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The Dream was made in Hollywood

In the essay “California: the Dream and the Challenge in the Twenty-first Century,” Kevin Star claims that even though the state “finds itself struggling with continuing challenges in energy production, environmental protection, elementary and secondary education, and others aspects of the general health and well-being of its population” (Starr 1), California will overcome all these problems. Contrasting with Starr view of California, Victor Davis Hanson claims, in the article “Paradise Lost,” that Californians live in a fantasy where everything is taken for granted. Moreover, in the book The Devil in Silicon Valley: Northern California, Race, and Mexican American, Stephen J. Pitti challenge Star idealization of the Golden State by exposing the history of discrimination that Mexican Americans experienced in California.

As described by the authors, California is no perfect place. Problems like the high demand for energy production and for education, and the interest conflicts between the industry and environmentalists are a few examples of the “flaws” of our beloved state. Regarding the future of California, there is much uncertainty. While Starr is optimistic, stating that California will answer America’s question in these problems areas, Hanson is pessimistic, stating that America should be aware of the “new Californians” (Hanson 431). Even though I live in California, and I plan to live here for a long time, I do not share Starr optimism about the future. Moreover, his lack of concrete support and his biased tone weaken his essay. Accordingly, his depiction of the future of California is unconvincing.

Starr’s overwhelming optimism weakens his essay. Starr belief that California will overcome its current problems as it did on the past has weak support. For instance, lets analyze the traffic problem. On the one hand, Starr argues that Californians have been :

“talking about ways of improving local bus service and supplementing such bus services with additional light rail. New schemes for diamond lanes favoring high –passengers loads were being advanced and implemented, together with the creation of priced tool roads and other market incentives” (Starr 9).

On the other hand Starr contends that “in many parts of the state quality of life [has been] dramatically curtailed by a lengthening commute and the necessity of spending more and more hours in transit” (Starr 9). Even though Starr recognizes the existence of the gridlocks, he treats it as a minor problem. Hanson states “U.S. 101 freeways are in places not free at all …. Our third artery, Interstate 5, is more a collapsed vein, in most places no wider than when it served 20 million Californians” (Hanson 429). The essence of Hanson’s argument is that our infrastructure is outdated. While Hanson believes that “we are losing a type of Californian [, the builder,] and a credo [of building a lot]” (Hanson 431), Starr believes this type of Californian still lives here, and that this Californian will lead another golden age of inventions that are going to revolutionize the world and solve our problems. Although I wish that Starr is right, I must emphasize that his overwhelming optimism weakens his article.

Furthermore, the fact that Starr’s describes a California of multiple identities without noting the existent racial tensions demonstrates that he’s biased. Starr talks of a true multicultural society in California, yet, he doesn’t recognize the racism that non-dominant cultures experience when immigrating to the Golden State. As Pitti points out, “[t]heir [, Latinos,] labor remained tough, low-paid, and often dangerous. Janitors like Jose Celis were instructed ‘to clean bathrooms with a solvent that dissolved his gloves,’ and employees like Leonarda Pineda was fired when she ‘rebuffed her foreman’s sexual propositions’” (Pitti 177). This quote shows the entire disregard that some minorities experience from members of the dominant culture. As Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Teiasha Bankhead state in their article “Coming to California: Chasing the Dream,” “Skin color superseded all other salient characteristics as a ticket to claim a share of the California pot of Gold” (Gibbs and Bankhead). Conflicting with multicultural theory defined by Gregory Jay in “What is Multiculturalism?,” the racial barriers existent in California are still to be overcome.

Finally, California is not as diverse as Starr claims to be. Challenging Starr’s claims that “[a] pattern of diversity was sustained at the core of the California identity” (Starr 2), Clifford E. Trafzer and Joel R. Hyer, authors of the book *Exterminate Them! Written Accounts of the Murder, Rape, and Enslavement of Native Americans during the California Gold Rush*, describe the atrocities that native Americans, a minority group, suffered during the Gold Rush. Trafzer and Hyer state, “the state of California set aside $1.5 million to reimburse volunteer militia units that hunted down and killed so-called hostile Indian. Thus, the state of California paid men to murder Native Californians” (Trafzer 135). In other words, the authors of *Exterminate Them!* believe that, in contrast to Starr’s claim, the Golden State government is, in fact, against diversity in the state. Moreover, public institutions, like the police, sometimes have actions that conflict with Starr’s ideas of diversity. The cases of police brutality in San Jose, described by Pitti, are one example of such actions. Hence, California still is far from being the paradisiacal place depicted by Starr.

Day after day that I live here, my personal experience shows me that the “Dream” is an invention of Hollywood. As the Red Hot Chili peppers pointed out in their music “Californication:”

   “Space may be the final frontier

But it's made in a Hollywood basement.”

In other words, Hollywood shapes our ideas of many things. Analogous to something made in Hollywood, the California Dream is fake and powerful. It’s difficult for me to say, but I must admit that maybe I have been a victim of Rawls paradox of expectations. Therefore, Starr doesn’t convince me.

Works Cited

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