California has long been a meeting place for people of diverse backgrounds, but no group has faced more dramatic changes than Native Californians. From early European contact to the Gold Rush era, Native Californians responded in various ways — welcoming, resisting, adapting, and being transformed by the newcomers.

**1. Early European Encounters (Spanish Conquest):**

When the Spanish Empire first arrived in California, Native Californians experienced a sudden and violent disruption to their lives. The Spanish conquest was marked by military force, disease, and cultural imposition. Spanish explorers often viewed the land as a resource to be claimed and the Native people as subjects to be converted. While some Native groups initially welcomed the Spanish with curiosity, hoping for peaceful trade or alliances, this period soon turned into one of resistance and survival. For example, leaders like Toypurina of the Tongva people actively resisted Spanish rule, organizing revolts against missions and military outposts. The Spanish responded with brutal force, using violence and forced labor to suppress Native uprisings. Despite these hardships, Native Californians found ways to preserve their cultural practices in secret, showcasing a form of subtle defiance.

**2. The Mission System:**

With the establishment of the mission system under Father Junípero Serra, Native Californians faced systematic attempts to erase their culture and religion. The missions aimed to "civilize" the Native population by converting them to Christianity, often through coercion. Natives were compelled to work in the missions, farming and constructing buildings under harsh conditions. Yet, resistance remained strong. Many Native individuals escaped the missions, returning to their ancestral lands or forming new communities further inland. Others adapted to mission life while quietly maintaining their languages and spiritual traditions. The mission system profoundly altered Native Californian societies, yet it did not erase their identity. This era highlighted both the resilience and the adaptability of Native peoples in the face of cultural suppression.

**2. The Rise of the Mexican Era:**

Following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, California entered the Mexican era, a time of shifting power and land ownership. The mission system began to decline as Mexican authorities secularized the missions, redistributing land to Mexican settlers and officials — often at the expense of Native Californians. While some Natives were granted small parcels of land, many found themselves landless and vulnerable to exploitation as laborers on Mexican ranchos. Others resisted this new form of colonization by forming alliances and creating their own independent communities away from Mexican control. This era saw Native Californians navigating a complex landscape — some adapting by working within the ranch system, others resisting through acts of defiance and flight. The loss of mission lands did not equate to freedom; instead, it ushered in new struggles for autonomy and survival.

**3. The Gold Rush Era:**

The California Gold Rush of 1848 brought an influx of settlers, miners, and fortune-seekers, further devastating Native communities. The sudden population boom led to violent clashes, with miners often attacking Native villages to claim land or eliminate perceived threats. The Gold Rush also introduced new diseases and environmental destruction, as rivers were polluted and hunting grounds depleted. Native Californians responded by forming alliances with neighboring tribes, relocating to safer areas, or adopting new survival strategies such as working as laborers for settlers. Resistance also persisted, with some groups launching guerrilla-style attacks against miners and settlers. The violence and displacement of this period decimated Native populations, yet their determination to protect their communities remained evident.

**Conclusion:**

The responses of Native Californians to these three historical eras — the Spanish conquest, the mission system, and the Gold Rush — reflect a complex blend of resistance, adaptation, and cultural preservation. These experiences resonate in the modern stories told by Tommy Orange in *There There*, where Native American characters grapple with the long-lasting impact of colonization and displacement. Their histories, though rooted in the past, continue to shape their identities and sense of belonging today.

Ultimately, the resilience of Native Californians — from Toypurina's rebellion to the quiet preservation of cultural traditions — underscores the ongoing struggle for survival and self-determination in a land marked by continuous waves of newcomers and change.

Native Californians in my opinion have faced most dramatic changes then any other diverse backgrounds in California. It was divided into four different eras such as Early European contact, the Mission System, The Mexican California and finally the Gold Rush Era. I will further discuss in detail how the Native Californians responded to newcomers in distinct eras.

Early European Encounter

The Spanish people first arrived in California which highlighted the mark by military force, cultural imposition and disease, also the Spanish people thought that the resource of the land needs to be claimed as well as convert the Native people. Even though, few Native groups welcomed them as they were excited and cautious about the opportunity of trade but soon they resisted and were focused on the survival of themselves. For instance, Toypurina, leader of Tongva people was against Spanish rule which led to revolt and further increasing violence and supress Natives from forced labor. In spite of all this, the Native Californiance struggled to preserve their culture by practicing it in secret.

The Mission System

Father Junipro Serra established the mission system wherein the Native Californians faced attempts to eradicate their culture and religion. This is because it focused on converting them to Christianity (even sometimes through coercion). The Native Californians were also forced to work in harsh situations in farming, constructing buildings, etc. but they did resisted strongly. It resulted into a split as many Natives were able to escape the missions and return back to their ancestral lands while others needed to adapt to the mission life but they quietly maintained their languages and traditions. Thus, the system did alter the society of Native Californians but was not able to eradicate it marking both the resistance and adaptability of the Natives.

The Rise of Mexican Era

After Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, it gave rise to Mexican era wherein power was shifted and also ownership of land. The mission system began to decline but at the cost of the Natives as many of them were landless and were also exploited as laborers. There were few who resisted by forming alliances to be away from Mexican control. Thus, it did not gave freedom but a new rise to the struggle and survival of the Natives.

The Gold Rush Era

This era of 1848 brought a rush of miners, settlers and fortunes seekers to further devastate the Native Californians. It led to violent clash of attacking the Native to claim land. This era also gave rise to new diseases and destruction of environment as the water sources like rivers were polluted. The response of Native Californians was again split into two categories by forming alliances with neighbor tribes and relocate to safe area or by working as laborers for settlers. They also resisted in form of guerrilla-style attacks against the miners. Though the violence scared the Natives, they tried their best to protect their communities.

Overall, the Native Californians responded to all four eras in a mixture of resistance, adaption, struggle and also preserve their culture. It also matched to the stories told by Tommy Orange in There There, where long impact of colonization and displacement was found in Natives. This history also helped them to shape their identity in the present.