

#### [4]

In California itself over the next half-century (1850-1900) such consolidation brought together railroad ownership, real estate monopoly, and exclusive water rights. Whether in the original urban areas of San Francisco developing and benefitting from the Gold Rush and such subsequent discoveries as the silver lode in Nevada or, somewhat delayed by the gradual rate of transportation links with San Francisco and the rest of the continent, in the Southern Californian desert range that came up with that unique urban/conurban plant known as “Los Angeles” or, more generally, “Southern Cal,” the great Californian captains of industry worked relentlessly toward maintaining a seamless system of control uniting business and government.

Particularly the South Pacific Railroad (SP) has been aptly described as a “Gilded Age plutocracy, California style,” composed of the Big Four alliance of Leland Stanford (California governor and future founder of Stanford University), Mark Hopkins, Charles Crocker and Collis P. Huntington, all Gold Rush immigrants who then went into business, railroads, steamship enterprises, land holdings

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<sup>28</sup> I follow here Brands’ very stimulating reading in his last part, “The New El Dorado (America in the Age of Gold,” in Brands [2002], esp. 441-4. Brands’ attitude toward this entrepreneurial spirit is, however, more favorable than mine. Cf. also McWilliams [1949], 25, on the “restless energy” of America: “But it is only in California that this energy is coeval with statehood.”

abetted by friendly federal government grants, irrigation projects, hotels and urban real estate.<sup>29</sup> Such massive concentration ensured that the more enlightened dreams for a California composed of middle-class farmers and citizens along Jeffersonian lines would be sabotaged at the outset of American rule.

Perhaps the most imposing achievement of such massive collusion was the successful completion of the Owens Valley project in 1913 appropriately creating an Imperial Valley economy and bringing water to the desert expanses of Southern California on a scale that would serve the greater area of a rapidly burgeoning Los Angeles. Against all pre-industrial probabilities the fantastic conurbation called Los Angeles exploded to become by 1930 the largest American city west of Chicago, the ultimate “matrix city for the United States in the twenty-first Asian Pacific century,” cunningly constructed by cooperation among city fathers and an apparently bottomless American appetite to seek out homes and bliss within this “Southern California Raj.”<sup>30</sup> What has been called an “epic of real-estate development” from the 1880s on, pumped up and funneled by massive advertising campaigns to the rest of America, became a permanent feature of the Californian economy to the present day. At the very least, however, around 1930 one could legitimately refer to “a golden age of California as a regional American civilization.”<sup>31</sup>

At the other extreme, another dream for California reflecting strong skepticism toward such quantum economic leaps no less succeeded in becoming a permanent fixture of Californian civilization. The “utopian” instinct to create new forms of individual and social life through experimentation, communes, cooperatives, general culture, and eventually the reformism of Progressivist politics originally reflected respect for the unmatched diversity of the Californian ecosystem. If the Californian agricultural economy was first dangerously narrowed to the production of wheat for a bursting population, this same astonishing diversity of Californian soils and climate was already being noted and exploited by a growing number of viticulturists -- including the Korbel brothers from Bohemia and winemaker Franz Hazek from Prague -- and fruit growers. With five major regions for planting and its basically stable Mediterranean

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<sup>29</sup> Following ID 200ff.

<sup>30</sup> MD 392.

<sup>31</sup> MD 393.

climate, rich and variegated soil, it is not surprising that the agribusiness represented by a “handful of wheat barons” would be rejected as a monopolizing undertow of the mining industry well before the latter had begun its permanent decline by 1880. Moreover, the new availability of the American national market for foodstuffs after 1979 through transportation and refrigeration technology enabled Californian growers to transform American diet and drink between 1880 and 1920 in the direction of fresh fruits, vegetables and native wines. The earlier exponents of such innovations fed a spate of utopian ventures in California,<sup>32</sup> but increasingly this new economy went hand-in-hand with more pressing capitalist priorities. Nonetheless, it also helped produce, among its practitioners, a mode of life that, reflecting the exigencies of such agriculture, emphasized, according to its more eloquent boosters, the priority of “aesthetics” in the dramatically beautiful human and natural landscapes that emerged as the privileged focus of “orange culture,” a culture that was emblazoned elsewhere through orange crate illustrations of the image of fin de siècle California as “the point most desirable to attain for the fullest joys of living.”<sup>33</sup> Particularly in conjunction with the simultaneous praise of the Californian climate as the most salubrious for health, longevity, and the cultivation of ultimate human bodily beauty, this image seemed a final confirmation of the “mountain of paradise” (*Kār-Īfarn*) metaphor of California as the land of the Hesperides itself with its fabled Golden Age “apples,” the very concretion of a “Mediterranean” civilization that not only drew together the more rhapsodic comparisons by “Euro-Californians” of California with France, Italy, Greece and Spain, but also the Mediterranean of the Holy Lands and of Islamic al-Andalus and North Africa.<sup>34</sup>

Of course, this idyllic image hid facts of land monopoly and corporate control that no less ensured that Californian civilization would remain dependent on further developments in industrial and capitalist cycles. The different ethnic elements making up farm labor supply – from Chinese, Japanese, Indian and Philipino to, most importantly, Latino workers – suffered modes of deprivation that only

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<sup>32</sup> Cf. the account in Hine [1966].

<sup>33</sup> Edward James Wickson, cited in ID 139.

<sup>34</sup> Cf., above all, the excellent chapter “An American Mediterranean,” in ACD 365-414.

became Californian political issues during the Depression period of the 1930s before receiving national exposure in such literary classics as John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939). On the more urban level, however, monopolization had already awakened reformist concerns before 1900, and between 1910 and 1915 Progressivist legislation and in some cases direct Progressivist rule at the local and state levels fuelled important adjustments in the disparity of benefits from Californian natural wealth. Progressivism then received a far more important boost during the Depression period of the 1930s along with the tremendous stimulus to the Californian economy brought about by the outbreak of war in 1941 as California became the center for industrial and military activities in the Pacific theatre. As a result, by 1945-1955 Californians could claim some of the most advanced legislation and benefits arising from the government sector, at both state and federal levels.<sup>35</sup>

## [5]

The second world war and the immediate postwar period form the vital watershed in California's ascension to the status of a vital world civilization. Prior to this stage, California had succeeded in developing for Californians a new more casual style of life, from home design, clothing, diet, sports and "outdoorsness" to a generalized commitment to the "pursuit of pleasure" that stood it apart from the rest of the United States. These tendencies not only promoted fantasy, esotericism and utopianism that made California the most receptive culture for heterodox religiosities and communities. Such tendencies also came together in the pragmatic domains of art and technology to create one of the more enduring cultural industries of the twentieth century: "Hollywood." That industry, generating wealth and subcultures connected with film, literature, and overall media production, turned into one of the greatest bonanzas for the California economy, diversifying itself over the rest of the century to link up with entertainment parks like Disneyland on the one hand and the computer economy of multimedia on the other.

More than any other industry, Hollywood also benefitted enormously from the unprecedented diaspora of *Mittleuropa* refugees in the arts, philosophy and literature who fled European fascism and anti-Semitism in the thirties to find homes and professional opportunities in the Southland. Even where

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<sup>35</sup> McWilliams [1949] is especially interesting for his futuristic expectations of California as of 1949.

they were not engaged in screenplays for the film industry, many such refugees produced some of their most vital and personal works in California, from Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* (1948) to the second version of Bertold Brecht's *Galileo* first performed in Los Angeles following the English translation of Brecht's friend, Hollywood actor Charles Laughton, and perhaps most surprisingly Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno's *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947). These particular refugees eventually returned to Germany and Central Europe, but in such cases as screenwriter Frederick Kohner, originally from Teplice-Shonau, California proved sufficiently congenial for him to stay and compose that classic surf novel (and basis for surf films that turned surfing into yet another exemplar of the Californian life of pleasure): *Gidget* (1957) based on the beach life of Kohner's teenage daughter Kathy Kohner (who may therefore be regarded as the original Czech model for the "California Girl").<sup>36</sup>

At the same time, it is perhaps no accident that originally the real estate called "Hollywood" was owned by the Theosophical Society and served as the locus for a Pythagorean institute "Krotona" committed to the transformation of western civilization; eventually, the Society moved to the Valley of Ojai near Santa Barbara which served to inspire the Indian meditative master J. Krishnamurti to a series of enlightenment experiences in the late 1920s.<sup>37</sup> Another branch of theosophy, led by the intrepid Kathleen Tingley, managed to create an entire community, replete with temples and Greek open-air theatres, at Point Loma near San Diego. On a less esoteric yet still influential level, the founder of the "Wizard of Oz" stories, Frank Baum, moved to Southern California where he completed the body of writings of Oz, probably confident in the assumption that he now concretely dwelt in Oz proper. This "Oz" strain in Californian civilization may be then traced to the later efflorescence in the forties of a "Berkeley-Big Sur bohemia"<sup>38</sup> associated with the name and presence of Henry Miller after the New York native moved from Europe to Big Sur, the "Tibet" of California, and encouraged an ebullient mix of politics, sex and esotericism -- supported by the theories of Wilhelm Reich and other transplanters of Freudian radicalism to California that would form the Human Potentials movement -- that helped give

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<sup>36</sup> Kohner [2001].

<sup>37</sup> Cf. Ross [1989].

<sup>38</sup> Following EDC 212.

birth to the later beat and hippie movements of the fifties and sixties.

Somewhere between Hollywood and this Berkeley-Big Sur bohemianism, California also succeeded in producing exemplary academic standards of intellect in its great institutions, the University of California (at Berkeley and then later also at Los Angeles), Stanford University, the California Institute of Technology, and the University of Southern California. Such excellence was responsible not only for epochal discoveries in the pure science of astronomy and related astrophysical fields, but also for the more pragmatic sciences of jet propulsion, atomic fission and the construction of both atomic and hydrogen bombs. It was in the Southern California of George Ellery Hale's and Edwin Hubble's observations at Mount Wilson and Mount Palomar that the theory of a universe of galaxies and nebulae and of an endlessly expanding cosmos was first articulated and confirmed, while it was in the Northern California of Robert Oppenheimer's Berkeley circle that atomic theory gave way to the Manhattan Project eventually actuated on the sacred native land in Los Alamos, New Mexico, that was personally recommended by Oppenheimer himself. What is perhaps less well known, and reflective of that esoteric dimension in the California imagination even in its most stringent cerebral moments, is that Hale and his followers took themselves equally seriously as members of a scientific brotherhood committed to meditation and ritual redolent of ancient Egyptaic and Zoroastrian circles.<sup>39</sup>

Such elements – the “California” style of life, the willingness to risk new modes of living and esoteric communitarianism, fantasy, scientific cosmic speculation, and the pragmatics of that designer of dreams, Hollywood – became American standards mainly through the world war and its aftermath. After 1945, Californian civilization, following these forces at play, could be said to have become the American standard, and the American fifties may be taken partly as the period of transference to daily American life of this same California style that had been shaped in the twenties and thirties. By the same token, California had become all the more essential to cold war considerations that dominated much of the American political scene between 1948 and 1989. A major recipient of defense expenditures from 1941

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<sup>39</sup> Following the account in DE 61-89. In his attempt to create “a scientific Athens amidst the orange groves” in the Pasadena of the California Institute of Technology, Hale drew on Egyptaic as well as Florentine Renaissance Neoplatonic motifs. Hale was called “Priest of the Sun, Zoroaster of our time” by newsmagazines (77). Cf. also Hale [1924] and Hale [1926].

to 1950 and after, California spawned a huge body of aviation industries that continued to be central to its own and the U.S. economy throughout the cold war. More viscerally, California produced two of the most visible expressions of political alternatives for the next twenty years: on the one hand, its governor Earl Warren who as Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court from 1953 continued the liberal progressivist message of California into U.S. law and practice to the extent that the “Warren Court” became the favorite whipping boy for American conservatives and reactionaries; and, on the other hand, Congressman Richard Nixon whose cold war politics, originally nurtured in Californian battles, brought the full brunt of what has been termed Southern Californian “plutocratic conservatism” to the American political landscape and facilitated the later conservative turn in American politics associated with former Californian Governor Ronald Reagan during the eighties.

In any event, the transference of Californian civilization to American daily life may be said to have been completed as of 1962, the year in which California permanently surpassed New York as the most populous U.S. state. From this stage on, California was more explicitly accepted as the vanguard of the American project and over the next forty-odd years California has largely fulfilled such expectations. On the favorable side Californians launched the protest movements of the sixties, the ecology and environmental considerations of the seventies, the spread of a computer society starting in Silicon Valley in the seventies before becoming the PC force of the eighties and the world wide web and dotcom phenomena of the nineties. On the nether side, California also came to stand for the seething forces of upheaval on the American scene, from the minority outbreaks of the sixties led by such groups as the Black Panthers and the random violence of urban life in the eighties and nineties to citizen selfishness starting with Proposition 13 in 1978 to severely limit civic responsibilities toward the imposing social and material programs that had been achieved in the earlier part of the century.

Relentlessly growing in population, power, and influence as the center of America’s Pacific concerns, California has therefore made its way to the major world economic ranks while giving off an endless set of worries intermixed with film noir fixations of the meaninglessness of LA, the groundlessness of culture under the sun, and science-fiction fantasies of Armageddon. Even today, national newsmagazines rush to publicize the apparent collapse of Californian civil society in the present

crisis of the state budget and the political recall movement.<sup>40</sup> Still, at the very least, these same apocalyptic accounts recognize that if California “goes,” so does everything and everyone else in the American, and eventually world, economy.

## [6]

Are there underlying patterns to this complex mosaic of events and intentions that make up Californian civilization? And, apart from concern with the heavy weight that the Californian economy brings to all aspects of global culture and globalization tendencies, are there any strong reasons for non-Californians, including the rest of the United States, to care?

Let us take the boldest reading of such patterns: California, we claim, represents “paradise” in world history in the relatively testable sense that it has been built on millennia of biodiversity permeating ecosystem and human habitation and articulation. Modern Californian history is therefore the story of a dialectic between such biodiversity and attempts both to preserve and to reduce it. To argue that such biodiversity has been irretrievably lost and transformed since the coming of the Europeans is to overlook the degree to which such challenges remain an extremely recent facet of Californian reality. This is not to underplay the serious risks brought about by such challenges. At the same time, however, it is worth noting that each Californian generation has produced among its more sensitive and courageous members threads of continuity in both articulating and extending the original experience and vision.

In this respect, perhaps the single most distinctly Californian body of works and both social and naturalist achievements belongs to John Muir. Muir, of course, is known as the remarkable naturalist and explorer who was fundamental to the creation of the first national parks, environmental groups like the Sierra Club, and the evolution of an environmentalist consciousness and movement in the United States. While all this is true, and important, it is his remarkable body of writings that may well prove his greatest influence. In a style halfway between romantic elegy and naturalist precision, Muir succeeded, perhaps even more than Henry David Thoreau, in capturing and preserving the miracle of contemplating the Californian “wilderness” before the great central valley of California was turned into the world’s most

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<sup>40</sup> Cf. Newsweek [2003].

successful agribusiness and the Yosemite Valley overturned by visitors. Above all, Muir pinpointed the sacred center of California as the towering Sierra Nevada mountain range guarding and nurturing the Californian landscape, and, within it, the Yosemite Valley proper; indeed, it was Muir's prose that enabled modern citizens to think of this great body of nature as somehow sacred without suffering secularized embarrassment for putatively regressive romantic tendencies.

Coming upon the mountains through a Central Valley landscape "glowing golden in the sunshine" with its multitudinous flowers and the sweetest honey in the world, Muir was transfixed by their huge presence "reposing like a smooth, cumulous cloud in the sunny sky, and so gloriously colored, and so luminous, it seems to be not clothed with light, but wholly composed of it, like the wall of some celestial city." This brilliant vision Muir henceforth baptized the "Range of Light;" and not surprisingly, once he had penetrated the heart of this "celestial city," he then described the Yosemite Valley he came upon -- which became his home for some six years (1868-73) -- as "an immense hall or temple lighted from above," although "no temple made with hands can compare with Yosemite" whose every rock "seems to glow with life."<sup>41</sup>

A quarter-century later a similarly dazzled explorer and author, the poet Robinson Jeffers, found the words to extol the Big Sur landscape connecting North and South California. In Jeffers' case, the landscape awakened a sense of Hellenic presence, not the familiar orderliness of "genteel" classical readings, but the primordial power of a cosmos that was staggeringly beautiful in its fatefulness. Jeffers' philosophy of "inhumanism" was his attempt to express the character of this cosmos:

Erase the lines: I pray you not to love classifications:  
The thing is like a river, from source to sea-mouth  
One flowing life. We that have the honor and hardship of  
    being human  
Are one flesh with the beasts, and the beasts with the plants  
One streaming sap, and certainly the plants and algae and  
    the earth they spring from  
  
Are one flesh with the stars.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Muir [1961], 2; Muir [1962], 4.

<sup>42</sup> "The Double Axe," cited in Karman [1987], 51-2.

In a 1941 lecture at the U.S. Library of Congress Jeffers explained that his position might be likened to “pantheism,” but it was more of a “feeling” or “certitude” that “the world, the universe, is one being, a single organism, one great life that includes all life and all things; and is so beautiful that it must be loved and revered; and in moments of mystical vision we identify ourselves with it.”<sup>43</sup>

In a letter to a correspondent, Jeffers amplified his thoughts: “This whole is in all its parts so beautiful, and is felt by me to be so intensely in earnest, that I am compelled to love it, and to think of it as divine.” Humans could contribute “ever so slightly” to this overriding “beauty of things” by making their own lives and environment beautiful, but such contributions were not overly important or necessary to the whole. Yet this beauty went hand-in-hand with the unquestioned cruelty and torture and suffering in things. The living wildness of Big Sur – its eagles, falcons, condors and cougars – penetrated the core of Jeffers; as one visitor described it, “something utterly wild .... crept into his mind and marked his features.” This wildness enabled the poet to articulate the underlying female energy of the cosmos as *shakti* – possibly distantly reflecting the more compassionate cult of the Madonna, “la Conquistadora,” in his home town of Carmel where he built his own tower to gaze like a hawk upon the thunderous seascape – but ultimately even the final manifestation of the wild goddess in his poetry, Aphrodite, utters the warning: “Something is lurking hidden/There is always a knife in the flowers. There is always a lion just beyond the firelight.”<sup>44</sup>

The case of Henry Miller and his particular infatuation with the Californian ecosystem indicates a further elaboration of this vision. After years of expatriate existence in Paris and a dazzling experience of Greece, Miller was forced to return to the United States during the second world war. He set out to cross the United States by car, and in his ill-tempered account of that odyssey, *The Air-Conditioned Nightmare* (1945), recorded what he considered to be the most frightful aspect of American society, namely its total disengagement from nature. Eventually, however, Miller ended up in Big Sur, and his paeans to the

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<sup>43</sup> Jeffers [1956], 23-4.

<sup>44</sup> Cited in Karman [1987], 70,40, 92, 136. It is worth noting that Jeffers had received an extensive classical education since the age of five, had studied in Europe, and studied both medicine and forestry at American universities. At the same time, like Muir, he was known for his astonishing physical energy in mountaineering and mountain-climbing.

landscape and the life of its inhabitants took on a typically Millersque tone of mixed humor and awe: “It was here at Big Sur that I first learned to say *Amen!*” Here, that is, Miller continued to live as the conflicted and farcical person his writings invariably reveal, without however the hard edge of the bad humor of underachievement of his earlier self. Like the hero of his title, Hieronymous Bosch and the latter’s associations with the Brothers and Sisters of the Free Spirit in which the millennium of paradise had been presumably attained, Miller confessed that thanks to California, he now truly dwelt in “paradise” – which, moreover, “contains flaws (Paradisiacal flaws, if you like).”<sup>45</sup>

Against these reconciliations may be contrasted the more tortured case of Jack Kerouac as the ultimate Beat literary antihero. Kerouac’s *On the Road* (1955, 1957) had already provided the classic beat equivalent to Muir’s walk across the continent to Yosemite Valley and Miller’s wild drive from New York through the Old South to Los Angeles. In *Big Sur* (1962), however, recounting his stay of 1960, Kerouac revealed how far he had come to the end of his particular road of alcoholism and paranoia. Big Sur rewarded him at first with what he called “marvelous insights”: “Don’t call me eternity,” its blue sky told him, “call me God if you like, all of you talkers are in paradise: the leaf is paradise, the tree stump is paradise, the paper bag is paradise, the man is paradise, the sand is paradise, the sea is paradise, the man is paradise, the fog is paradise.” Yet, though Kerouac spoke the language, he turned away from it; his self-deceptions could not be hidden in this light and space: “All my tricks laid bare, even the realization that they’re laid bare itself laid bare as a lotta bunk.” Eventually Kerouac underwent a complete breakdown, and the only survivor of his ordeal is the closing onomatopoeic poem called “Sea: Sounds of the Pacific Ocean at Big Sur:”

Sho, Shoosh, flut,  
ravad, tapavada pow,  
coof, loof, root, –  
No, no, no, no, no, no –  
Oh ya, ya, ya, ya, yo, yair –

Shhh—<sup>46</sup>

[7]

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<sup>45</sup> Miller [1957], 32, 25.

<sup>46</sup> Kerouac [1962], 29, 33, 178-200, 186.

Still, what does this “California” with its “Range of Light,” “celestial temple” of Yosemite Valley, and Greek primordiality at Big Sur have to do with the “lowlands” of the rest of California’s material civilization? Miller already provides a suggestion with his emphasis on joy and release, and even Kerouac agrees, however much Kerouac himself cannot incorporate the laughter that comes with acknowledgment of the power of the California reality. This aspect of Californian society is often denigrated in such readings as “Hollywood Babylon” and the recorded excesses of the human potential, beat and hippie, and new age movements that have proved popular among a substantial minority of natives and outsiders. At the very least, it is such indefatigable “pursuit of pleasure,” whether physical or spiritual, that can be both related to the more sophisticated consequences of reverencing the California landscape and to the particularly manic manner in which California entered an incipient American capitalist and industrial society in the post-Gold Rush period.

Seen in purely socio-economic terms this material society continues to offer one of the clearest images of both the potentials and contradictions of a flagrantly entrepreneurial society that nonetheless includes its progressivist or social democratic punctuations. In the arts, however, where something like a higher plastic reality is often the object of Californian artists, architects and designers, such factors have enabled a remarkable set of aesthetic achievements that temptingly suggest possibilities, if not attainments, of synthesis. From the earliest American period, Californian art linked up with European and American standards, and in such cases as the Art and Crafts movement it has been argued that California might even have served as the most imposing case of arts and crafts influence throughout a wide variety of social sectors. Modernism and surrealism also had some of their finest articulations on the West Coast, and abstract expressionism may well have originated, not so much in New York, as in important features of certain Californian painters.

Perhaps one of the more indicative arts movement is Dynaton, a temporary coalescence of three artists, Wolfgang Paalen, Gordon Onslow-Ford and Lee Mullican, during the late forties and early fifties in the San Francisco Bay area. A continuation of the art magazine *Dyn* begun by Paalen in Mexico during the early forties, Dynaton (from the Greek for “possible”) achieved a rare fusion of the painters’ simultaneous concern with Amerindian cultures, Zen Buddhism and spiritualism, the new physics,

extraterrestrial life, psychology meditation, and, finally, “the vital quiet in California nature.”<sup>47</sup> In the words of Paalen, Dynaton meant: “A limitless continuum in which all forms of reality are potentially implicit. Possibilities are a part of nature. Nature is what we can know of realized possibilities.”<sup>48</sup>

Yet, short of pursuing such syntheses, Californian civilization does often enough express itself in darker tones of noir and even despair. Whether in the caustic novels of Nathaniel West<sup>49</sup> or in the Hollywood film noir tradition, such as *Double Indemnity* and *The Black Dahlia* (1946) screenwritten by Californian thriller author Raymond Chandler, the individual comes up hard against a frenzied and unstable background of atomistic forces in chaotic play. Sometimes a narrow suggestion of redemption is found precisely in the struttings of a lost idealism that still “plays all the angles,” such as the hero Rick in the classic Hollywood film, *Casablanca* (1943), or even in the beat-alienated costumes of the “rebel without a cause” or motorcyclist “wild ones.” It is difficult to separate these gestures as responses either to what California’s more acute writers and poets have pointed to as the uncompromising truthfulness of its nature or to the continued acceleration of entrepreneurial society gone (almost) mad. Yet this very question is no less a part of the enduring spectacle of California civilization.

## [8]

In the final analysis “California” belongs to world history because it is the most packed symbol of elements otherwise difficult to decipher in the unprecedented voyages of discovery and exploitation first launched by Europeans in the fifteenth century and forming the very beginnings of the globalization process. If California has been rightly labeled “a questing sort of state,”<sup>50</sup> it may well be because California symbolizes the ultimate object of that endless quest to the West, toward the “Hesperus” of Virgilian Aeneas’ search, that in the fifteenth century became associated with island-hopping from the coast of west Africa across the Atlantic Ocean in hopes of reaching the fabled “Indies,” themselves

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<sup>47</sup> Susan M. Anderson, “Journey into the Sun: California Artists and Surrealism,” in Karlstrom [1996], 198. Also Barron, Bernstein & Fort [2000]. Cf. Dyn [1943] for an example of Paalen’s commitment to Amerindian art.

<sup>48</sup> *Dynaton Reviewed* [1977], 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Miss Lonelyhearts* (1933), *Day of the Locust* [1939]. West died of an automobile accident in 1940.

<sup>50</sup> McWilliams [1973], 374.

forming yet another body of islands from Zipangu (Japan) to Ceylon. Even after discovery of the huge size of the future South America as a continent after 1500, it was still felt that Columbus' landfall among the Caribbean islands augured a further set of isles – rather than a North American “continent” – eventually working its way to the Indies and “Cathay” proper. Along that extensive thalassic highway, the “Isle of California” became a fixture of imagination, and eventually of unrepentant ambition.

As one commentator has noted, “it is well known that islands excite the imagination of the maturing individual... the island image emerges as a significant symbol in evolving consciousness. The island is a controllable, perfectible world in miniature.”<sup>51</sup> In such terms, the Island of California, this veritable “Mountain of Paradise,” soars as a standing challenge not only to Californians proper, but also to the rest of the world caught up in the throes of a globalization process that first took off in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries when it was first literally discovered that “the salt seas of the world are connected; that all countries possessing sea coasts are mutually accessible by sea;” and that “eventually the existing networks” are “embraced in a super-network, so to speak, of ocean routes encircling the world.”<sup>52</sup>

Of course, this challenge is intended for Californians no less than for all non-Californians, including the rest of the United States. However, for Californians proper there remains always the further commitment to the land, its ecosystem and its history, which transcends the priority of all political economic categories. For Californians, this deeper commitment inseparable from reflection on “California civilization” is perhaps best captured in the more pregnant ramifications of the final deathbed message from that last native Californian, “Ishi,” to his latest fellow Californians: “You stay, I go.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Polk [1991], 27.

<sup>52</sup> Parry [1981], ix, xv.

<sup>53</sup> Kroeber [1961], 238. I put “Ishi” in quotation-marks since it was not his personal name, which remained a private possession, but the name meaning “man” that Californian anthropologist Alfred Kroeber gave him for practical reasons of identification.

## Appendix 1

### World Economic Powers 2000 - 2001 GDP & GSP (Millions of US \$)

		2000	2001
1.	United States	9,837	10,171
1.	Japan	4,313	4,842
1.	Germany	1,873	1,874
1.	United Kingdom	1,415	1,406
1.	<b>CALIFORNIA</b>	<b>1,344</b>	<b>1,359</b>
1.	France	1,294	1,303
1.	China	1,080	1,159
1.	Italy	1,074	1,091

*Sources:* World Bank

Bureau of Economic Analysis, U.S. Department of Commerce

## Appendix 2

## ABBREVIATIONS

- ACD** Starr, Kevin. *Americans and the California Dream, 1850-1915* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- DE** Starr, Kevin. *The Dream Endures: California Enters the 1940s* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1997)
- EDC** Starr, Kevin. *Embattled Dreams: California in War and Peace 1940-1950* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2002).
- EDG** Starr, Kevin. *Endangered Dreams: The Great Depression in California* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1996).
- ID** Starr, Kevin. *Inventing the Dream: California Through the Progressive Era* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1985).
- MD** Starr, Kevin. *Material Dreams: Southern California Through the 1920s* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1990).

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