

Golden: How California Grew—and What It Cost

Louis Warren

My previous books have explored racial and ethnic struggles over wildlife conservation, the mythology of the American West in popular culture of North America and Europe, and Native American spirituality and religion in American history. I have also edited a textbook, *American Environmental History*, which I am revising for a second edition.

My new book project is called *Golden: How California Grew—and What It Cost*. California has long been synonymous with growth, success, and the future, not only in the U.S., but around the world. It is the nation's largest state. With a population of 40 million people, it is home to one in eight U.S. residents. If it were an independent country, it would have the fifth largest economy in the world.

But how did California achieve such size and wealth? And what have been the costs socially, politically, and environmentally? Success did not come easy. Except for a few years in the early days of the Gold Rush (1848 – ca. 1853), a relative handful of interests monopolized land and other resources in the Golden State, constraining population growth and limiting opportunity for most people. Only after 1900 would the modern California we know, with rapid growth and widely shared economic gains, begin to emerge. This book explores how that happened, and how themes of economy, race, and environment intertwined in the process, from 1848 to the present.

The environmental narrative of California's growth is well known. The state saw the rapid destruction of wildlife habitat in the sprawl of housing and the wholesale destruction of riparian ecosystems as rivers were channeled to suburbs. But residents also grappled with some environmental problems on a scale that exceeded many other places. Thus, California blazed a path into environmental regulation of auto emissions, and it has become a leader in greenhouse gas regulation and reduction. At the same time, the state's demand for water to fuel urban growth led to the construction of the world's largest water delivery system, a hydraulic machine that depleted riparian ecosystems and now faces unparalleled strain from competing demands, while diminished snowmelt and rising seas threaten to destroy it. And across California, expanding inequality tears at the legacy of shared prosperity. *Golden* will explain the relationship between growth and inequality over the last century and a half in a place that achieved astonishing success, and it will use environmental history to help us see both the contours of that success and its limitations.