

Round Table California History at the College Level

IN OCTOBER OF 2018, *California History* solicited responses from ten professors who have taught California History—and, in one case, California Geography—at the college level. Although this group represents a fraction of all faculty teaching these courses throughout the state, the responses are quite significant and probably fairly representative. While each professor reveals unique conceptualizations, teaching strategies, and reading assignments, there is also a lot of commonality among them. Chief among their observations is the inherent curiosity of studying a land so immense, and the challenges and opportunities of teaching such a diverse body of students. Ultimately, their responses are a lively reminder of the importance—perhaps urgency—of teaching, learning, and writing about California.

CH: Why is teaching California History relevant, in your view?

Robert W. Cherny, Professor emeritus of History, San Francisco State University: An informed understanding of the state's history is crucial for meaningful participation in the state's civic life.

William Deverell, Professor of History, University of Southern California: I'm lucky to be able to teach the history of California *in California*. It thrills me to teach a class to a couple of hundred undergraduates who have all kinds of ideas about California and experiences either as or in California. Many of my students are native, many are new to California, and most – I'd suspect – will spend great chunks of their lives in California. I feel like I am working with them as the leaders of California's future, and I always feel obligated to remind them that the past is only barely behind us: it exerts power on us yet, it is what created the conditions of our contemporary world, and it is our only lesson plan for moving ahead into a future of greater access, equality, and opportunity for all.

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Philip Garone, Professor of History, California State University, Stanislaus: There are so many reasons why teaching California history is relevant. As our most populous state, California has had, and will continue to have, an outsized influence on national politics and, indeed, has been among the state leaders in grappling with contemporary climate change, for example. California also has been at the forefront of conservationist and environmentalist battles for more than a century—and therefore provides useful lessons about shifting public attitudes toward the natural world and of the role of humans within it. On the other hand, California has had its share of ugly ethnic and racial politics, from the near destruction of our Native American population, to supporting Chinese exclusion, to late-twentieth century anti-immigrant policies. As such, California presents a state-level example of much larger national issues and trends, and therefore provides an enlightening insight into the trajectory of American politics and definitions of what it means to be an “American.”

Glen Gendzel, Professor of History, San José State University: Our state is full of people who hunger for knowledge about this wonderful place we live. So many of my students are Californians by choice or by their parents’ choice. A lot of them seem to lack basic knowledge about how California evolved, but they want to know because they live here and everything they see demands explanation. Even students who attended 4th grade in California schools seem to have retained little relevant information from their required state history instruction, though many of them remember building mission models and panning for gold, of course. A place full of people from diverse places and backgrounds really needs a story to which they can all relate. It need not be a unitary narrative that inevitably leaves some people feeling left out. Rather, it should be a kaleidoscopic grand epic of inclusion that assures everyone that they belong here and that they are not the only ones who can claim that right. Struggles over immigration, nativism, conflict, and assimilation make this sort of history obviously relevant and therefore I try to teach about these subjects as much as possible. But my students generally want to know how California got this way – so rich, so poor, so crowded, so expensive, so divided, so innovative, so diverse, so dynamic, so big in general. I try to help them understand all that.

Jessica Kim, Associate Professor of History, California State University, Northridge: In addition to being a California historian I am also a public historian and I love teaching place-based history. I am also lucky to live and teach in California so my students and I can make (southern) California our laboratory. For example, in one iteration of my California history class, the students and I read academic work on some aspect of California history one week and then explored a public history site related to that theme the next. We read divergent academic perspectives on the history of the California missions and then visited the San Fernando Mission. Students then wrote reflective papers on the different perspectives presented by the scholars and the mission. We did a similar exercise with the history of Olvera Street in downtown Los Angeles. Not only were these excursions and exercises fun but they also helped students see how historical narratives about California can diverge, overlap, shape relationships of power, and operate in the contemporary moment.

Elizabeth Lobb, Professor of Geography, Mt. San Antonio College: As you know, I teach California Geography, which is particularly important today. California has the largest and

most diverse population in the country. California is connected to the global economy in important ways and leads in developing progressive policies to address global warming/climate change. Students living in California, particularly Southern California, are often unaware of the importance their region holds nationally and internationally. In addition to developing foundational knowledge about California's social, economic, cultural and urban place in the world, California Geography also develops an understanding of the physical processes that shape the state. It is particularly relevant to study California and its geography as humans all across the globe are faced with significant challenges in adapting to changes in physical processes and learning to develop more sustainable approaches to human interaction with the environment.

Michael F. Magliari, Professor of History, California State University, Chico: The teaching of state and local history allows students to gain a greater understanding and appreciation of their most familiar and immediate daily surroundings, often the surroundings in which they were born, raised, and spent most, if not all, of their lives. For many students, state history is consequently more engaging and personally meaningful than histories focused at the more “distant” national or global levels. At the same time, those nationally and globally focused histories can frequently be made more understandable and “relevant” when taught via state and locally based case studies. To give just one very obvious example, the history of Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal can quite easily be communicated by focusing on all the relief programs and public works projects that the New Dealers brought to California. Again and again, California provides compelling case studies for understanding larger national and even international events and trends.

Allison Varzally, Professor of History, California State University, Fullerton: When I teach California history it is typically to young Californians, students who have some familiarity with California because they took a course on California as part of their fourth-grade curriculum. Teaching this subject seems like a way of preparing these young people for a more engaged kind of citizenship, and to be more informed and thoughtful in their everyday lives. I would also say that I always open the classes by asking why there is a dedicated class about California at a California university but not elsewhere. Usually, students insist that California is special. If the state's not predictive of other places, it might at least influence other places in the West, the nation, and the World.

Felicia Viator, Assistant Professor of History, San Francisco State University: California History is a crucial lens for understanding the whole nation. There are all these big themes many of us cover when we teach American History: the American Dream, Manifest Destiny, the displacement of Native people, immigration and nativism, conflicts between labor and capital, political experimentation, racial diversity and inequality, activism and social change, the urban-rural divide, expansion of military power. California History throws all of these processes into high relief. It's definitely a unique region with a unique history, of course. But, as I remind my students, California isn't a place apart from the rest of the nation in the way we might assume; it's a window in.

Natale Zappia, Associate Professor of History, Whittier College: California's history offers a unique lens into the rest of the nation's past—its most hopeful and darkest predilections.

Until more recent years, the location of the state has relegated it to the “western” and “modern” histories of the United States. Digging deeper into the multiple layers of California beyond the “big three” moments (missions, Gold Rush, Hollywood) forces students (and teachers) to reorient the directionality of U.S. and world history. Perched on the Pacific Rim, California has acted as a node in the early modern world economy as other early American Atlantic colonies and cities also became interlinked with global trade. Native California was the most populous and culturally diverse place within Indigenous North America. So California has always been “the place.” The state and its people will continue to shape world history.

CH: *What are the most important themes you cover in your class?*

Robert W. Cherny: There have been competing perspectives over time regarding the development of the state’s economy, society, and polity, and regarding the relation between and among California, the US, and the world.

William Deverell: My course has gotten more global over time – California as a global crossroads for centuries and California as a place of undeniably robust global influence and significance. The second theme is California as a case study of diversity – and the reaction and reception of such diversity over time. Finally, and it sounds simple, I spend more time these days on the sheer scale of the place.

Philip Garone: It’s difficult to narrow it down to just two or three, but I would say that the main themes in my course are Native American history (before, during, and after the Gold Rush); reclamation, the development of large-scale irrigated agriculture, and the construction of the state’s massive hydraulic infrastructure (all of which are particularly relevant to the Central Valley, where I teach); and the politics of race, ethnicity, and class.

Glen Gendzel: It’s a cliché to say that diversity is an important theme in California history, but it surely is by any reckoning. The key is to go beyond the simplistic observation that California has always been diverse; we have to teach about structures of dominance, intergroup conflicts, and struggles for equality and justice that have been vital features of the California experience with diversity. We have to teach about migration, immigration, nativism, discrimination, violence, genocide, resistance, survival, tolerance, intolerance, and eventual triumph for lots of people who have made California their home. Another theme is environmental adaptation, destruction, manipulation, and preservation which has great relevance in a state with such a wonderful natural setting that continues to draw people from around the world just to look at it. Another theme that I teach about is innovation: how did California become known as the world’s greatest incubator for new ideas in culture, politics, technology, and business? This particular theme is always popular in Silicon Valley, where I teach, so I try to address it. I also try to get students thinking about California’s allure for people from other states and around the world, i.e., the California mystique, which makes us the lodestone for so much attention, both positive and negative.

Jessica Kim: I could say a lot on this subject but I’m limit myself to these: Migration and immigration; Race and ethnicity; California as “trendsetter” for the nation (and whether or not this adage is true)

Elizabeth Lobb: In the first half of the course we talk about the evolution of California's physical landscapes. I divide this up into two two sub-sections: plate tectonics and other processes shaping landforms and climate/weather. These are topics students know very little about. So understanding the placement of mountains and understanding the tectonic activities that are occurring essentially at their feet is I think of particular relevance to students. They've all experienced earthquakes but they often don't have any idea what they actually are! And then the other portion of the physical geography is climate and weather, which is actually my favorite portion. Students know surprisingly little about California's climate even though they live here. And nine times out of ten they think we live in a desert here in Los Angeles and we do not live in a desert. So we talk about the difference between desert and Mediterranean climates. And they should leave with an understanding not only of California's basic weather patterns and climate but also the general controls that influence weather and climate all over the world, things like latitude, the role of mountain ranges, atmospheric pressure, proximity to ocean/coasts and winds. Most of my students have experienced our local winds, the Santa Anas, and come to have a better understanding of their connection to fire danger. The remainder of the course looks at the human geography of the state, but before jumping into that in detail we spend time discussing water which connects the human and physical themes, of course. We focus on the consequences of commodifying water, moving that water around, and making state water policy. For the human side of California geography, we focus on the sequence of occupants, and how those occupants have left their own distinctive imprint on the landscape.

Michael F. Magliari: Among the most important and basic themes running through my California history courses are, first, environmental changes and challenges that I usually address by focusing on the history of California agriculture, urban growth, and the state's major water projects, and, second, California's repeated, and often violent, cycles of racial and ethnic conflicts, and accommodations.

Allison Varzally: Coming out of my own research interests I have really stressed the importance of racial diversity in California history and insist that diversity is not just a recent development, although it has obviously intensified since immigration reforms have moved us towards a more global society. But California has always been diverse. Looking at the indigenous communities which were more varied in language and culture here than any in other region of the Americas. We track that diversity to the present day. I think another striking theme has been the environment: whether teaching the Fall or the Spring, there's usually some regional natural disaster that may have some social or historical significance. So we talk a lot about the opportunities of California's climate and landscape, but also the dangers. And then I think the third theme we emphasize is the idea that California is a place in the mind, and a place for transformation and recovery and opportunity. Of course, that theme forces us to also acknowledge the reality of perpetual inequality and poverty.

Felicia Viator: The African American experience in California is core to my curriculum. The conventional way to teach this theme, and the way textbooks tend to approach it, is to dedicate a lecture or two to black migration during World War II and, perhaps, the rise of Black Power in Oakland and Los Angeles. These are definitely watershed moments in the history of Black

California, and I cover them pretty thoroughly. But I also try to demonstrate to my students how integral African Americans were to the *whole* of California History. Without that piece of the puzzle, it's impossible to see, for instance, how truly dynamic Gold Rush society was, or how heated the state-making process was, or the creative ways Californians coped with crisis during the Great Depression. I also spend lots of time encouraging my students to think deeply about California mythologies, especially those that have drawn people here and the most stubborn myths that still persist. For example, we consider 16th century lore about Island California with its Amazonian women and man-eating beasts. We explore the legends of the Mexican Dons and the New El Dorado. We take a look at California as the Land of Sunshine and Health, as Holy Salvation, as the Black Promised Land, and as a Liberal Oasis.

Natale Zappia: The most important themes I teach include “California as Indigenous” and “California as Pacific.” Native Americans engaged in a multifaceted and expansive economy linking Northern and Southern California as well as with networks spilling far beyond its present borders. The very roads and other infrastructure we modern Californians rely on today rest upon older Indigenous structures. The expansion of the mission economy similarly relied on earlier Native networks. At the same time, students must learn of the horrific demographic, political-economic, and cultural devastation unleashed by non-Native New Spain, Mexico, and Anglo-America. The genocide unleashed by the Gold Rush serves as one of the most important aspects of my California history courses because students are largely unaware of it. This fact alone makes teaching California history and the impacts of the Gold Rush an essential lesson about memory, public history, and erasure.

CH: *What are the greatest challenges you face when teaching California History?*

Robert W. Cherny: The students tend to be from various majors and to be taking the course for various reasons: some to meet an upper-division GE requirement or to meet the requirement in US history and government, some because they are credential candidates, and relatively few because they are history majors. Many if not most have not taken other upper-division history courses, and many if not most will not take another upper-division history course. Most are likely to become long-term residents of California and participate in various ways in its civic life.

The challenges are to reach this diverse group of students, to get them interested in the subject matter (as opposed to ticking off one more required course), and to get them to think about California in the ways that historians do. For the multiple-subject credential candidates, an additional challenge is not only to get them to think critically about California history but also to prepare them to present California history in a meaningful way in the 4th grade. For the single-subject credential candidates, an additional challenge is to get them to think about the ways that California history intersects with the middle- and high-school courses they will be teaching in US and world history. For all of them, there is a challenge in getting them to read the assigned readings. And for all of them, the most important challenge is to get them to think critically about their own role as long-term residents of California.

The last time I taught the course, I assigned one chapter in the text each week, and the first class meeting of each week began with a quiz over the subject matter of that chapter; it was a

quiz that required them to fill in a blank or write a sentence as an answer—no multiple-choice or T-F. Most of the answers were obvious for anyone who did the reading, but the last question was always something like, why is this relevant today? Once they completed the quiz and handed it in, I asked the class to provide their answers to the various questions, discussed the varying answers, and left plenty of time for a directed discussion of their answers to the last question. (Any thoughtful answer was usually acceptable for the final question.) The class met twice a week. For the second class meeting each week, I typically gave a lecture that added more depth to some aspect of the topic for the week.

William Deverell: I try always to create and sustain a kind of pedagogical tension in the class between California as exceptional and California as a place and history through which we can understand, for example, great swaths of the history of the United States. It is a tension. I want them to understand the place, and that requires borders of time and space. But I want to always look beyond California's borders, to look south, north, east and west, to look across the continent, to look across the Pacific. And that requires real focus, on my part and on the part of my students, to try to keep it all straight. It's hard. But I also find that tension in a classroom is almost always a good thing. It keeps us on our toes and keeps us awake.

Philip Garone: This is something I've been thinking about for a long time, and I find that the challenges fall (broadly) into two major areas that are rather distinct from each other. First, many of my students are economically disadvantaged (as is the case with many of the California State University campuses), and one of the many consequences of that circumstance is that they have had little opportunity to explore and get to know much of their home state. San Francisco and Yosemite, for example, are each only two hours away, but few of my students have been to either. It is challenging to build student interest in the history and issues facing the numerous and varied parts of our state to which they have no real connection. Second, because my course serves, fairly equally, History majors and Liberal Studies majors, the latter of whom are preparing for teaching careers in elementary education, I face the challenge of designing it in such a way that is equally relevant to future K-8 teachers—in terms of meeting Subject Matter requirements that they will in turn pass on to their own students—as it is to budding historians who may possibly be contemplating more advanced studies in graduate school.

Glen Gendzel: As historians, we are fond of books; we love to read them and assign them to our students. I have a lot of students who love books, too, and they read avidly; but I surely wish I had more students like that. Too many of today's college students are not interested in heavy, sustained reading as a way of learning. For historians, this presents a difficult challenge because we can't herd our students into time machines and take them back in time to observe the past directly. We can only present them with documents from the past, or books about the past, and urge them to read so that the implicit act of time travel occurs in their heads, through imagination, by entering past experience via written accounts of that experience, both primary and secondary. I am frustrated by the rather large proportion of students who don't want to read, or read much, if they can help it, which makes it tough to teach history. Sometimes, ESL issues are often involved, so I try to use lots of images in class and I try to explain things in many different ways in hopes that LEP (Limited English Proficient)

students will eventually catch on. But it's a constant challenge. The upside is that my classrooms are incredibly diverse in every sense of the word—not just racially, ethnically, and linguistically, but in terms of age, class, income, occupation, orientation, ideology, awareness, experience, preparation, and so on across seemingly infinite vectors—which makes for a lot of heady discussion. I learn from my students all the time.

Jessica Kim: Sometimes teaching state history seems somewhat arbitrary, even parochial. Do the borders of an individual state *really* demarcate a history substantially different than the larger nation? In some instances, yes. And at certain moments this is stunningly true in California. But in other moments the history of California is really just a part of larger national trends and it feels artificial to parse the regional or state from the national. Ultimately, I suppose the tension between the regional or state and the greater nation is both one of the challenges of teaching state history and one of its more interesting dimensions.

Elizabeth Lobb: Basic geographic illiteracy. I find students can't even name the Sierra Nevada let alone find the range on a map. So that maybe one challenge, but the other obvious challenge – which is typical of community college in general – is just the enormous range of ability and experience. I teach a number of vets who obviously have a wealth of experience and, in the same class, students who are straight out of high school and have never left Covina. But I've also noticed a hopeful change over last twenty years I've been teaching: students today are more aware of their lack of geographic knowledge and more interested in correcting that. I think this is a function of globalization and, more specifically, the increased proportion of immigrants in the classroom. They're just more tied into the world than they used to be. They are global consumers and they're really competing on a global basis now. They feel that.

Michael F. Magliari: Here at California State University, Chico, I am saddled (thanks to reasons related to various bureaucratic and programmatic demands rather than the concerns of good pedagogy) with a one-semester-only approach to California history. This makes it impossible for me to cover all the important and fascinating topics I'd like to address at something more than a cursory level. I envy those who are able to teach a two-semester or three-quarter sequence of California history, which is what we had when I was a history major at UC Davis.

Allison Varzally: I think one great challenge is to make California unfamiliar to the students. They sometimes think that California history is just a description of their own lives, and so providing them enough materials to see their lives in a broader context is always a challenge. So I'm always trying to find the right reading for undergraduates.

Felicia Viator: At San Francisco State, California History is an upper division course that fulfills a long list of university requirements for graduation, including the G.E. It's a popular course because it allows students to check a bunch of boxes in one shot. That means huge classes filled with students from many disciplines—lots of juniors and seniors who are declared in nearly every major but history. The enrollment is always high, as with the other history survey courses, but unlike those, it isn't a natural gateway to the History major. In fact, for many SF State students, especially junior transfers, it's the only history class they'll take. In other words, when I teach California History, I'm teaching a motley crew with a wide

range of skills and wildly varying levels of interest in history. So I have two challenges (or opportunities, really). The first is to teach to a broad, diverse audience in a way that encourages enthusiastic engagement and real success. Luckily, most SF State students have grown up in California and have some personal connection to the themes covered in class. As long as I present entertaining stories and provocative questions, they're along for the ride. But the other more important thing is that I have to figure out how to teach things like critical analysis and historical empathy in ways that non-history students will find valuable and useful.

Natale Zappia: Shaking students loose from the “inevitability” of “East to West.” I find this especially vexing as an East Coast transplant. Over the years, I still find students (the vast majority from California) that think California history doesn't really begin until the nineteenth century.

CH: *What are the best books/texts/articles you assign in your California History course?*

Robert W. Cherny: I'd like to think that the best text was Robert Cherny, Richard Griswold del Castillo, and Gretchen Lemke-Santangelo, *Competing Visions: A History of California* (2nd edn., Wadsworth/Cengage, 2014; 1st edn., Houghton Mifflin, 2005). One of things we set out to do in creating that text was to organize it in such a way that there would be one chapter per week, so that instructors would be able to add their own specialized readings without overloading students who most likely are in the class to satisfy a graduation requirement. Unfortunately, the current publisher seems not to be interested in a 3rd edition. I also like Irwin, et al., *The Elusive Eden*, and Rawls, *California*. In addition to one chapter per week in the text, I assigned additional readings that I created online (the university had a system called I-Learn), including primary sources, selected articles, and other material, e.g., Sherman's account of the Vigilantes, Bryce's chapter on California, *Yick Wo v. Hopkins*, Ginsburg's *Howl*, and Peter Shrag on CA politics in the late 20th century.

William Deverell: Reading Miriam Pawel's *Browns of California* for the first time, and I know it will go well. It's sweeping history and very thoughtful biography, all pulled through 150 years of California history. We often read Don Waldie, as I am always proselytizing that book and that thinker. We are reading Dawn Mabalon's Central Valley portrait of Filipino American history, as I want students to know that history and to know what an accomplishment that book is, as well as what a tragic loss to our community of scholars her recent death represents. We read David Iglar's *Great Ocean*: crisp, thematic chapters on the west of the west that the Pacific was, is, and will be.

Philip Garone: I vary the syllabus with each iteration of the course, mixing slightly older path-breaking works with more recent scholarship, and thus have assigned a wide range of books over the years. I'm a little hesitant to provide a short list, in that I do not wish to exclude some of the fine works that I have used successfully in this class, but the ones I return to regularly include Carolyn Merchant's edited volume, *Green versus Gold: Sources in California's Environmental History*, which contains an excellent selection of both primary source documents and excerpts from influential secondary sources. My students continue to gain a great deal of understanding about the challenges that faced California Native Americans, including in the hinterland of my university (the San Joaquin Valley and adjacent Sierra Nevada foothills),

from Albert L. Hurtado's *Indian Survival on the California Frontier*. Among the several fine textbooks that are available, I prefer *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California* (co-authored by Richard B. Rice, William A. Bullough, Richard J. Orsi, and Mary Ann Irwin) because of the detailed coverage that it provides for environmental history while still offering full coverage of more "traditional" topics. I also assign at least one book that is specifically about the Central Valley, as I find that this approach works well to hold my students' interest and to help them gain a deeper understanding of the part of the state in which they live. I have assigned *The King of California: J.G. Boswell and the Making of a Secret American Empire*, by Mark Arax and Rick Wartzman, because of its relevance for the history of agriculture, race and ethnicity, and the environment. Finally, I assign my own *The Fall and Rise of the Wetlands of California's Great Central Valley*, which covers the environmental transformation of the entire Central Valley from the Native American period to the present—from the valley's dramatic loss of wetlands, riparian forests, and native grasslands for the sake of reclamation and agricultural development, to the reasons underlying more recent protection and restoration of those ecosystems and the wildlife that they support. Throughout, it engages with larger questions and challenges of Western water development and resource conservation.

Glen Gendzel: I like to teach with primary sources and secondary sources that make heavy use of primary sources, rather than a single textbook. I use a lot of short documents and essays, and I try to skew the balance ever so slightly towards Northern California so that my students can relate, given that almost all of them live in the Bay Area. These days, I usually assign some combination of these books: Betty Goerke, *Chief Marin: Leader, Rebel and Legend*; Linda Heidenreich, *"This Land Was Mexican Once": Histories of Resistance from Northern California*; Jo Ann Levy, *They Saw the Elephant: Women in the California Gold Rush*; Jean Pfaelzer, *Driven Out: The Forgotten War Against Chinese Americans*; Yoshiko Uchida, *Desert Exile: The Uprooting of a Japanese-American Family*; Kirse Granat May, *Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture, 1955-1966*; Peter Schrag, *California: America's High-Stakes Experiment*; and various chapters from Kevin Starr, among other writers.

Other books, or portions thereof, that I have assigned in the past include Joshua Paddison, ed., *A World Transformed: Firsthand Accounts of California before the Gold Rush*; Rose Marie Beebe and Robert Senkewicz, eds., *Lands of Promise and Despair: Chronicles of Early California* and *Testimonios: Early California through the Eyes of Women*; Kat Anderson, *Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California's Natural Resources*; Stephen Pitti, *The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican Americans*; Terry Beers, ed., *Gunfight at Mussel Slough: Evolution of a Western Myth*; Philip Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself*; T. C. Boyle, *The Tortilla Curtain*; Peter Schrag, *Paradise Lost: California's Experience, America's Future*; Elaine Elinson and Stan Yogi, *Wherever There's a Fight: How Runaway Slaves, Suffragists, Immigrants, Strikers, and Poets Shaped Civil Liberties in California*; and many others I can't remember right now. In the future, I plan to use Allison Varzally, *Making a Non-White America: Californians Coloring Outside Ethnic Lines* and Mark Brilliant, *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California* because I think these books will connect with the multicultural lives of so many of my students these days.

Jessica Kim: This list could certainly be much longer but in addition to teaching California through public history (here I use texts such as Dolores Hayden's classic *The Power of Place*), I also love teaching California history through narrative, particularly migrant narratives. I have paired novels and memoirs with peer-reviewed articles to approach a theme relevant to immigration and migration for a particular week and the students and I enjoying parsing how personal narratives reflect larger political or socio-economic trends. For example, I have taught Carlos Bulosan's poignant *America is in the Heart*, John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*, and T. C. Boyle's *Tortilla Curtain*. Over the course of the semester, the students and I compare and contrast these migrant narratives and experiences across time periods and paying particular attention to race and ethnicity. Students seem to particularly enjoy *Tortilla Curtain* as it says so much about contemporary America.

Elizabeth Lobb: Unlike in history, geography has produced fewer great books on California. The main one used in college geography classrooms today is William Selby's, *Rediscovering the Golden State*. It certainly has its strengths, particularly on the physical geography side. I also have students use Google Earth, which is a great tool for improving student understanding of physical geography and spatial relationships. But on the human geography side, there is much less strong material. I end up assembling material for that subject including chapters from Davis' *City of Quartz*, and several academic articles. I think there is a real need for a textbook that covers both physical and human geography with equal sophistication.

Michael F. Magliari: Ever since I began teaching California history at Chico State in the Fall semester of 1990, I have assigned as my required textbook *The Elusive Eden: A New History of California*. Now in its 4th edition, *The Elusive Eden* is well written, clearly organized, and nicely illustrated. It has always been received enthusiastically by my students, many of whom are, ordinarily, not great fans of textbooks! *The Elusive Eden*, however, consistently has been a winner for me in the classroom. Because I've organized my California course around a "controversies" approach that emphasizes hotly contested issues and historiographic debates, I supplement *The Elusive Eden* with professional journal articles (now obtainable on-line and in full text via JSTOR and AHL) that provide conflicting interpretations of specific topics such as the Missions, the Gold Rush, the Big Four, the Los Angeles-Owens Valley Aqueduct, the Japanese American internment camps, etc. I typically assign anywhere from two to four articles per controversy, along with the relevant sections of *The Elusive Eden*.

Allison Varzally: You know, it is an oldie but I still use Chan and Olin's *Major Problems in California History* because of its great primary materials. Of course, it concludes in the 1990s, so it has its limitations. I really like Iglar's *Great Ocean: Pacific Worlds from Captain Cook to the Gold Rush*, and having students think about California not as the end of the United States but as the edge of the Pacific and as part of a set of exchanges and relationships prior to westward expansion. I love Kelly Lytle Hernández's, *City of Inmates*. It is really provocative and relevant, particularly given the recent stories of detention and deportation. And Madley's *American Genocide*. It is a big book, and highly detailed, but very powerful in having students think about the ways in which American Indians were systematically brutalized. I think all those books are really helpful.

Felicia Viator: I've had the most success using primary source texts by women writers, including Louise Clappe's Gold Rush memoir *The Shirley Letters*, select essays about California's Cold War culture in Joan Didion's *Slouching Toward Bethlehem*, Deborah Miranda's story of her family and her perspectives on California history in *Bad Indians*, and passages from Lynell George's reflections on the black experience in Los Angeles in *No Crystal Stair*.

Natale Zappia: I especially enjoy teaching about the intersection of California and environmental history. Like many other myths about the "California Dream," the ideas of "nature" and how it is expressed in the state still revolves around places like Yosemite National Park, while other spaces like Los Angeles are seen as the "anti-nature." Of course, nothing can be further from the truth and I interrogate these themes while challenging students to rethink their local environment. How can the LA River, Griffith Park, and other green spaces be considered "nature?" What does this tell us about the history of mega-cities like Los Angeles? My favorite text for these discussions is Bill Deverell's and Gregory Hise's edited book *Land of Sunshine: An Environmental History of Metropolitan Los Angeles*.

CH: *What is the single most important thing to understand about California History, in your opinion?*

Robert W. Cherny: It is the same thing that is most important to understand when thinking about most history courses dealing with the past few centuries: history is complicated; history is made up of individuals within a particular context making choices among various options regarding immediate issues, and those choices have both short-term and long-term consequences; an informed understanding of our history is crucial to participation in civil society.

William Deverell: For my students: that they are products of it in ways that they may not even understand, that they have an obligation to their families and communities to know it better, and that they shape it by way of their lives and work. That they *are it*.

Philip Garone: I think it has to be the centrality of water. Almost every aspect of California's historical development has been tied to the procurement of water supplies and the containment of our rivers to prevent flooding. Without hydraulic engineering we would not have modern Los Angeles or, for that matter, San Francisco. The Central Valley would still be prone to massive flooding, as in the great flood of 1862, and the controlled water supply that allowed the Valley to become an agricultural powerhouse would not exist. Currently, climate change, especially the transition from snowfall to rainfall in the Sierra Nevada, which will dramatically reduce available water supplies, is poised to seriously threaten "business-as-usual" in the state and therefore needs to be taught and understood. There are many important things to understand about California's history, including how California fits into larger national and even trans-Pacific narratives about mass migration as well as displacement of native peoples, about economic growth and development, about ethnic and racial conflict, about the rise of environmentalism and the growth of technology, and much more, but more than anything else, modern California exists because of the ways we have engineered the state's water—with all the benefits and pitfalls that doing so has entailed.

Glen Gendzel: See #1 and #2 above. Also, as a native Californian who has taught at five universities in five states, I think it's important to address California's image in the eyes of the rest of the country. I talk about our reputation for weirdness, depravity, and nonconformity as symptoms of California's essential role as America's laboratory for social experimentation and innovation. The rest of the country doesn't like what it sees here, but it happens here first, and only later does the rest of the country catch up. This is a different from the familiar formulation that "California is America, only more so" (which, by the way, did not originate with Wallace Stegner; it came from *Overland Monthly* in the 1880s). California is America, only earlier, too.

Jessica Kim: Am I allowed a few? They are related and likely not surprising. First, the allure, the "dream" of California. That allure, captured in so many historical and cultural places and spaces, has had enduring power. However much we may question the lived reality of the "California Dream," the dream itself has had undeniable influence in defining California as a place apart from, say, Iowa (no offense to friends and colleagues in Iowa!). The second, and related, is the sheer diversity of peoples, cultures, ethnicities, and races that have arrived in California as a result of that dream. Finally, the pursuit of the "California Dream" by so many different people from so many different backgrounds has revealed the fractures in and strengths of democratic processes and institutions in a multi-ethnic and multi-racial context. The 21st century has much to learn from California's historic, sometimes tragic, failings and achievements.

Elizabeth Lobb: It has to be California's ethnic diversity. One part of that is simply getting students to fully understand the complexity of ethnicity and identity, which they already sort of understand. But the bigger piece is to understand how exceptional California is within the context of the United States. And my students don't know that at all. They think that 80 percent of Americans are bilingual, and that you can get Ethiopian food anywhere in America, on any given night.

Michael F. Magliari: One of the most important things to understand about California history is that it is deeply misunderstood and distorted thanks to all the popular hopes and myths that have been grafted upon the region ever since the California Trail was blazed in 1841. Popular conceptions of California as Eden, as El Dorado, as a land of progress, innovation, experimentation, as the land of "the California Dream," the "Land of Sunshine," and so forth, are all accurate enough as far as they go, but they remain stereotypes that obscure as much as they reveal. One of the chief goals of a good California history course is to critically examine those stereotypes in order to obtain a more complete and accurate understanding of California's past, and its prospects for the future.

Allison Varzally: I may go back to that idea of diversity. This is somewhat personal because I'm curious about the possibilities of different people getting along. The current moment is obviously one of great national political divisiveness, and I think maybe looking at California's history of collaboration against discrimination is a really important intellectual and civic exercise.

Felicia Viator: One common misconception about California is that it's an outlier, and right now, in this current political landscape, that's an especially popular view. California

is caricatured as a place apart, culturally, politically, economically. It's traitorous. It's righteous. It's marginal. It's weird. But the more I study California History, the more I see how misleading all those stereotypes really are. California hasn't been out of step with the rest of the nation as often as it's been a few steps ahead. The things that have happened here through history—things like immigration reform, tax revolts, tech innovations, environmental activism, celebrities rising to political power—have often portended broader national changes. For better and for worse. California History is instructive that way, and sometimes sobering. And in the current moment, it's also hopeful.

Natale Zappia: The most important thing to appreciate about California is its immensity—geographically, culturally, economically, and demographically. These considerations alone should make California one of the main foci of any U.S. history syllabus.