Introduction

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When I taught my first course on California literature in the early 1990s, I was an assistant professor in the English Department at the University of California, Los Angeles. At the time, it was one of the few such classes offered in the United States.

Today similar courses are taught at colleges and universities across the country. A front-page article published in the *Los Angeles Times* on January 2, 2012, claimed that the surging interest in California literature was due to "a new generation of students eager to explore the state's confluence of luxury and despair; of exploitation and reinvention."

People are fascinated by California because it represents the best and worst of America. Los Angeles is a hedonistic city. But it is also an example of well-regulated capitalism, a corporate town filled with employees who work in "the industry." San Francisco is one of the nation's most popular tourist destinations, even though gay residents recently led a movement supporting public nudity. California attracts celebrities, refugees, minorities, faddists, religious fanatics, surf bums, environmental activists, and visionary entrepreneurs. It is the land of fruits and nuts, but also the home of Silicon Valley; a blue state with a large number of conservative voters; a prelapsarian Eden with apocalyptic weather conditions. A character in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985) explains why he hates California: "Mud slides, brush fires, coastal erosion, earthquakes, mass killings, et cetera. We can relax and enjoy these disasters because in our hearts we feel that California deserves what it gets. Californians invented the concept of life-style. This alone warrants their doom."

This comment illustrates the love–hate relationship people have with the state. The only thing the speaker enjoys more than anticipating California's destruction is imagining how he would feel while watching it happen. The region has always been a blank slate for projecting other groups' frustrations and fantasies. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, European novelists and cartographers envisioned California as an island off the Pacific Coast,

populated by a race of female Amazonian warriors. Others romanticized the region, believing that California's indigenous tribes lived together in harmony prior to the arrival of the white man. In fact, California was neither a violent kingdom nor the terrestrial paradise of popular lore.

Unlike much of the nineteenth-century American West, which was characterized as the Great American Desert, California was believed to be blessed with untold natural resources and an ideal climate. Chinese miners referred to California as Gold Mountain. Tourists and invalids considered it an alternative to the Mediterranean. They ventured there seeking relaxation and better health. Mexican immigrants call it El Norte, "The North." For them, it represented better living conditions and job opportunities.

The film industry moved from the East Coast to California in the early twentieth century. The state's geographic diversity – its spectacular deserts, mountains, and beaches – provided directors with a greater variety of outdoor settings. Once a blank slate, California now became a giant projection screen, a fictional substitute for other places.

California is a place of contradictions. It is the endpoint of Manifest Destiny, the land of eternal sunshine and youth. At times, the entire state seems like a gated community inhabited by wealthy celebrities. However, California is also associated with boom–bust economies and nightmarish dystopias. Its various geographical districts and diverse constituents are perpetually at odds with each other. Hardly a day goes by without the northern part of the state threatening to break away from the south, or the San Fernando Valley threatening to secede from Los Angeles. For every success story there are a hundred cautionary tales of disaster, thousands of "actors" waiting tables in Beverly Hills. It's surprising that the state remains the number one destination for immigrants from around the world, considering the race riots and urban unrest, the high cost of living, and lack of good jobs in the post-recession economy.

The literature does nothing to burnish the state's reputation. Nathanael West once proclaimed that "people came to California to die." Most narratives about the region aren't as dire as *The Day of the Locust* (1939), though they often portray California in an unflattering light. The Mexican ranching elite lead a privileged existence in Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona* (1884). But they are supported by the labor of indigenous slaves. In T. C. Boyle's *The Tortilla Curtain* (1995), a white upper-middle-class couple and their poor Mexican counterparts come to California to realize their dreams. But a series of natural and man-made catastrophes leave their fortunes in doubt at the end of the novel.

Americans are known for their optimism. Yet, our national literature seldom reflects this aspect of our character. A student once asked me why there are no happy endings in American literature. Perhaps it's our New England heritage. The Puritans were known for their work ethic, not their cheerful dispositions. In "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" (1893), Frederick Jackson Turner anxiously wondered what would happen once the frontier disappeared and pioneers had no more horizons to conquer. Turner portrayed westward expansion as a laborious endeavor, but also as a sign of God's providential design.

In reality, most Americans who went West weren't seeking religious affirmation. They were looking for adventure or a chance to strike it rich. California was originally occupied by non-Christian natives, and later by Catholic Spaniards and Mexicans. In American literature, there is a sense that the region is resistant to Puritan values and Protestant notions of progressive reform.

The Puritan fear of Native Americans was reflected in Indian captivity narratives. The natives on the West Coast were peaceful. They had been subdued by earlier colonial powers before whites arrived in the region. Visitors worried about succumbing to idleness in a land where it was possible to thrive without expending much physical energy. In *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), Richard Henry Dana noted the indolence of locals, as well as the enervating weather. Dana's lament was echoed by twentieth-century European and English expatriates and by American writers who came to Hollywood, lured by the promise of a fat payday. Many of them drank themselves to death or frittered their talents away.

If history is written by the winners, perhaps literature is written by the losers – by people who have no other way to protest the official narrative sanctioned by society. Many regional writers challenge the notion that California is a metaphorical pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. It is an exceptional place, but one where people seem predestined to fail. The literature of the Gold Rush era is filled with depictions of unlucky miners. Naturalist writers such as Frank Norris, Jack London, and Upton Sinclair are haunted by a sense of fatality. Literary noir is synonymous with cynicism and existential angst. Most hard-boiled detective novels are set in California, the fashionable dwelling place of despair.

Because California produces a vast percentage of the world's popular culture, it is often considered an intellectual wasteland. Hollywood blockbusters, amateur singing competitions, the manufactured fame of the Kardashian family – the reasons to loathe California are endless. But

California's writers are a more serious lot, concerned with the devastating effects of European and North American colonization, the cost of capitalism and the impact of industrialization, the misuse of the land and its resources, and the constant tension among the state's people and interest groups.

For some minorities and countercultural movements, like the Beats, regional modernists, and gay and lesbian writers, California is a place where personal fulfillment and artistic self-expression are possible. But as the essays in this anthology suggest, most writers portray California as a land of contestation and strife.

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Wallace Stegner once claimed that California bears the same relation to the West as Florida does to the South – which is to say none at all. It is a state without a "regional" identity. There are very few westerns set in the California, for the same reason that there aren't any Indian captivity narratives. The formula western highlights the tension between opposing interest groups who struggle to control the early frontier. Indians versus whites. Ranchers versus sheepherders. Townspeople versus the railroad. The players vary from novel to novel, but the essential plot remains the same. California was tamed long before it was annexed as a United States territory. Its future as a state was in jeopardy for a mere two years, during the Mexican-American War (1846–48). Its acquisition seemed almost inevitable, a final sign of God's will, the last stage in the transcontinental journey of conquest and settlement.

California's reputation as the Golden State didn't become tarnished until the twentieth century. Industrialization, a continuing influx of immigrants, and increasing competition for the region's diminishing resources are among the many problems that have bedeviled the region. Instead of the western, which celebrates pioneer virtues and the triumph of white civilization, the genre most closely associated with California is noir. It features gritty depictions of urban life and a fatalistic view of human behavior. The state has also attracted science fiction writers, ranging from L. Ron Hubbard, the founder of Scientology, to African American novelists, and MacArthur Foundation Grant-winner Octavia Butler. All of their works comment on present-day California in an unflattering way. Their futuristic settings either reflect the contemporary ills of society or offer a hopeful alternative: an imaginary place where racism, class inequality, environmental pollution, and the exploitation of industrial workers no longer exist.

At a time when there is growing interest in global relations, comparative literatures, and diaspora studies, it might seem quaint to devote a volume of criticism to the literature of a particular state. The concept of a "state," with universally respected and theoretically controllable borders, is increasingly under siege in the twenty-first century. However, whether it is a mythical isle, part of a European or Mexican empire, a frontier territory, or the thirty-first state in the Union, California is a place uniquely worthy of study. It has the region's most culturally diverse population and a heterogeneous body of literature.

The History of California Literature offers a chronological survey of writers, cultures, literary genres, and regional movements that have flourished from the Native American period through the early twenty-first century. Part I, "Beginnings," features a selection of indigenous folktales from northern, central, and southern California. It includes the oral memoirs and writings of Indians and Mexicans living under European colonial rule, and concludes with a study of the Mexican era, ending in 1848.

The pre-contact period in native California lasted approximately 12,000 years. It ended with the arrival of Spanish explorers in 1509. Catholic priests collected stories from hundreds of tribes that lived in the area, starting in the late eighteenth century. Later enthnographers discovered that different indigenous peoples had their own folkloric histories. Tribes in northern California produced "earth diver" myths about animals that dove into a primordial sea to retrieve mud with which to build the earth. Those in the central region believed the trickster figure Coyote played a pivotal role in California's creation. The Three Brothers myth was popular among tribes in the south and posited the notion that twin divinities brought the world to fruition. Paul Apodaca analyzes a selection of these narratives in English translation.

Native Americans also produced oral memoirs and wrote autobiographies describing their lives under colonial rule. Pablo Tac, a member of the Luiseño tribe, was educated by Franciscan friars during the Mission era. He wrote a critical account of the Spanish entitled *Indian Life and Customs at Mission San Luis Rey* (1835). Other members of the Luiseño, Chumash, and Ohlone tribes told similar tales of oppression. Lisbeth Haas shows how these subjects asserted their humanity by contesting the European notion of Indians as ungodly savages.

Vincent Pérez considers literature from the Spanish and Mexican periods, beginning in 1796 when the Catholic Church established its first mission in California, and ending in 1848 with the conclusion of the

Mexican-American War. The literature from this period includes Francisco Paluo's biography, *The Life and Apostolic Labors of the Venerable Junipero Serra* and his *Historical Memoirs of New California*; the diaries of the Spanish explorer Juan Bautista de Anza and Francisco Garces; the autobiography of Mexican rancher Mariano Guadalupe Vallejo; and the novels of Maria Amparo Ruiz de Burton. The essay ends with an examination of Helen Hunt Jackson's *Ramona*, published in 1884, which retrospectively romanticized the Mission era.

Part II, "The American Presence," focuses on early nineteenth-century tourists, mountain men, and military officials who visited or lived in the region; on miners who came to California between the late 1840s and mid-1870s; and on environmental writers who later celebrated the state's varied landscapes and argued for the creation of national parks. As David Wyatt notes, whites who arrived here in the early nineteenth century were uninspired by the landscape and contemptuous of the region's inhabitants. In *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), Richard Henry Dana found the tropical coast disagreeable, and characterized the natives as sluggards who scarcely earned their keep. Mountain man Zenas Leonard dismissed Yosemite Valley and referred to the Spanish as stupid in his autobiography published in 1839. James Ohio Pattie expressed similar sentiments in his *Personal Narrative* (1831), written by Timothy Flint. So did mountain man James Clyman and Monterey's *alcade* Walter Colton, in their respective memoirs and diaries. Eventually, however, these men came to appreciate the California frontier.

Immigrants from all over the world flooded into the region after the discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill in 1848. Those who failed to strike it rich wrote about their misadventures, their encounters with people of other races, and their observations of camp life. Nicholas Witschi sifts through letters, poems, diaries, newspaper articles, magazines, and books published during the Gold Rush, from the late 1840s to the mid-1870s. Among the collected gems are Louise Clappe's *The Shirley Letters* (1851–52), John Rollin Ridge's *The Life and Adventures of Joaquín Murieta* (1854), Bret Harte's *The Luck of Roaring Camp and Other Tales* (1868), and Mark Twain's *Roughing It* (1872).

Decades of intensive mining triggered a movement to preserve the state's natural resources in the late nineteenth century. Geologist Clarence King published *Mountaineering in the Sierra Nevada* in 1872. John Muir, the first president of the Sierra Club, argued that the state's varied landscapes were crucial to California's identity in a series of books written between 1874 and 1916. According to Steven Pavlos Holmes, Muir also worked with

Theodore Roosevelt to oppose the damming of the Hetch Hetchy River in Yosemite National Park. Although Mary Austin didn't seek publicity for her environmental causes, her classic *The Land of Little Rain* (1903) offers a nuanced depiction of drylands ecology. Robinson Jeffers shunned the limelight as well. Yet, he attracted national attention by writing poems about nature in the 1920s and 1930s.

Part III, "Contested Spaces," chronicles the struggles of African Americans, Chicana/os, and Asian Americans from the frontier era through the mid-twentieth century. During this time, discriminatory acts of legislation were passed against minorities, including the Chinese Exclusion Act (1882) and the Alien Land Law (1913). However, it was also a period of literary innovation and political rebellion, as witnessed by the growth of the West Coast branch of the Harlem Renaissance and the 1965 Watts Riot.

African Americans viewed California as a land of opportunity. Emancipated slaves worked as cowboys, miners, and trappers in the middle and late nineteenth century. Thousands migrated to the West Coast during World War II, seeking employment in the aerospace and shipbuilding industries. Believing that the state was free from the racism prevalent in others parts of the country, they discovered that many cities were unofficially segregated and that minorities had limited economic and social mobility. The rising discontent among California's black population led to urban protests during the Civil Rights era. Aparajita Nanda traces the evolution and politicization of the African American West, examining works by long forgotten contributors to the state's cultural heritage.

Asian Americans encountered similar obstacles when they came to California. Chinese laborers were confined to ethnic ghettos. Immigrants at Angel Island were held indefinitely or returned to their homelands after the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1882. Asian Americans were prevented from purchasing farms starting in 1913, while Japanese Americans were placed in internment camps during World War II. Minorities claimed a space for themselves in the 1960s and 1970s, according to Catherine Fung, who chronicles the quest for racial solidarity and political freedom in early Asian American literature.

Frederick Jackson Turner claimed that the U.S. frontier ended in 1890, when the census determined that the nation had settled most of the land in the region. The same year marked the publication of Adolfo R. Carrillo's memoir, which represents the beginning of Mexican American literature in California. Carrillo, an exiled Mexican journalist, wrote about the northern migration of his people and their adaptation to the region. Some

descendants of the nineteenth-century Californios reflected nostalgically on their illustrious past, while others rejected the pastoral romanticism associated with the Spanish missions and Mexican ranchos. Political refugees entered the state during the Mexican Revolution (1910–20) and focused on the cultural differences between recent arrivals and "*pochos*" or assimilated Mexican immigrants. They also defended the urban working class in their proletarian literature. Manuel M. Martin-Rodriguez argues that Emanuel J. Camarena's *Pancho* (1958) represents the end of the Mexican American period. The novel appeared on the eve of the agricultural strikes that would lead to the rise of the Chicana/o movement in the following decade.

Part IV, "Social Change and Literary Experimentation," deals with a time of economic upheaval and artistic rebellion. Advances in technology and rapid industrialization caused modernist writers to rethink their relationship to the material world in the early decades of the twentieth century. Social protest novels written by Jack London, Frank Norris, and Upton Sinclair began to appear during this time. The "crisis of modernity" came to a head in the 1920s and 1930s. John Steinbeck, a popular writer, and emerging modernist poets critiqued capitalism and wove socialist themes into their works. Hard-boiled detective writers offered the harshest assessment of modern society, depicting California as the cataclysmic endpoint of Manifest Destiny.

Ramona condemned California's treatment of Native Americans, but its love story encouraged readers to view it as a sentimental romance. Later authors, writing in a naturalistic vein, offered a bleaker portrait of the region in the early twentieth century, as Susan Shillinglaw indicates. Norris criticized railroad oligarchies in *The Octopus* (1901). London's dystopian novel, *The Iron Heel* (1908), examined the rise of a tyrannical government. Much of the action takes place in the Bay Area and Sonoma County. *Oil!* (1927), by Sinclair, focuses on the exploitation of the region's resources. Most famously, Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) called attention to the exploitation of farm workers, big business, technology, and the destructive environmental practices that led to the Dust Bowl.

Although the New York stock market crashed in 1929, it took some time for the aftershock to reach California. Yet, it was here that many writers, photographers, and social historians ultimately found inspiration. Jan Goggans reveals that the Depression produced two types of narratives, one dealing with agricultural laborers who came to the state, seeking work in the fields; the other, with dreamers who failed to find success in

Hollywood. Alongside *The Grapes of Wrath*, Dorothea Lange and Paul Taylor's *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion* and Carey McWilliams' *Factories in the Field* were also published in 1939. In addition, a new genre known as the Hollywood novel appeared in the 1930s, attracting writers such as Nathanael West, Horace McCoy, and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

The state provided new subject matter for some writers, while offering others a unique place within existing traditions in the early decades of the twentieth century. A group of artists whom Geneva Gano calls "sub-urban modernists" were associated not with the state's rural areas or with cosmopolitan centers such as Los Angeles, but with bohemian communities in Edendale, Palm Springs, Pasadena, and Carmel-by-the-Sea. They were united by their interest in the avant-garde and by their passion for radical political causes.

Popular pulp fiction writers were often as likely to critique society as their modernist counterparts. Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler, and James M. Cain wrote during the Depression, the Prohibition era, and World War II. They depicted Los Angeles and San Francisco as violent urban locales filled with characters who were driven by base emotions and animal instincts. William Marling identifies the hard-boiled private eye as someone living in a world where crime was the norm, and who was nearly as flawed as his enemies. Ironically, these authors set their works in "the Golden State," a place where they uncovered social hypocrisy, economic desperation, and moral depravity.

Part V, "Alternative Voices," concentrates on the period after the war. Paradoxically, it was a time of prosperity and increasing discontent. Those who were geographically and politically marginalized wrote about the "other" California in the 1940s. Countercultural movements in the 1950s and 1960s attacked the conservative center from a variety of peripheral vantage points, condemning homophobia, western religion, sexism, and the nation's involvement in the Vietnam War.

Phillip Round writes about the "other" California, including the coastal forest region, the Central Valley, and the Modoc Plateau. These locales didn't benefit from the post-World War II economic boom that helped the rest of the state. The establishment of the *bracero* program in 1942 reinforced cultural differences between long-time residents and Mexican immigrants. Japanese Americans maintained an uncomfortable relationship with the state's desert areas, which housed internment camps during the war. The rise of corporate farming and the completion of California's major water projects resulted in the consolidation of land holdings and the

marginalization of laborers, small farmers, and loggers in these transitioning regions.

The following decade was a period of political conservatism and social conformity. As Kurt Hemmer notes, the Beats represented an alternative voice – not another place, but an "other" state of mind. They were part of a countercultural movement that challenged conventional views on religion, morality, society's relationship to nature, and national and foreign affairs. These poets promoted an aesthetic based on personal revelation and experimentation with drugs. They were attracted to Buddhism, advocated pacifism, and opposed the Vietnam War. The Beats had as many followers as they had unpopular causes. They established communities in northern and southern California; affiliated with the African American and Black Mountain poets; and shared an affinity with other dissident writers such as Richard Brautigan, Hunter S. Thompson, and Charles Bukowski.

Many of the poets who thrived during this period were located in San Francisco. In addition to the Berkeley Renaissance poets, the Language poets, and the members of Second Wave Feminism and the New Narrative movement, there were DIY magazines and non-institutional reading series allied with anarchists, labor organizers, conscientious objectors, ecological coalitions, and supporters of gay liberation. Kaplan Page Harris notes that the last group was especially influential during this era because the Bay Area had a large LGBT population and numerous homophile organizations.

Brian Stefans writes about artists who critiqued California, starting in the McCarthy era and ending with the arrival of punk in the late 1970s. They included Thomas Mann, Bertolt Brecht, and other Germans living in exile; transplanted American poets; and nihilistic singer/songwriters. In a postwar consumer society, these people felt they had no agency; no voice in a place like Los Angeles, a city known for its inauthenticity of communication, inhabited by actors and dramatists. They rejected bourgeois norms of decorum, conventional morality, the commercial entertainment industry, and even language itself.

Instead of concentrating on writers who attempted to influence the culture by exerting what Stefans calls "*negative* power," Part VI, "Creating Communities," examines artists who changed the dominant discourse by raising their minority voices in solidarity. The 1960s and 1970s saw the rise of the Civil Rights movement, feminism, gay liberation, and ecological writing. The 1965 Watts Riot and the 1992 Los Angeles Uprising motivated African Americans to speak out against racial injustice, while the Chicana/o resistance movement, the Asian American identity movement, and the