

Part I

INTRODUCTORY ESSAYS



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## Chapter One

# BEYOND DREAMS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS: DEFINING CALIFORNIA THROUGH CULTURE

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Anyone who knows enough to define California through culture knows better than to try. California is too large, too diverse, and too dynamic to be defined. Transposed to the east coast of the United States, California would stretch from Charleston to Boston, encompassing all or part of 11 states from the Atlantic Coast to the Appalachian Trail. It contains a greater range of landforms and more species of plants and animals than any area of comparable size in North America, with a human population equally as diverse. Santa Clara County, now better known as Silicon Valley, by itself has residents from 177 of the 194 nations of the world (Moriarty 2004: 8). California is home to *sizable* immigrant communities from 60 different countries.

As someone who has spent more than two decades supporting public programs in which Californians describe and analyze life as it's lived in California, I have experienced this cultural diversity firsthand. In groups large and small Californians have shared how and why they or their ancestors came to be here, discussed issues both historical and contemporary, and shared their hopes and fears for communities both ethnic and geographic. Listen to California Native Americans collecting stories of their ancestors' encounters with Europeans in the nineteenth century, residents of the Sierra Nevada foothills discussing the population boom they face, Japanese Americans recalling their internment during World War II, Afghan artists recently displaced by war to the San Francisco Bay Area, and you can't help but recognize that California doesn't have *a* culture, it has many cultures.

The state is also too dynamic to define. As the California economy cycles through boom and bust, today's confident definition becomes tomorrow's embarrassment. In November 1991, *Time* magazine dedicated an entire issue to examining "California: The Endangered Dream," observing how

drought, traffic, sprawl, and economic downturn were driving people out of the state. Four years later, the California economy was ascending up the side of the dot-com bubble and by the decade's end the state's population had grown by more than four million people and California boasted the fifth highest gross domestic product in the world. Five years after that, the dot-com bubble burst and the state plunged into fiscal crisis once again. "California defies efforts to characterize it as a single state," complains Peter Schrag, who has been studying California for three decades, "even as you describe it, it seems to obey some geographic uncertainty principle, and changes" (2006: 40).

Then there's the problem of "culture." If we take culture in its anthropological sense, as the totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, institutions, and all of the products of human work and thought, the task of defining California expands well beyond the limits of my expertise and space. Nearly 50 years ago, two dozen scholars, writers, and critics assembled in Carmel, California to discuss the question, "Has the West Coast an Identifiable Culture?" One of the group, the novelist Wallace Stegner, summarized the group's findings:

Two days at Carmel convinced most of us that we felt pretty much like the rest of the United States, only more so. Our language is a representative amalgam almost undistinguished by local dialectal peculiarities; ethnically we are more mixed even than the eastern seaboard cities; in a prosperous country, we are more prosperous than most; in an urban country, more urban than most; in a gadget-happy country, more addicted to gadgets; in a mobile country, more mobile; in a tasteless country, more tasteless; in a creative country, more energetically creative; in an optimistic society, more optimistic; in an anxious society, more anxious. (1982, p. 106)

If you're looking for a shorthand definition of California by culture, "America only more so" is as good as any.

But the most striking thing about defining California by culture is that despite the impossibility of the task, commentators both glib and serious persist in trying to do so. Why? No one seems to think it important to define the culture of my home state of Pennsylvania, or Iowa, or Arizona. Why California? Of the many places in the world blessed with natural wonders, favorable climates, energetic economies, and dynamic populations, why should California hold such a distinctive place in the national and global imagination?

The question leads us to California's defining cultural feature: its persistence as a location where the deepest human yearnings can be realized. "California" has sometimes been a blank screen onto which people have projected their desires, sometimes a real place that promises opportunity

never before imagined, and sometimes a bitter example of disillusion and disappointment. But a definition of California always refers not just to the real place called California, but to an imagined place of the same name.

When commentators attempt to define California, they use powerful human metaphors such as Paradise, Eden, El Dorado – all places that exist in the imagination, places challenging people to find them, to lose them, to regain them. As a consequence, defining California by culture means encountering a perpetual tension that exists between California the imagined and California the real. In other states, serious culture can be created without reference to the images promoters concoct to attract new business, tourists, and investments. In California these images are always there, to be dismissed, qualified, ridiculed, or embraced, perhaps, but always there and demanding attention. I know of no other place whose culture is created by such a tension. But as a result, California affords observers here and abroad an opportunity to think upon human possibility and its limits.

Tension between the imagined and the real begins the same instant California is named. Other American states derive their names from their indigenous inhabitants, from descriptions of tangible natural features, or from people to be honored. California alone is named for a completely imaginary place. No one has found a convincing etymology for the name, but “California” first appears in a popular romance, *Las Sergas de Esplandian*, written by Garci Rodriguez Ordonez de Montalvo and first published in Madrid in 1510:

Know, then, that, on the right hand of the Indies, there is an island called California, very close to the side of the Terrestrial Paradise, and it was peopled by black women, without any man among them, for they lived in the fashion of Amazons. They were of strong and hardy bodies, of ardent courage and great force. Their island was the strongest in all the world, with its steep cliffs and rocky shores. Their arms were all of gold, and so was the harness of the wild beasts which they tamed and rode. For, in the whole island, there was no metal but gold. (Hicks et al. 2000: 76)

Edward Everett Hale, best known as the author of “The Man without a Country,” offered a plausible explanation in 1862 for how this imaginary name came to be fixed to a portion of the Pacific coast. Montalvo’s romance, which went through several editions, was popular enough to remain in the memory of some unknown member of a naval expedition sent by Cortés to explore the northwest coast of Mexico in 1533, and when he saw what he thought was an island with steep cliffs and rocky shores, the name stuck (Hart 1978: 398).

No less than two defining metaphors for California make their appearance in this single passage: California as paradise and California as El

Dorado. Also making its immediate appearance is the disjuncture between the imagined destination and the real place. The land the unknown explorer called California had “steep cliffs and rocky shores,” to be sure, but it turned out to be the peninsula of Baja California, not an island, and it fostered no black Amazons and contained no gold. In a pattern that would be repeated by many individuals looking for “California,” disappointment came soon after discovery. Spanish explorers found nothing that resembled a terrestrial paradise in California and, after a few sixteenth-century expeditions, Spain sent no more for nearly two centuries.

If there were ever a people who experienced California as paradise, it was the indigenous people who had been living there ten thousand years before their encounter with Europeans. They were hunter-gatherer cultures who had no metal tools and left no written records. Social classes hardly existed and communities were small. Except for tribes along the Colorado River, they appear to have been a peaceable people, though conflict was not unknown. We need not place them into an alien mythic place to acknowledge that conditions in what became California must have favored them, for at the time when European colonization began in 1769, they are estimated to have numbered 300,000, the densest concentration of Indians north of Mexico.

California’s indigenous people spoke over a hundred different mutually unintelligible languages and Rawls notes that “elements of culture occurring only in part of California, most of them only in a small part, greatly outnumbered those that were universal” (Rawls & Bean 2003: 15–16). The only feature common to both indigenous and contemporary California culture is its diversity. Unfortunately, much of this cultural richness has been lost. Disease and confinement brought by Europeans halved their numbers to about 150,000 by the mid-nineteenth century. Then came the catastrophe that decimated California Indians, the event that fixed California forever in the world’s imagination: the Gold Rush.

The Gold Rush was a defining moment for California, one that turned a sleepy province on the far edge of the continent into a true El Dorado. The search for gold had motivated Spanish explorers since the sixteenth century, but no one could seriously identify California as El Dorado until James Marshall’s discovery of gold in January 1848. As news and evidence overcame initial skepticism, men poured into California, first from Oregon and Hawaii, then Mexico and Chile, and finally from the east coast, Europe, and Asia. In 1847 San Francisco had a population of 800 and California’s non-indigenous population was perhaps 13,000. Eighty thousand men arrived in 1849 alone and by 1854 there were upwards of 300,000 in California. It was the greatest mass migration in American history and vaulted the state into national and world attention (Rohrbough 1997: 8).

For sheer drama the Gold Rush is hard to beat. Hundreds of thousands of men, and a much smaller number of women, crossed oceans or a continent to test their individual wills against nature and fortune. It was “the adventure of a lifetime and the journey of the century,” and the experiences of the Argonauts filled personal diaries and letters and made newspaper copy for years, but the reality was that the discoveries of successful claims that inspired gold fever lasted less than three years. Most miners eventually returned to their homes without realizing the fantasies of wealth that had once motivated them. In their diaries and letters, California became an archetype for possibility and for disappointment (Rohrbough 1997).

The California Gold Rush also became an archetype for California’s pattern of development as it was succeeded by a series of speculative booms that brought more attention and more migrants to California. “Elsewhere the tempo of development was slow at first, and gradually accelerated as energy accumulated,” wrote Carey McWilliams a century later, “but in California the lights went on all at once, in a blaze, and they have never been dimmed” (1949: 25).

The most recent assessment of the Gold Rush came during California’s Sesquicentennial which began, appropriately enough, in 1998 when California was enjoying yet another boom – the dot-com boom of internet technology companies – and ended in 2000 as that boom went bust. The new social history made it impossible to ignore the dark side of the Gold Rush – its racial violence, its catastrophic effect on Native Americans and the environment, the dislocation of families throughout the nation – and historian Kevin Starr, then chair of the Sesquicentennial Commission, accepted such revaluations as a necessary acknowledgment of California’s “sin.” Yet he insisted that in the Gold Rush lay the genes of California’s cultural DNA: exploitation of technology, a pattern of booms, a multicultural population, intense entrepreneurial energy, liberation of women, and an opening to Asian influence (1998: 61).

One Gold Rush feature that has persisted throughout California’s subsequent history is immigration. Immigration rates have waxed and waned with fluctuation in the economy and legal restrictions, but it has *averaged* 1,000 people a day since 1920 and, since the turn of the new century, the daily average increase is 1,670. The year my wife and I moved here, 1970, there were 20 million people living in California. In 2010 that number is expected to be 40 million. Since 1980, California has been receiving an average of 300,000 immigrants per year.

Underlying the diversity of immigrants to California is one feature universal to all: the decision to leave one’s home and the decision that California is where one wants to be. One of the few common threads of California identity is this exercise of choice: at some point everyone in California is – or is related to – someone who left his or her home and

came to California looking for something better. Immigrants have come to California to pursue many versions of “gold”: opportunities, artistic or economic; freedoms, political or sexual; or openness, geographical or intellectual. These diverse motivations get lumped into a single term, “the California Dream” – a term often invoked and seldom defined.

Kevin Starr is the great chronicler of the California Dream. The title he chose for the first volume of his magisterial history of California, *Americans and the California Dream: 1850–1915*, announces the trope that has carried his history through six volumes and a century of California’s history. In succeeding volumes Starr has chronicled the dream invented, endangered, embattled and enduring. “While yet barely a name on the map, it entered American awareness as a symbol of renewal,” he writes in his preface. “Obscurely, at a distance – then with rushes of clarity and delight – Americans glimpsed a California of beauty and justice, where on the land or in well-ordered cities they might enter into prosperity and peace” (1973: vii–viii)

When the Santa Fe railroad arrived in Los Angeles in 1887, it broke the monopoly of the Southern Pacific, briefly lowering the one-way fare from Kansas City from \$125 to \$1 and creating the first land boom in Southern California (Barron et al. 2000: 54). Almost immediately, California was portrayed as a natural paradise, an image that prevailed into the first decades of the twentieth century (ibid.: 100). The rise of Hollywood as the center of motion pictures added images of urban glamour to the definition of California, while the Great Depression of the 1930s added images of rural misery and labor struggle. In the aftermath of World War II, California was no longer seen as a pre-industrial Garden of Eden. Driven by scientific and technological advances during and after the war, California was the place where the future begins.

This was not the claim of promoters and boosters. As that group of scholars that assembled in Carmel discussed West Coast culture – its architecture, its opera and jazz, its painters and theaters and museums – their confidence grew. Never mind, Stegner reports, that “half of the people cited as signs of great creative growth were in-migrants, as were half of ourselves.” That was simply the defining feature of West Coast culture. They have come to prepare the coast “as a launching platform for the future” (Stegner 1982: 108). When Stegner’s article appeared in late 1959, the idea of California as the future may have looked attractive. The state’s freeway system was not yet clogged with traffic, its master plan of education was widely admired, and its legislature was seen as a model. But the Golden State’s golden age could not last. Enter Joan Didion, the great chronicler of California disappointment.

A California native whose parents arrived in California in the years just before and after statehood in 1850, Didion and her husband, John Gregory Dunne, began writing a column called “Points West” in 1967 for the

*Saturday Evening Post*. She published some of these columns in *Slouching towards Bethlehem* in 1968, the same year that California officially adopted “The Golden State” as its state motto. Didion’s lead story, “Some Dreamers of the Golden Dream,” announces itself as “a story about love and death in the golden land,” but, typically, Didion is being ironic. It is a story of unhappy marriage, adultery, and murder in San Bernardino. In “Notes from a Native Daughter,” she writes to those who have visited Los Angeles or San Francisco and believe they have been to California, whereas it is her hometown, Sacramento, that really *is* California and “California is a place in which a boom mentality and a sense of Chekhovian loss meet in uneasy suspension” (1968: 172). We are a long way from Starr’s view of California as a symbol of renewal. If California be the future, Didion warns, the nation and the world were in trouble.

Joan Didion left California for good in 1988, but she returned to the subject of California again 15 years later with *Where I Was From*. When her husband protested that the title should properly be “Where I Am From,” she insisted on “Where I Was From” as more accurate, more definitive in its separation. Yet even in this final work, she pays tribute to the compulsion to make something of the state, a compulsion that survives even the most severe disappointment. “California has remained in some way impenetrable to me, a wearying enigma, as it has to many of us who are from there,” she writes. “We worry it, correct and revise it, try and fail to define our relationship to it and its relationship to the rest of the country” (2003: 38). Her critique of California is a serious contribution to California’s literature of disappointment, but the California she writes about no longer exists, for in Didion’s book you will find not a single person of color.

Didion’s omission is the more astonishing given the dramatic impact of immigration: the most important definer of California in the last few decades has been the growing diversity of its population. In 1962, when Governor Edmund G. Brown proclaimed “California First Days” to celebrate California’s passing New York as the nation’s most populous state, the state had nearly 17 million people, of whom 14 million were non-Hispanic white. The primary language of foreign-born Californians was English, as most had come from either Canada or Great Britain. Now, one-fourth of California’s schoolchildren come from homes where English is not the primary language (Schrag 2006: 22–4).

Late in 1999, California officially became a majority–minority state, a state in which no ethnic group was a majority. According to official estimates, California’s current population is 45 percent Anglo, 35 percent Hispanic, 11 percent Asian, 6 percent black, 2 percent multi-race, and 1 percent Native American and Asian Pacific Islander (State of California, March 2006). As of 2000, nearly nine million California residents (26

percent) were born outside of the United States (compared with 12 percent nationally) and nearly 60 percent are from Latin America – 44 percent from Mexico alone – while 33 percent are from Asia. By 2011, Latinos are projected to surpass Anglos as the largest minority group.

Mexicans account for 44 percent of the foreign-born population in California, six times the percentage of the next highest group, Filipinos. The fact that two-thirds of foreign-born families are from Mexico and other Spanish-speaking countries has sparked concern, fear, and reaction. During the 1994 election, California Governor Pete Wilson's campaign ran a television advertisement that showed Mexicans running across the California border while a voiceover ominously repeated, "They keep coming." He endorsed a ballot initiative denying public education and other services to undocumented residents. Wilson was re-elected and Proposition 187 passed with nearly 60 percent of the vote. Four years later, California voters passed Proposition 227, which dismantled the state's existing bilingual education programs and decreed that public school children be taught in English only. Cultural conservatives warned that Hispanic immigrants were not learning English and were not assimilating to core American values and that California was in danger of becoming "Mexifornia" and the US a "bilingual, bicultural" society (Hanson 2003; Huntington 2004).

The debate rages on – about how many illegal immigrants are in California and their impact on local economies and services – but some studies suggest that such fears may be based on demographic trends which are temporary. The foreign-born presence in California was 15 percent in 1980 and 26 percent in 2000, much higher than in any other state, but immigrants are now increasingly migrating to states other than California. Even if the number of immigrant arrivals in California were to remain constant, the share of Californians who are foreign-born in 2030 will still be less than 30 percent. In addition, the immigrants' average *length* of residence is increasing. From 1970 to 1990, during the phase of accelerating immigration, half of all the foreign born each decade were recently arrived, but that fraction is receding to only one-third or one-quarter of the total foreign born. English proficiency increases significantly between first-generation immigrants and those in the second generation and the proportion speaking English exclusively rises from 10 percent in the first generation to 29 percent in the second generation to 94 percent in the third generation (Ramakrishnan & Johnson 2005: 11).

Meanwhile California's culture is becoming increasingly and unselfconsciously multicultural and no recent survey of California culture that I have seen ignores this. In late 2000, the Los Angeles County Museum of Art mounted "Made in California: Art, Image, and Identity, 1900–2000," a comprehensive exhibition that explored the diversity of California art in the twentieth century. Essays that accompanied the exhibition repeatedly

acknowledged the importance of immigration in the creation of California's art, music, and literature. The University of California's definitive anthology of California literature to 1945 contains only a few non-Anglo voices – William Saroyan, Carlos Bulosan, Toshio Mori, or Jade Snow Wong – whereas a recent anthology contains native Californians like Maxine Hong Kingston, David Mas Masumoto, Yxta Maya Murray, Richard Rodriguez, and Gary Soto, not to mention immigrants like Khaled Hosseini, Chitra Divakaruni, or le thi diem thuy (Divakaruni et al. 2005).

### The Next California Culture

In California, traditional cultural forms are transplants which adapt to local conditions, while modern cultural forms are often invented here. The list of items invented in California includes Barbie dolls and the hula hoops, the Frisbee and the freeway. California is the source of trend-setting environmental regulations and low emissivity windows; digital video recorders and computer-generated imagery; iPods and search engines; the discovery and treatment of AIDS and state-sponsored stem cell research; and venture capital and venture philanthropy (*California 2007*: 14–34). The three major entertainment media of the twentieth century – radio, television, and motion pictures – depended on technologies which developed in California, flourished here as industries, and changed the way America experienced culture.

Now the new media of the twenty-first century – the internet, search engines and web.2.0 – are again developing and flourishing as industries in California and changing patterns of cultural consumption once more. In a recent article, Bill Ivey and Steven Tepper argue that nineteenth-century inventions like the phonograph, the motion picture camera, and radio broadcasting made it possible for Americans who had no access to symphony halls or theaters to experience cultural performance, albeit performances packaged by others at a distance. “Local and vernacular art and entertainment were eclipsed by a culture that was increasingly defined by the tastes of a national elite at Columbia Records, or Universal Studios, or nonprofit arts organizations,” they argue, “the amateurs at home were overshadowed by the new class of creative ‘professionals,’ and audiences were increasingly socialized to be passive consumers, awaiting their favorite radio broadcasts or sitting in darkened theaters and concert halls, applauding on cue” (Ivey & Tepper 2006).

The new technology is reducing the high costs of artistic production and the challenges of finding an audience. Computer software enables people to compose their own music, make their own films, compose their own books and then distribute them over the internet. At the same time,

thanks to the iPod or TiVo (both invented in California), cultural experiences which could only be had from one source at a specific time can now be captured for consumption when and where the consumer wants. “The combination of the rise of serious amateur art making, the explosion of choice, and the sophistication of Internet-savvy consumers will create new micromarkets, challenging the dominance of 20th century mass markets” (Ivey & Tepper 2006).

The promises of this new cultural delivery system are many: decentralization of cultural authority and production, greater opportunities for people to express themselves culturally, more exposure to cultural products from others and especially from people in distant places, and more opportunities for direct connection between people. There are also concomitant dangers: a growing divide between people who have access to these resources and people who do not, a flattening out of cultural quality, and the demise of some of the cultural organizations that have provided much of the “live” culture in recent decades. This last development has already caught the attention of Californians.

There are an estimated 10,000 cultural organizations in California, ranging in size from the multi-billion-dollar endowment of the Getty Museum in Los Angeles to small non-profit cultural organizations living from performance to performance. As their name suggests, many of these organizations cannot support themselves on the strength of ticket sales alone, but they have proliferated because of support from private foundations and public cultural agencies. Such support was justified because the commercial market was widely viewed as unable to produce cultural products of sufficient quality, ethnic variety, and popular access. While their numbers have grown since the 1960s, a recent study shows they are now challenged by shrinking audiences and diminishing funding. “Audiences at nonprofit arts organizations are generally flat or shrinking,” the report warns, “and it is generally assumed that the field of cultural institutions is overcrowded” (AEA 2006: 6).

Unlike their counterparts in Canada and Europe, California cultural organizations cannot look to government agencies for significant support. California has a population slightly larger than that of Canada, but while Canada spends \$243 million on the arts at the federal level, more than \$7 per capita, the state of California spends \$2.1 million, about 6 cents per capita (California Arts Council 2006). State support for the California Arts Council, which averaged \$21.5 million annually for the period 1997–2003, was slashed to \$1 million in the wake of fiscal crisis following the dot-com bust. Only the personal intervention of the Chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts prevented California’s Arts Council funding from being zeroed out, and though the state’s economy has recovered, funding to the Arts Council has not. More than half of the agency’s current \$3

million budget comes from proceeds from the sale of a special arts license plate. Other statewide cultural organizations, such as the California Council for the Humanities, the California Association of Museums, and the California Historical Society receive no state funding and never have.

The future of California's cultural ecosystem is still unclear, as is the future of its education system, its highway system, its prison system, and its state government. More population growth is projected and polls indicate that most Californians believe the state's infrastructure is inadequate to future demand (Baldassare 2000). The newest metaphor to describe California is as a "high stakes experiment" (Schrag 2006), a significant departure from earlier descriptors. The state is still positioned in the old tension between the real and the imagined but gone is the old Edenic innocence. If California continues to offer a glimpse of the world's future, it is not because it has the solutions, but because it is encountering the challenges first.

### The California Hope

I am not a disinterested observer of this experiment. I have a personal stake in how California's culture is defined. Several years ago, I interviewed Californians from different parts of the state and different walks of life – writers, artists, scientists, activists, educators, public officials – some prominent, some not, some natives, some not. I wanted to know what, if anything, it meant to be a Californian. The state's diversity showed itself in the answers I heard, of course, but after the first dozen or so, I found that one particular word kept surfacing: hope. These people or their parents or grandparents may have been drawn to California because of a dream – something as glorious as gold or as modest as a good job and good weather. They often encountered realities that tested or even destroyed those initial images or dreams. But those who stayed – and everyone I interviewed had obviously stayed – spoke about the persistence of hope which they identified with California.

As a result of the answers I heard, I can no longer think of California as a culture defined by dreams. A dream is somehow too insubstantial, too subjective, to propel and sustain a living culture. A dream is what people project on to the state before they arrive here, and the only thing that makes it a California dream is their chosen destination, their belief that California is a place where one can change one's place, one's neighbors, and make a new start. This has proven to be true often enough to encourage many to come here, but disappointment is what they feel when those dreams are not confirmed by their experience here. Those who try to

impose their dreams on the landscape, who meet neighbors they do not like or who do not like them, who never make California home, find the California dream turns into the California disappointment. This too has proven to be true often enough to drive people from the state. But dream and disappointment do not and cannot define California culture. Something more durable defines the culture that people who live here are creating, and hope is as good a word for this as any.

California has no special claim to being a culture of hope, of course. Every culture is necessarily a culture of hope, for every culture offers its people stories about what is worth living for, exemplary lives, resources for explaining and living through misfortune. But because people from so many parts of the world have come to California, because it remains at the forefront of so many technological innovations that will shape the culture of the future, and because it has a long history as a showcase for individual and social possibility, the contours of California hope continue to interest and influence the world.

In order to see all of California, you have to rise more than 1,000 miles above its surface. I have spent most of this essay defining California from a great distance in order not to be overwhelmed by the diversity of its surface features. In order to see examples of hope, however, we need to meet a few real Californians. These people are not particularly powerful or influential people, but the lives they are living accurately reflect the fundamental hope that is defining contemporary California's culture.

Pai Yang doesn't know the exact year of her birth; it was either 1969 or 1970, when what Americans call the Vietnam War spilled into Cambodia and Laos as well and her people, the Hmong, were fighting a secret war for the United States. When the Americans withdrew, her family fled to a refugee camp in Thailand, from where they were flown to Oregon under the sponsorship of a church. After five months as the only refugee family there, they moved to Iowa where there was a large Hmong community. When she was 10, the family came to Fresno to participate in the first Hmong New Year celebration there. They decided to stay in California because for Hmong elders, used to a warm climate year round, Fresno's midwinter sunshine was far preferable to the snows of Iowa.

The Hmong had not left their homeland voluntarily, but fled the aftermath of the war in 1975 as refugees. They came not intending to stay and talked always about returning, a thought that sustained them through the prejudice and discrimination they had encountered in Fresno. By the 1990s, though, their children had begun calling America home and the elders began to realize they were not going to return. Like other immigrant communities before them, the Hmong community began to organize itself to obtain the economic and social services it needed in this new land, and they began to make a home in California.

The Hmong are a mountain people, and Fresno sits in a very wide valley, flanked by the Sierra Nevada range to the east. Pai occasionally takes community elders to the mountains of Yosemite National Park, for a taste of the freedom, the freshness of the air they once knew in Laos. She takes them to Glacier Point, which overlooks Yosemite Valley and the granite peaks of the Yosemite back country, one of the most spectacular views on the face of the earth. But for the Hmong elders, the view is a painful reminder of the home they have left and will never see again. "Some of them start crying," Pai told me, "not just crying, but howling, you know? And loud, because they miss the old home so much." For the first generation, the costs of immigration are high.

The New Year's festival in Fresno that first brought Pai Yang and her family to the city is the largest festival of its kind, attracting thousands of Hmong from around the country and the world. This week-long celebration of their traditional music, food, and dance not only brings the Hmong community together, it serves as an occasion for strengthening connections with the rest of Fresno. Pai Yang is here to stay, working as a community organizer to create a place for her people. When I spoke with her, she was pregnant with her second child. On her desk was a picture of the first, a four-year-old daughter with a big smile. "Right now, you ask her, 'where are you from?' she says 'I'm from California.' And she'll point towards California." What's her name, I asked. "Sunshine," said Pai Yang. "Sunshine."

Malcolm Margolin was born in Boston and his first impression of California came from three wild men on motorcycles who pulled up in front of a local bar and told him they were from San Bernardino. The name conjured up the usual images of beaches and palm trees and beautiful women in skimpy bathing suits (San Bernardino, far from the ocean, sits on the edge of the Mojave Desert). Malcolm and his wife drove to California in 1967 and were captivated by the beauty of Yosemite Valley and the vibrancy of street life in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco. The next year they moved to California.

In 1974 Margolin launched the publishing company that became Heyday Books by single-handedly writing, typesetting, designing, and distributing a natural history guidebook of the hills and shoreline of the eastern San Francisco Bay. He then wrote and published *The Oblone Way*, a reconstruction of the life of the original inhabitants of the San Francisco Bay Area that became a California classic. At a time when most Californians were unaware that any Indians still lived in California, Margolin began publishing books by and about California Indians. His newsletter, *News from Native California*, created a network among indigenous people and their advocates that has helped create and sustain a cultural renaissance among California Indians.

Now Heyday Books is one of the state's most important regional publishers, with a booklist essential to anyone who cares about California's cultural and natural history. A migrant from the Atlantic coast, he came to California and found deep wisdom in indigenous cultures few Californians knew. "These are people that have been around for ten or twelve thousand years, and they have in their bone, in their tissue, in their tonality, something that echoes a kind of California that those of us who are guests never see," he told me. "It's a sadder California, a deeper California, a California that moves along more slow-moving currents. These for me are the true Californians."

Alice Waters was a teenager when her family moved to Southern California. She opened Chez Panisse restaurant in Berkeley in 1971 and began featuring meals made with locally grown, seasonal produce. As she and other chefs experimented with traditional recipes, a recognizable "California cuisine" emerged, more as a set of practices than a set of recipes. It doesn't matter if a combination of ingredients is traditional or not. What matters is whether the ingredients are fresh and tasty. California cuisine uses dishes from other cuisines and fills them with local content.

Waters herself does not care for the term "California cuisine." "Cuisine," she believes, implies methods of food selection and preparation that have stood the test of centuries, while what she calls California cooking is still a work in progress. California cooking is "very influenced by Mediterranean cooking, but with some dishes that feel more unique because of the ways that we have integrated influences, whether they're Asian influences or Native American or whatever influences into what we are doing right here." In the same way, California's own culture is a work in progress, built originally on a European base but increasingly influenced by cultures from around the world, a culture old enough to have birthed some recognizable trends, but too young to merit a distinct definition.

Waters' insistence on using local seasonable produce led her inevitably to concern for the sources of that produce, the land it grows on, the way it is grown, and the people who grow it. Her restaurant has developed a network of local farmers and ranchers dedicated to sustainable agricultural practices. She is a strong advocate for farmers' markets, whose numbers have grown in California from a handful in the 1970s to over 500 today. She founded the Edible Schoolyard at a local middle school, a project in which students grow and prepare their own food and which integrates that experience into the school's curriculum. Waters insists that the everyday act of eating a meal can make us mindful of our connections to the farmer and the land.

David Mas Masumoto is the kind of peach farmer Alice Waters adores. Born and raised in Selma in the southern San Joaquin Valley, his Japanese grandfathers were both second sons, which meant they would not inherit

land in Japan, and when they landed in California looking for a better life, they naturally gravitated toward the Central Valley, the agricultural heartland of California. Mas's family chose California not once, but twice: first, when they came to California, and again after they were released from the relocation camp in Arizona where the American government confined them during World War II. They returned to Selma and eventually were able to buy the small farm on which Mas was later born.

Mas's farm is an anomaly of California agriculture. It is small (80 acres) and farmed by his family and seasonal agricultural workers. He left the Valley to attend the University of California, Berkeley, never intending to return, but decided to do so both to make a living and to give voice to the people that lived there. His book, *Epitaph for a Peach*, chronicles a season trying to grow and market a peach that, while delicious, is shunned by supermarkets because it is "ugly" and doesn't ship well.

Much of California produce is grown on huge mechanized farms – "factories in the field," as Carey McWilliams called them. Mas and other family farmers in California have to struggle to survive, and Mas has found ingenious ways to connect his produce with the people who consume it. For the past several years, he has offered some of his peach trees for "adoption." The people who are approved as "parents" receive e-mail reports on their peach tree's progress throughout the growing season and then come to his farm on two summer weekends to harvest the fruit from their tree. The whole experience puts city dwellers in touch with the vagaries of weather that make farming so risky and makes them understand that produce does not come from supermarkets, it comes from a particular place inhabited by particular people.

Mas lives in multicultural California. His daughter's high school classroom held Latinos, Japanese Americans, Southeast Asian, German Mennonites, and Portuguese, all reading John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* and discussing what it means to come to a place and call it home. That diversity is what makes him feel like a Californian; that, and the ability to invent a life. We normally think immigrants come to California to remake themselves, but Mas believes native Californians can and do. "I actually think that, as a native Californian, there's this constant ability to renew yourself," he told me as we talked on his front porch. "Traditions have helped us make connections but hasn't prevent us from doing things, whereas in rural America, the Midwest, traditions sometimes stop change." Mas Masumoto, roots deep in California soil, is one face of California culture.

Whether refugee, immigrant, or native Californian, these four people illustrate what is happening in contemporary California culture at ground level. Pai Yang, born abroad, brings her talents and her Hmong heritage to the culture. Malcolm Margolin makes available the wisdom of

California's first cultures, so that the state's future can learn from its past. Alice Waters plants a French restaurant in California soil and seeds a movement based on the most basic cultural activity. Mas Masumoto connects his family farm to the people who eat his produce and gives a voice to small, sustainable agriculture in the midst of industrial agriculture.

The dreams that bring people to California are various, but when people make the choice to come here, an unexpected consequence has been to find they are among very diverse people who all have made the same choice. The California hope that has emerged in the last generation embraces this consequence, hoping that people from different cultures might find a way to live and thrive together, taking risks and working hard to enrich themselves economically, and helping and enriching one another culturally and spiritually as well. Both dreams and hopes are imaginary things, but hopes are seasoned by experience where dreams are not. Peter Schrag ends his recent book by describing the challenge facing California in stark terms: "In trying to forge a modern postindustrial democratic society not only from its cultural diversity but also from a population consisting in considerable part of Third World immigrants, California was undertaking something that had never been done in human history" (Schrag 2006: 262).

Here again we find the old tension between the real and the imagined. California is no longer Eden, no longer a dream and therefore no longer a disappointment, but a place where the future is being invented. California didn't intend to become a multicultural population, but it is one. As California goes, so goes the world, not because California has cornered the market on solutions, but because California is encountering the challenges early and intensely. If the culture of hope is to survive and prevail, California will need the kind of cultural hope that my four examples embody. A happy outcome is far from assured, but the culture being forged in California will continue to be the focus of world attention – for California, once America only more so, has become the world, only more so.

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