



California: A History (Modern Library Chronicles Series Book 23)

Kevin Starr

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California has always been our Shangri-la—the promised land of countless pilgrims in search of the American Dream. Now the Golden State’s premier historian, Kevin Starr, distills the entire sweep of California’s history into one splendid volume. From the age of exploration to the age of Arnold, this is the story of a place at once quintessentially American and utterly unique.

Arguing that America’s most populous state has always been blessed with both spectacular natural beauty and astonishing human diversity, Starr unfolds a rapid-fire epic of discovery, innovation, catastrophe, and triumph.

For generations, California’s native peoples basked in the abundance of a climate and topography eminently suited to human habitation. By the time the Spanish arrived in the early sixteenth century, there were scores of autonomous tribes thriving in the region. Though conquest was rapid, nearly two centuries passed before Spain exerted control over upper California through the chain of missions that stand to this day.

The discovery of gold in January 1848 changed everything. With population increasing exponentially as get-rich-quick dreamers converged from all over the world, California reinvented itself overnight. Starr deftly traces the successive waves of innovation and calamity that have broken over the state since then—the incredible wealth of the Big Four railroad tycoons and the devastating San Francisco earthquake of 1906; the emergence of Hollywood as the world’s entertainment capital and of Silicon Valley as the center of high-tech research and development; the heroic irrigation and transportation projects that have altered the face of the region; the role of labor, both organized and migrant, in key industries from agriculture to aerospace.

Kevin Starr has devoted his career to the history of his beloved state, but he has never lost his sense of wonder over California’s sheer abundance and peerless variety. This one-volume distillation of a lifetime’s work gathers together everything that is most important, most fascinating, and most revealing about our greatest state.

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