

# Globalizing California History

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Scholars of American history have often been accused of taking a narrow view of their subject. Instead of including the rest of the world, critics said, U.S. historians told a story that was constrained by national and nationalistic boundaries. This critique has also been somewhat justifiably applied to scholars of California history. For centuries people, ideas, and goods from all over the world have moved in and out of what is now the state of California, but the histories written about them have often been limited by the state's geographical boundaries. Only recently has the academy begun to consider Californian history as part of a vast, complex, and ethnically diverse system of people and goods moving back and forth across the Pacific Basin.

Because the literature in this area is massive and diverse, I cannot hope to cover it all, but rather I will try to give a sampling of the types and range of scholarship being produced in this field. I have divided this essay into three parts: first, a brief survey of the broader globalization trend in American history; second, a look at California-specific immigration studies that push their research beyond the state's borders; and finally, a discussion of some recent scholarship that more directly focuses on California as a part of a wider Pacific Basin field of study.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This organization is somewhat artificial in that, of course, there is considerable overlap among the California immigration histories and the Pacific Basin studies (some of which look at immigrant groups). I have chosen this organization, because the four California immigration studies I discuss were written mostly in the decade of the 1990s, whereas most of the studies in the Pacific Basin section were written in the 2000s. Also, the studies in the third section I believe are more self-consciously trying to connect California to the geography of the Pacific Ocean, and so deserve separate treatment.

### Globalizing American History

Histories of the United States written about the early republican era have been, by necessity, inclusive of the Atlantic world. The movements of people and ideas across the Atlantic Ocean were and still are integral to the U.S. colonial narrative. The story of the Puritans, for instance, would not make much sense without noting the religious and social forces in England that drove them to cross the sea to the New World. Early histories of the (mainly white, English-speaking) colonists would have included some minimal mention of the “push” factors that caused them to leave their European homes. Thus, because the majority of these immigrants came from Europe, an outward looking, Atlantic Basin view of U.S. history was probably unavoidable. Likewise, even the most fleeting discussion of the slave trade would include the “triangle trade” of slaves, raw materials, and finished goods that crisscrossed the Atlantic Ocean.

In 1893, however, historian Frederick Jackson Turner suggested an overarching thesis for U.S. history that was much more inward looking—one that looked toward the western frontier for explanatory power. Turner theorized that it was America’s struggle with the frontier that made the American people exceptional. Most U.S. historians generally followed this American exceptionalist approach, until the upheavals of the 1960s diversified and broadened the range of Americans included in the historical narrative. Soon American historians also began to broaden their geographical horizons as well.

Historians of immigration in particular began to question the one-way, melting pot analysis. In his 1988 book, for instance, Robert Ostergren examines nineteenth

century immigrants from Sweden, but he presents extensive research on the region they were from as well as what happened to them in the United States.<sup>2</sup> Ostergren's work helps shatter the notion that it was somehow being on the frontier that determined the character of this group of Swedish immigrants by pointing out that they transplanted not only Old World crops to the New World, but also significant parts of their home culture.

Similarly, in his 1992 essay historian David Thelen calls for more of this outward-looking history, rather than the parade of specialized and inaccessible monographs he sees typifying academic scholarship.<sup>3</sup> In "Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History," Thelen wonders why if "capital, labor, people, ideas, diseases, environmental destruction, and television programs" could move across borders, how did migrating individuals construct their lives as they met everyday needs in the "borderlands" between cultures.<sup>4</sup> Responding to such calls in the late 1990s the Organization of American Historians [OAH] met over the course of several years and hammered out a framework to attempt a broadening of American history, especially as it concerned the collegiate U.S. history survey course. The findings of this series of conferences were published in 2000 and introduced into classrooms at the college level.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the 1990s and 2000s scholars of U.S. history responded to the criticism of U.S. insularity by producing a variety of monographs that were more

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<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Ostergren, *A Community Transplanted: The Trans-Atlantic Experience of a Swedish Immigrant Settlement in the Upper Middle West, 1835-1915* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> David Thelen, "Of Audiences, Borderlands, and Comparisons: Toward the Internationalization of American History," *The Journal of American History* 79(2)(Sept. 1992): 432-462.

<sup>4</sup> Thelen, 436.

<sup>5</sup> See Thomas J. Osborne, "Implementing the *La Pietra Report*: Internationalizing Three Topics in the United States History Survey Course," *The History Teacher* 36(2)(Feb. 2003), 163-175, and Carl J. Guarneri, "Internationalizing the United States Survey Course: American History for a Global Age," *The History Teacher* 36(1)(Nov. 2002), 37-64.

international in scope. In his 2006 essay Matthew Frye Jacobson, for instance, critiques classic studies of immigrants that nationalistically deal only with how certain groups did or did not adapt to the “melting pot.”<sup>6</sup> Jacobson advocates replacing the nation as the unit of organization with the continent. From this wider perspective, a North American history would use a “global cross-roads” model to better explain the ebbs and flows of imperialism, expansion, conquest, annexation, slavery, emancipation, and immigration.<sup>7</sup>

To better apply this historiographical movement to the classroom, within the last five years U.S. historians have begun producing college level textbooks that incorporate this globalization. Two examples of this trend are Thomas Bender’s *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* and Gary W. Reichard and Ted Dickson’s *America On The World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History*.<sup>8</sup>

The call to internationalize U.S. history, nevertheless, has not been rapid enough for some critics. One historian who follows this literature notes that, despite the welcome expansion of U.S. historians into this larger global framework, “distrust and even miscommunication remain” between world historians and U.S. historians. Despite this continued suspicion of American historians’ commitment to this broadening of their field, a continued dedication to this globalizing trend can only enrich the study of American history.

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<sup>6</sup> Matthew Frye Jacobson, “More ‘Trans-’, less ‘National,’” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 25 (4)(Summer2006), 74-84.

<sup>7</sup> Jacobson, 83.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2006), and Gary W. Reichard, and Ted Dickson, *America On The World Stage: A Global Approach to U.S. History* (Urbana and Chicago: The University of Illinois Press, 2008).

## Globalizing California Immigrant Studies

In the early 1990s scholars of California immigration studies followed the national trend of widening the geographic reach of their subjects by producing a number of excellent monographs. One early example of this is George Sanchez's *Becoming Mexican American*.<sup>9</sup> Sanchez grapples with the complex and ever-evolving nature of Mexican-American culture in the U.S. Southwest. He notes that far from transporting Mexican culture intact across the border, immigrants fashioned a new "collective identity that emerged from daily experience in the US."<sup>10</sup> His description of a "circular" migration pattern is also helpful in combating the myth of one-way chain migration. This constant back and forth of Mexican migration throughout the twentieth century "insured the constant infusion of Mexican culture into Chicano communities in the US."<sup>11</sup> This method of analyzing not only conditions in "sending" countries, but also the complex cultural adaptations employed by the immigrants in the "receiving" country would become more common over the next several decades.

Madeline Hsu follows in this vein with her 2000 *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943*.<sup>12</sup> Hsu studied immigrant laborers from the Taishan province to explore the Chinese quest for modernity, the limitations of nationalism, and the flexibility of people on the move between two countries. She points out that the old nation-centered way of studying immigrants would do more than just make such a study incomplete. By not

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<sup>9</sup> George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> Sanchez, 11.

<sup>11</sup> Sanchez, 272.

<sup>12</sup> Madeline Yuan-yin Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

studying these sending conditions, it makes real understanding of this movement impossible. She demonstrates, for instance, that historians cannot begin to answer questions like why so many Taishanese bachelors would willingly put themselves through deplorable conditions in California without knowing what conditions they left behind in China.

Lon Kurashige adds to this immigrant literature with his 2002 book *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict*.<sup>13</sup> Kurashige addresses the complex factors at play in Japanese immigration to Los Angeles in the first half of the twentieth century. He describes the tension created by the Pearl Harbor bombing and the internment camps among first and second generation Japanese Americans. He also skillfully relates the complexity of traditions and loyalties of the Japanese homeland colliding with the realities of American racialism and the way in which successive generations of Japanese Americans adapted to these realities.

Yen Le Espiritu examines the transnational lives of San Diego Filipinos in *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries*.<sup>14</sup> She asserts that this group cannot be understood without first understanding the context of American imperialism in the Pacific.<sup>15</sup> Espiritu takes issue with those who characterize immigration (and immigrants) as a problem, asserting “we need to conceptualize immigration as a technology of racialization and gendering—a crucial site for the reproduction of and resistance to ‘scattered hegemonies.’”<sup>16</sup> Espiritu notes that

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<sup>13</sup> Lon Kurashige, *Japanese American Celebration and Conflict: A History of Ethnic Identity and Festival, 1934-1990* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Yen Le Espiritu, *Home Bound: Filipino American Lives across Cultures, Communities, and Countries* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 2003).

<sup>15</sup> Espiritu, 25.

<sup>16</sup> Espiritu, 207.

transnationalism—figuratively being between two nations—for a particular immigrant population holds inherent contradictions. It can break down borders and traditions and create new cultures, but transnationalism can also “fortify traditional hierarchies, homogenize diverse cultural practices, and obscure intragroup differences and differential relationships.”<sup>17</sup> For Espiritu transnationalism is at best a compromise or choice made and lived in a context of a scarcity of other options.

### California and the Pacific Basin

I now turn to the burst of scholarship, which—starting around the turn of the twenty-first century—purposefully attempts to move California’s history outside its borders and into the wider history of the Pacific world. Although somewhat late to the historiographical globalization trend, these scholars have made up for lost time with numerous studies, several of which I will discuss below.

In 1999 Dennis Flynn, Lionel Frost, and A.J.H. Latham collected a series of essays into a volume that incorporates many aspects of Pacific Basin’s history. *Pacific Centuries: Pacific and Pacific Rim History Since the Sixteenth Century* attempts to foreground the Pacific Rim as a key subject of study as we move into the twenty-first century.<sup>18</sup> These essays collectively emphasize the historical importance of human activity on and around the globe’s largest body of water and treat the Pacific as a geographical entity that coheres as a proper subject of study. The scholarship spans 400 years and ranges in topics from early European exploration and trade to events as recent as the U.S./China rapprochement in the 1970s.

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<sup>17</sup> Espiritu, 214.

<sup>18</sup> Dennis Flynn, Lionel Frost, and A.J.H. Latham, eds., *Pacific Centuries: Pacific and Pacific Rim History Since the Sixteenth Century* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

One chapter that deals specifically with a California topic is by James Gerber who has written a fascinating comparative study of the connection between two Pacific Rim gold rushes and California wheat production.<sup>19</sup> According to Gerber, conventional economic theories predict that when a region has a gold strike as large as California's, the prices of other export products, such as wheat, should be adversely affected because of artificially inflated wages. Instead, following the strike at Sutter's Mill, an agricultural boom in California established the state as one of U.S.'s most important grain producing regions in second half of the nineteenth century.

To explain some of this agricultural success, Gerber points to 1851 gold strikes in Australia's New South Wales and Victoria provinces that followed closely behind California's.<sup>20</sup> He theorizes that the boost in grain exports to the Australian gold fields gave California growers a window of opportunity to improve their agricultural efficiency, thus avoiding the crippling collapse that economic theory would have predicted. Gerber also points out that these California grain producers gained efficiency by avoiding the expense of marketing their product to the eastern United States—a more “natural” destination for American farmers. Instead, by selling their grain across the Pacific in Australia, they saved significantly on transportation costs and maximized their profit margin.

Historian Kenneth Pomeranz in a critique of Gerber asserts that this California wheat connection cannot be the whole story.<sup>21</sup> Ironically, Pomeranz cites two other

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<sup>19</sup> James Gerber, “Gold Rushes and the Trans-Pacific Wheat Trade: California and Australia, 1848-57,” in Flynn, 125-151.

<sup>20</sup> The Australian gold find was not just coincidental. According to Gerber, Australian miners took what they had learned about geology and mining in California, searched in their home country for similar conditions, and found gold.

<sup>21</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, [untitled review of *Pacific Centuries*], *The Journal of Economic History* 60(3)(Sept. 2000), 883-885.

successful Pacific Rim grain exporters, Chile and Oregon, to refute Gerber's claims. Pomeranz notes that—other than a one-time jump—Melbourne wheat prices were similar to New York prices in the same time period. Pomeranz asserts that historians still don't know how these Californian growers were able to cut production costs in the face of expensive labor, but he sees promise in an examination of "land quality, usufruct prices, and the uncertainty of property rights in 1850s California," adding that Gerber mentions this last fact, but not in relation to grain production.<sup>22</sup> Despite the vulnerability of Gerber's conclusions, his chapter in *Pacific Centuries* foreshadowed the innovative research on California history that was to follow.

Also in a 1999 book, Gray Brechin contributes to California history with *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin*.<sup>23</sup> This study of California's first great city is an engagingly written, if sometimes polemical, look at the nature of the "imperial" city of San Francisco. While making points about the often destructive and wasteful influence that such a metropole can have on the surrounding region, Brechin points out the profoundly influential role San Francisco had on, not just the state of California, but also the whole Pacific region. Brechin stretches his evidence, however, sometimes to the breaking point, for instance, tying San Francisco's nefarious reach to the bombing of Hiroshima. Despite its shortcomings, this book's usefulness is in tracing the ecological, financial, and human impact that a regionally important city such as San Francisco can have throughout the Pacific Basin.

Trying to counter the gloomy historiography of Irish immigrants, Malcolm Campbell has written "Ireland's Furthest Shores: Irish Immigrant Settlement in

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<sup>22</sup> Pomeranz, 884.

<sup>23</sup> Gray Brechin, *Imperial San Francisco: Urban Power, Earthly Ruin* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1999).

Nineteenth-Century California and Eastern Australia.”<sup>24</sup> Malcolm uses the Pacific Basin model of historical research to counter decades of Irish studies that paint only a bleak view of these global migrants. Asserting that Irish populations on the American west coast and the Australian east coast had experiences that were more “benign” than their eastern United States brethren, Malcolm cites four factors to explain this. First, in California and the provinces of eastern Australia many Irish immigrants were among the first to arrive, thus they gained legitimacy in a society where “the nascent political, economic, and social structures were fluid and keenly contested.”<sup>25</sup> Second, in both of these Pacific localities, the backgrounds and prior experiences of the Irish gave them a competitive advantage over less experienced immigrants. Having already trekked half way around the world, many of these Irish men and women had already acquired skills that would better help them compete for scarce resources in their new environment. Third, according to Malcolm, these two regions were more cosmopolitan in that there were fewer structural impediments to the Irish specifically in comparison to other European immigrants, and less anti-Catholicism as well, compared to some eastern cities of the U.S. Finally, and somewhat tragically, was the presence of “substantial nonwhite immigrant populations against whom community antagonism was directed,” thus, taking the pressure off the light-skinned Irish as perennial outsiders.<sup>26</sup> Malcolm concludes that historians would do well to “move beyond the constraints imposed by national

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<sup>24</sup> Malcolm Campbell, “Ireland’s Furthest Shores: Irish Immigrant Settlement in Nineteenth-Century California and Eastern Australia,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 71(1)(Feb. 2002), 59-90.

<sup>25</sup> Campbell, 66.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, 87.

narratives” and use “subnational comparison” to explore the experiences of Irish immigrants on both sides of the Pacific.<sup>27</sup>

Much innovative scholarship has been applied to the history of Asian immigrants in California. Henry Yu studies Chinese immigration to Los Angeles to make a larger point about the treatment of “undesirable” migrants and the complex web of local and global connections between them.<sup>28</sup> In “Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migrations,” Yu urges historians to “escape nationalism as our [scholarly] rationale.”<sup>29</sup> By linking the Chinese of Los Angeles to migratory networks of “people who have come from other areas in the United States and with places all through the Americas and Europe and around the Pacific and Asia,”<sup>30</sup> Yu hopes that historians can “truly forsake the political interests of nation building as the narrow rationale for scholarship.”<sup>31</sup> His engagingly written article ends with a personal anecdote about his Chinese grandmother who came to America and wanted to finally learn English, so that when she died, she could converse with the people who she might be buried next to.

In a 2004 essay historian David Igler writes about the intersection of money and microbes in “Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850.”<sup>32</sup> Originally a historian of the American West, Igler argues that the Far West was part of a Pacific Basin exchange of goods and diseases long before California became a state. Igler cites the “discovery” voyages of Captain James Cook in the late eighteenth century as having helped economically integrate the entire Pacific Basin along with the

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<sup>27</sup> Campbell, 90.

<sup>28</sup> Henry Yu, “Los Angeles and American Studies in a Pacific World of Migrations,” *American Quarterly* 56(3)(Sept. 2004), 531-543.

<sup>29</sup> Yu, 532.

<sup>30</sup> Yu, 535.

<sup>31</sup> Yu, 541.

<sup>32</sup> David Igler, “Diseased Goods: Global Exchanges in the Eastern Pacific Basin, 1770-1850,” *American Historical Review* 109(3)(June 2004), 693-719.

expansion of British, Spanish, Russian, and U.S. commercial ventures along the American coastline.<sup>33</sup> Igler asserts that the “eastern Pacific cohered as a region so long as an open and inclusive waterscape provided the primary connection between the disparate borderlands.” Not surprisingly, he cites the California Gold Rush and America’s annexation of Pacific territories as factors that forever altered these connections. By 1850, Igler notes, California, Oregon, and Washington had developed stronger commercial and political ties to the transcontinental nation. “Quite simply,” Igler writes, “much of the *eastern* Pacific was now the American *West*.”<sup>34</sup>

Igler also points out that by 1850, the microbes of Europe, Asia, and Africa circulated in almost every human population in the Pacific region, and he criticizes historians of the eastern Pacific who have “largely ignored this internationalism and instead focused on specific imperial nations and their conflicts over geography....”<sup>35</sup> It was *not*, Igler asserts, imperial laws or international borders to which either traders or microbes paid attention. Rather it was the “visible hand of global commerce that extended the most powerful—and deadly—reach into this region and forged the strongest links within and between the future American Far West, the Pacific Basin, and beyond.”<sup>36</sup>

David Igler followed up “Diseased Goods” with a short introductory essay in an issue of *Pacific Historical Review* devoted to several excellent pieces on the Pacific Basin and California.<sup>37</sup> In “Re-Orienting Asian American History through Transnational and International Scales,” Igler frames the debates around Asian-American history and

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<sup>33</sup> Igler, “Diseased Goods,” 695.

<sup>34</sup> Igler, “Diseased Goods,” 695.

<sup>35</sup> Igler, “Diseased Goods,” 718.

<sup>36</sup> Igler, “Diseased Goods,” 719.

<sup>37</sup> David Igler, “Re-Orienting Asian American History through Transnational and International Scales,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76(4)(Nov. 2007), 611-614.

sets the table for the two essays I will discuss below. He correctly notes that this Asian-American history has been typically located in U.S. cities and towns, in trans-Pacific migration routes, occupational niches, and moments of xenophobia in U.S. politics. Instead, Iglar advocates combating these clichéd treatments and “de-centering” the nation-state, rather than rejecting it completely as a proper direction for this historiography. Iglar cites the two essays discussed below as Asia-American histories at the “cutting edge of the transnational history that is currently reshaping national histories.”<sup>38</sup>

The first of the two essays is by Erika Lee.<sup>39</sup> In “The ‘Yellow Peril’ and Asian Exclusion in the Americas,” Lee begins with the question, how are ideas about racial difference, inferiority, and identity related to the global migration of labor, capital, and culture? She answers by tying the fact that Asians were among the first targets of national immigration and exclusion laws to the incidents of state-sanctioned violence, expulsion, and incarceration against them. Arguing that these were not separate phenomena, Lee calls this transnational anti-Asian racism “hemispheric Orientalism.”<sup>40</sup> She cites a kind of Asian exclusion domino effect in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. First, the United States legislatively attempted to exclude the Chinese in 1882, so in reaction Chinese migrants traveled first to Canada and Mexico in order to later enter the U.S. illegally. Then in 1908 Canada and the U.S. barred Japanese immigrants, who then went to Brazil, Mexico, Peru, and other Latin American countries. Lee continues, “when Brazil and Peru followed with their own restrictions on Asian

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<sup>38</sup> Iglar, “Re-Orienting,” 612.

<sup>39</sup> Erika Lee, “The ‘Yellow Peril’ and Asian Exclusion in the Americas,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76(4)(Nov 2007), 537–562.

<sup>40</sup> Lee, 538.

immigration, in 1934 and 1926 respectively, Japanese started to head from Brazil to Paraguay and Argentina, from Peru to Bolivia.”<sup>41</sup> She points out that when we view these events transnationally, they reveal an “interconnected web of migration and remigration throughout the Americas as well as the domino effects of restriction policies targeting Asians first in North America and then in South America.”<sup>42</sup>

When the U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 finally excluded all Asians, Canada, Brazil, and Peru soon followed suit. Lee ties these global interactions of race and racialized policies to parallel national policies of Japanese incarceration during World War II as well. Thus, this narrative of Asian exclusion contributes to a larger global history of race by “demonstrating how race, migration, and international relations intersect at multiple levels—locally, regionally, nationally, and globally.”<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, according to Lee, it challenges the typical black-white racial paradigm so prevalent in comparative studies of race, and confirms the U.S. as having played the central role in consolidating white supremacy around the world.<sup>44</sup>

The second essay that David Igler introduces is “Water and Land: Asian Americans and the U.S. West,” by Dorothy Fujita-Rony.<sup>45</sup> Along with Lee, Fujita-Rony is trying to rethink the stereotypical narrative waypoints of Chinese immigration: the Gold Rush, transcontinental railroad, exclusion laws, San Francisco bachelor community, and so on. Fujita-Rony admits that these standard ways of analyzing Asian Americans in the history of the U.S. West have some truth in them, which is why they endure. As an

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<sup>41</sup> Lee, 544.

<sup>42</sup> Lee, 544.

<sup>43</sup> Lee, 557.

<sup>44</sup> Lee, 557.

<sup>45</sup> Dorothy Fujita-Rony, “Water and Land: Asian Americans and the U.S. West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 76(4)(Nov. 2007), 563-574.

alternative, however, she advocates a more comprehensive view of the American West as a “part of a large region of both land and water” structured by U.S. economic, political, and cultural dominance.<sup>46</sup> Water isn’t just dead space to cross over, but an important terrain for social and economic activity. Fujita-Rony contends that militarism, colonialism, and capitalism created ocean highways that brought Indians to Vancouver, Chinese to San Francisco, and Filipina/os to Seattle.<sup>47</sup> The U.S. West is rooted in spaces of “racial, class, and gender confrontation and contradiction,” and steeped in hierarchies of economic, political, and military domination.<sup>48</sup> In the end Fujita-Rony makes a plea for further historical research on how these people occupy these spaces in multiple ways.

In a 2008 essay historian Alan Mayne compares Darwin, Australia, and San Francisco, in “Guardians at the Gate: Quarantine and Racialism in Two Pacific Rim Port Cities, 1870-1914.”<sup>49</sup> Mayne begins by noting the paradox of North American Europeans seeking the uninterrupted flow of goods while at the same time trying to restrict the movement of non-white humans around the Pacific Basin. He justifies comparing two such seemingly different cities—Darwin and San Francisco—by demonstrating that their “connectedness” with the outside world in both cases was mostly in terms of trade with Asian port cities.<sup>50</sup> Simultaneously attempting to promote trade and inhibit Asian immigration was an inherent contradiction for these two port cities. Both cities developed reputations during these years as an unwelcoming place to enter as an immigrant. Leaders in both port cities were afraid of being flooded not only with cheap

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<sup>46</sup> Fujita-Rony, 565.

<sup>47</sup> Fujita-Rony, 569.

<sup>48</sup> Fujita-Rony, 574.

<sup>49</sup> Alan Mayne, “Guardians at the Gate: Quarantine and Racialism in Two Pacific Rim Port Cities, 1870-1914,” *Urban History* 35(2)(2008), 255-274.

<sup>50</sup> Mayne, 257.

laborers, but also with communicable diseases that stalked the Pacific Basin. These fears were not completely unfounded. In 1887 an outbreak of small pox that originated in China quickly spread to Darwin and San Francisco. Mayne's conclusion is that culture is a powerful intermediary for commodity trade, but more so for the circulation of people and ideas between cities and regions.<sup>51</sup>

Kornel Chang examines labor and race in his 2009 essay, "Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880-1910."<sup>52</sup> Chang studies the racial and class bonds formed across national boundaries—in fact across oceans—due to the racialization of Asian migrants as degraded foreign laborers. On the Canadian/U.S. frontier this commonality among white labor leaders led to them promoting race riots, immigration restrictions, and anti-Asiatic organizations that crisscrossed the border. Chang argues that this racialization drew on "larger circuits of movements that linked the proletariat racism and xenophobia in the Pacific Northwest to Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa."<sup>53</sup> Previous scholarship on European immigrants in the U.S. using race as a common trait to bond together—so-called "whiteness studies"—are limited, according to Chang, because they accept the nation-state as the sole analytical framework. Instead, Chang suggests viewing the western U.S.-Canadian borderlands as a "settler society" in order to study white identity as a product of "intercolonial exchanges that spanned the Pacific world."<sup>54</sup> Thus, Chang argues, "the white working class was constituted through a

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<sup>51</sup> Mayne, 273.

<sup>52</sup> Kornel Chang, "Circulating Race and Empire: Transnational Labor Activism and the Politics of Anti-Asian Agitation in the Anglo-American Pacific World, 1880-1910," *Journal of American History* 96(3)(Dec. 2009), 678-701.

<sup>53</sup> Chang, 679.

<sup>54</sup> Chang, 680.

transnational process that took shape in multiple places and on varying scales, from the local and national to the imperial and global.”<sup>55</sup> Chang’s essay is an excellent example of thematic history freed from the national and state boundaries that have traditionally constrained such research.

David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, and Nancy Zuniga examine the degree to which Central American miners were aware of and reacted to world events in “A Gold Rush Salvadoran in California’s Latino World, 1857.”<sup>56</sup> In the past historians saw these migrant miners as isolated manual laborers who had little cohesiveness between them or connection to their homeland. By studying an open letter published in 1857 in a Spanish-language newspaper in Southern California, the authors have used an innovative case study to demonstrate that these miners did in fact keep track of important events locally and internationally and acted accordingly in their self-interest. The author of the letter, Salvadoran miner Angel Mora, wrote his impassioned missive to explain to his “fellow countrymen” why he could no longer take living in California and was about to return home.<sup>57</sup> To Hayes-Bautista, et al., the value in this seemingly insignificant communication is that even so far from home, Mora felt part of a larger, more inclusive civil society, and he felt an obligation to explain his decision to that community of fellow countrymen.

The last essay I will discuss is a work that has garnered some fervent reactions from other scholars. Thomas J. Osborne writes in his 2009 essay, “Pacific El Dorado: Rethinking Greater California’s Past,” that he has reached the point that he almost

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<sup>55</sup> Chang, 682.

<sup>56</sup> David E. Hayes-Bautista, Cynthia L. Chamberlin, and Nancy Zuniga, “A Gold Rush Salvadoran in California’s Latino World, 1857,” *Southern California Quarterly* 91(3)(Fall 2009), 257-294.

<sup>57</sup> Hayes-Bautista, et al., 288.

completely rejects the historiographical framework of approaching California's history within the bounds of the state's territory.<sup>58</sup> California's history, Osborne asserts, has from its beginnings grown out of its Pacific Basin ties. For instance, he cites, as have others, the ties between gold miners from Australia, Canada, and Mexico as examples of this internationalism. Without understanding this Pacific commerce, Osborne contends, historians would overlook the fact, for example, that this Asiatic trade was the driving force for the U.S. to annex both Oregon and California.

Osborne refers to "imaginings" of the California Dream, for instance the 1893 Midwinter fair at Golden Gate Park, that have set the terms for how people think about the Golden State. Over five months exhibitors portrayed to approximately a million and a half visitors a "Pacific-facing California as a cornucopia of luscious fruits and wines." Osborne points out that "[f]iguratively and literally, the exposition featured California as the Golden Gate to a better life that beckoned on America's Pacific shores."<sup>59</sup> Another imagining of the California dream is the rise of the state's beach culture in the late nineteenth century. San Diego's Hotel Del Coronado, for example, drew public attention to California's surf, sun, and sand. Later in the twentieth century surf culture turned big business with improved surfboard technology and endless films about this iconic California culture. Osborne cites the "free love" culture of the 1960s transitioning into a "less rebellious set of Pacific imaginings" as having emanated from the Big Sur's Esalen Institute. This imagining of California Osborne describes as an "outgrowth of the human potential movement of the times coupled with the Asian mysticism of the philosopher

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<sup>58</sup> Thomas J. Osborne, "Pacific El Dorado: Rethinking Greater California's Past," *California History* 87(1)(2009), 26-45.

<sup>59</sup> Osborne, 36.

Alan Watts and others.”<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps Osborne’s most significant contribution to the continued globalization of California history is his pivot in the article to a discussion of how teaching California history in this manner can be beneficial in several ways. What benefit would students gain from this pedagogical shift? First, Osborne maintains that students will learn a less parochial view of the state’s past, linking it to regional, national, and international developments, such as the Pacific-wide convulsions caused by the Gold Rush in the mid-nineteenth century. Second, a broader geographical viewpoint would better help students interrogate the notion of the state’s uniqueness or exceptionalism. Of course this lesson would more broadly apply to the notion of American exceptionalism as well. This wider lens would, to Osborne, lead to a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of California history. Third, Osborne notes, an emphasis on California’s maritime past would help historicize the growing importance of the Pacific world in the twenty-first century. Finally, a Pacific-oriented California history would lend “geographical balance to the Atlantic-centric U.S. history that dominates monographs, textbooks, and, by inference, classrooms.” By focusing not just on California’s landscapes, but also on its seascape, Osborne believes historians can reveal the “spatial construct of a Greater California.”<sup>61</sup>

While Osborne’s essay seems to have been generally well received, several valid criticisms have been made. One of Osborne’s critics, Christina Gold, writes that his discussion of Asian religions in California could be “thickened” with a more in depth

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<sup>60</sup> Osborne, 40.

<sup>61</sup> Osborne, 45.

examination of how these philosophies were adapted to the unique California context.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Gold finds his discussion of immigration from the Pacific world comparatively brief, thus, she claims, Osborne misses some of the impact of immigration on the state's cultural and social life.<sup>63</sup> She shares, however, Osborne's dismay that U.S. as well as California textbooks still mostly deal with the "political, economic, and cultural structures contained within the geographical boundaries of the state and around the state's relationship to the nation."<sup>64</sup> Overall, despite these minor criticisms, Gold finds much to praise in Osborne's article.

Another commenter, Mark Wild, has several practical criticisms of Osborne's article.<sup>65</sup> Wild wonders how well Osborne's vision will translate into the classroom by noting how crowded the typical survey course syllabus already is. Wild asks the pointed question, what will instructors have to give up to teach Osborne's Pacific Eldorado? Wild also questions whether this global/transnational framework implies a kind of universality that might mask local networks and practices. He nevertheless suggests that historians take up Osborne's challenge and endeavor to make room in the curriculum for this expansion of scholarly outlook.

Philip J. Ethington is perhaps more harshly critical of Osborne's overall premise than the previous two historians. In "Global California Contra Greater California,"<sup>66</sup> Ethington advocates a "much wider view of California's past than the Pacific Rim

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<sup>62</sup> Christina Gold, "'Pacific El Dorado': Scholarship, Pedagogy, and the Community College Student," *California History* 87(1)(2009), 49-52.

<sup>63</sup> Gold, 50.

<sup>64</sup> Gold, 51.

<sup>65</sup> Mark Wild, "Local Contexts, Global Frameworks, and the Future of the California History Course," *California History* 87(1)(2009), 46-48.

<sup>66</sup> Philip J. Ethington, "Global California Contra Greater California," *California History* 87(1)(2009), 53-56.

regionalism that [Osborne] proposes.”<sup>67</sup> Ethington asserts that Osborne has missed other important geographies, such as Latin America, Europe, and the Middle East. Thus geographically limited from the start, Ethington contends, Osborne cannot fully explore the history of California’s diverse global connections.

Regarding Osborne’s use of international expositions, such as the one in Golden Gate Park, Ethington writes that they “pale in comparison to the world-transforming motion picture industry, the most global of California industries.”<sup>68</sup> The other “global imaginary” that Ethington believes Osborne slights is the southern California aeronautics/aerospace industrial sector. According to Ethington, Osborne has missed this California connection to people and machines that literally circle the globe in space. Finally, Ethington discounts overall Osborne’s emphasis on the importance of Pacific Rim linkages. According to Ethington, much of the state’s institutional growth was already “inscribed into the Pacific Slope by the Spanish and Mexicans in terms of governing and economic relations,” and little of that influence can be traced to a Pacific orientation.<sup>69</sup> While agreeing that Asian and Pacific influences have been important, Ethington contends that by the time these groups of immigrants reached California, the indigenous, Spanish, Mexican, and Anglo rulers had long established the basic governmental and economic institutions.

Scholars of California history have only recently joined the effort to internationalize American and regional history. As evidenced by the above discussion, the Pacific Basin as a source for further California historical research is a vibrant,

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<sup>67</sup> Ethington, 53.

<sup>68</sup> Ethington, 54.

<sup>69</sup> Ethington, 56.

contentious, and growing area. Valid criticisms have been raised about the practicability of implementing these historiographical changes in the college classroom and whether this perspective ignores other important global influences. These criticisms should not hold back these varied lines of inquiry. And while unseating entrenched teaching styles is certainly not an easy task, nevertheless, I tend to agree with Mark Wild that despite its difficulties, historians must implement this paradigm shift if we are to keep pace with an increasingly diverse student body as well as rapid globalization in so many other aspects of our lives. California has a long and rich history that can be significantly enriched by addressing the many historical issues that arise from its Pacific Basin orientation. There may in fact still be academic gold to be found in California, but historians should look increasingly to the Pacific to find it.

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