

## Chapter 8

# Borders and Barriers

## *Citizenship in California*

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### LOCATING CALIFORNIA'S GEOGRAPHICAL BORDERS AND PEOPLE

Malcolm Margolin, founder of one of California's most important independent publishing houses, Heyday Books, has reckoned that California borders are as arbitrary as they come. Regarding their origin, he states,

In 1849, a bunch of alcoholics sitting around a table in Monterey drew some lines around a map through places that they'd never been, and created this thing called California, and we've been stuck with it ever since. It's not real. It's not real. In no way does it conform to geography, culture, or anything else in the real world.<sup>1</sup>

While the very mention of California creates a *bona fide* tension between the real and the imagined, the role that borders play in responsible citizenship is uniquely complicated in this place, as this chapter will attempt to demonstrate. It will do so by considering the nature of California as a contestable place, with both borders and barriers that duly complexify the lived experiences of those who dwell here. It is true that the borders of California as a sociopolitical entity—admitted as the thirty-first state of the union on September 9, 1850—are very real. Inebriated as the Monterey Commission architects may have been, they knew they had to present something relatively manageable, which California had been anything but during the preceding century.

In the Spanish colonial period (1769–1821), California actually consisted of two provinces: Baja California (present-day Baja, Mexico) and Alta California (present-day California). The missions system established by the Franciscans during this time, which ran from Mission San Diego de Alcalá

(founded 1769) to Mission San Francisco Solano in Sonoma (founded 1823, just after Spanish rule ended), constituted the social spine of the current state. The place transitioned from Spanish rule to become a relatively unstable Mexican province from 1821 to 1846. During its Mexican period, California became both more Pacific-oriented and foreigner settled,<sup>2</sup> after which the Mexican-American War from 1846 to 1848 allowed the Americans to occupy it. Following several battles, in late 1846 during the weeks and months that drew an end to Mexico's grip on California, Los Angeles became the site where U.S. Captain John C. Frémont received terms of surrender from Mexican Governor Pío Pico's officers. The surrender was made official January 13, 1847 in what became known as the Treaty of Cahuenga, signed at the Cahuenga Pass rancho, securing the end of the Mexican *Californios'* armed resistance in Alta California.<sup>3</sup>

It took another year for the war to fully end with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in Mexico City on February 2, 1848, signed just nine days after James Marshall found gold on the American River at Coloma, Northern California, when "Mexico was the richest country in the world and didn't know it."<sup>4</sup> Gold had already been discovered in California six years prior by Francisco Lopez on March 9, 1842. This find in Placerita Canyon, 400 miles south of Coloma and 30 miles north of pueblo Los Angeles, never brought much publicity, although the following year he brought 30 experienced prospectors from the Mexican state of Sonora to help him mine the area. At the time Los Angeles was no more than 100 or 200 people, although the city grew to 1,610 by the first census count upon its admittance to the United States. Yet by the mid-1850s, there was said to be 6,000 prospectors in Placerita Canyon, which next to some 300,000 in the motherlode amounted to a drop in the bucket and possibly accounts somewhat for how unremarkable this finding was in the annals of history. But so does the \$2 million retrieved from Lopez and others by 1954 as the historical documents usher them away, while leaving a leaky and informal relationship between countries,<sup>5</sup> with the 1849 California Constitution securing Spanish and English and official languages (lasting until 1986), and restricting the right to vote to every White male citizen of the United States and every White male citizen of Mexico who "elected to become a citizen of the United States," and was at least 21 years old.<sup>6</sup>

The California border shared with Mexico came about relatively simply. The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gives the specifics: Upper (Alta) and Lower (Baja) California were to be divided, consisting of

a straight line drawn from the middle of the Rio Gila, where it unites with the Colorado, to a point on the coast of the Pacific Ocean, distant one marine league due south of the southernmost point of the port of San Diego.<sup>7</sup>

In doing this, the United States secured San Diego; Mexico kept Baja. On the north, California borders demarcate from Oregon along the 42nd parallel, since California is not Oregon. And then with California's southeasternmost border running straight up the Colorado River, the California border designated by the 1849 Monterey Commission basically drew a line in the sand, going from where the 35th parallel intersects with the Colorado to where the 39th and 120th parallels meet in the center of Lake Tahoe, at which point the 120th parallel shoots up to the 42nd, including the Sierra within its boundaries.

If the state's borders are straightforward, the cities are a different situation. This is fine, except for how much these change, both historically and ongoingly. With more inclusive flare, the late California historian Kevin Starr would often close out the Prefaces of his books by identifying his location as Los Angeles (where he taught full-time at USC), Sacramento (where he served as State Librarian), and San Francisco (where he was born and lived nearly his entire life). About this tri-city dwelling, which disrupts any narrative of a self-contained city (not to mention a city's dependence on its hinterlands), Starr would often note the appropriateness of the triangulation since, he claimed, he lived in "a city called California."<sup>8</sup>

## WELCOME TO L.A.

Disrupting narratives is what California does. It is not so much a place that people pass through, although they do, as it is one they locate as a destination point, or point of termination—a *terminus cupiditatis* (terminus of desire).<sup>9</sup> And here is often where it just so happens that eager seekers often never arrive at their desired destination and often never find what they're looking for. They often find other things, whether they want to see them or not. Consider, for example, Los Angeles as an Asian place—in fact, the Asian American capital of the United States with some 1.5 million strong and counting.<sup>10</sup> This is not only what data reveals today, but was often the historical experience of travelers heading West, only to find that they had arrived at the edge of the East, where worlds collide.

Or they find a place on fire. In her reflections on the writings of Nathanael West, the 1965 Watts riots, and the violence and unpredictability of the Santa Ana winds, Joan Didion described the city burning as "Los Angeles's deepest image," accentuating the impermanence and unreliability of life in Los Angeles.<sup>11</sup> While we can certainly acknowledge that Los Angeles consumes, Los Angeles also endures; a real city—after the fire, rain, floods, and earthquakes—Los Angeles buds and blooms. As with the vast array of native plants in our region—from the Coastal Goldenbush and Bush Sunflower to the Seacliff Buckwheat,

California Aster, and with the sweet fragrance of our variety of sages, to the Fuchsia-Flowering Gooseberry to the California Sagebrush, Los Angeles blooms year-round in this semi-arid climate, awakening us each morning to the newness of this fragrant and delicate coastal basin. Los Angeles will bloom repeatedly, adopting and integrating foreign flora and fauna, unless we overdraw the richness of its resources, turning it barren through exploitation, pollution, and unsustainable practices that wreck our environment and abuse those seeking to make better lives here for themselves and their families.<sup>12</sup> Yet even amid the exploitation and ongoing problems that make Los Angeles seem like a primitive city, the globe's communities take up residence here, bringing with them the world's rich resources, traditions, knowledge, and practices. And by drawing from all these sources in robust inclusivity, Los Angeles can continue to be a place of habitation for the world. Los Angeles' truest image is not about burning; it is about life and love and hope, a dynamic movement, ever-changing and expanding. It is about making space for more life to be here, against all odds.

Los Angeles, then, is not one place, but many places, comprising 88 incorporated cities all interconnected, including the 76 unincorporated ones. Measuring around 4,083 square miles with over 10 million people, Los Angeles is California's most populous city, cutting the state's Northern and Southern populations in half at Wilshire Blvd. And it is also the second largest city in the United States. It is the "City of the Future," with little space to linger in the past. It engenders equal senses of dislocation and disorientation amid the recycle and remake, taking the present as "a work in progress, or, more precisely, a launching pad."<sup>13</sup>

Like California, Los Angeles belongs to the world, to everyone, where everyone can find representation here. Los Angeles' often morphed and mangled dwellers find this with their far-flung identity-markers derived from wherever they came, with their own nostalgic myths animating their daily mannerisms upon this supposed fresh canvas where things can change rapidly in the uniqueness of Los Angeles' penetrating light and golden hour shadows.<sup>14</sup> Amid the attempts to enhance and appropriate these cultures, the projections are often amplified and rarely enhanced; they eventually equalize under the sun.

The sun has been here for a long time; it is the main attraction, and gives the place life. It attracted Natives long ago, and today Los Angeles County is home to a larger Native population than any other county in the United States.<sup>15</sup> Los Angeles is also the world's second largest Mexican city, and also contains enormous populations of citizens from countries around the world. As the California cultural epicenter, it is a place of becoming, where one cannot easily remain the same here, choosing a static existence indefinitely. Things change here, and in this sense Los Angeles reflects a central feature of the *imago Dei*, pointing out that we can be something better than our current selves.<sup>16</sup>

There's an odyssey spirit here that's more than a pilgrimage, though. It is that, but more like a promise of space that can never be had in the ways that it was promised. As it was with the early hucksters who hoodwinked the care-less newcomers when advertising land as having "water privileges," only to discover these plots as "land *under water* or in dry creeks; land described as possessing scenic attractions consisted of—mountains and chasms!" (emphasis in original)<sup>17</sup> The tricksters and liars remain, only more sophisticated today, and often with greater capital, sometimes still found overnight. Yet amid the never-ending bureaucratic laws that are endlessly subverted and challenged at local and state levels, not to mention the legion of corruption, this does not prevent us from trying to do better. The dynamic, then, is not conducive to rest, or the static, sedentary, leisurely life.

Now before we consider what Los Angeles holds forth and how this might be grappled with theologically, let us not move on too quickly from the fact that once upon a time this was not Los Angeles at all. Nor was it la Ciudad de Nuestra Señora de los Ángeles de Porciuncula.

### WHERE YOU ARE: TONGVA LAND

The land we occupy is the land of the Tongva, although they would not have called themselves that. Later they were called Gabrielinos because of their close association with the Mission San Gabriel,<sup>18</sup> although they would not have called themselves that either.

These early Natives were "a people of material wealth and cultural sophistication" who "inhabited a vast tract of some of the most fertile and productive land in California." Before European contact, there were some 5,000 people living in 50 to 100 towns and settlements on the mainland and on the southern Channel Islands. The land they inhabited stretched from Topanga Canyon in the northwest to the base of Mount Wilson in the north (just below Pasadena) to San Bernardino in the east to the Aliso Creek vicinity near El Toro Road in the southeast (south of Irvine) encompassing more than 2,500 square miles.<sup>19</sup>

Never mind current county markers, these people were deeply connected with the land and with the other inhabitants with whom they lived: the fish and waterfowl in the marshland, the dolphin at sea. Their exceptional maritime abilities allowed them to be semi-sedentary. They knew the bluejay, rabbit, squirrel, deer, coyote, and the occasional mountain lion; they knew the rivers, every hole in the earth, and the insects. They knew the trees, the oak from which they would gather the abundance of acorns used for their meals. And they knew the bushes and their berries, the rocks, the wind and fire, the canyons and footpaths; the sunrise and the sunset; the tides and seasons. The earth spoke to them, and

they listened with a reciprocal self-understanding that marked the moral universe they knew, in which their morality was interwoven with geography, and they were taught who they were by the place they dwelt.

They had property, to be sure. The land gave these things to them and instructed them on what to do: cooking pots of steatite or soapstone traded with those from Santa Catalina Island; stone knives with wood handles; tightly and beautifully woven baskets; bone harpoons; shell fishhooks; animal skins to hunt in; and arrows. They possessed willow that formed the skeletal frameworks of their tule-thatched huts, and many other things for life in and with the land. And they lived and moved about on it.

### A GEOGRAPHICAL VIOLATION

And then there was a theft. It was not a stealing of bodies as with a different part of this nation's history, but the mission labor system brought a harsh, slave-like existence that was at least a "semicaptive," "communal form of forced labor," or a form of "slavery without the actual sale of the individual." A slavery *de facto*, albeit not in intent, according to historian Robert Archibald.<sup>20</sup> Amid much debate about the subject, Carey McWilliams concluded that the entire Franciscan missionary enterprise in California's coastal regional missions was tantamount to "Nazis operating concentration camps," which throughout the entire state during the colonial-missions period saw the total California Indian population fall from some 300,000 to 150,000 in about 70 years, many dying at or nearby the missions. After this, of course, a systematic extermination took place from 1846 to 1870, fueled by the lust for wealth in the Gold Rush, reducing the total population from 150,000 to about 30,000 in about 25 years. By 1880, the California census record gives the total native population at 16,277.<sup>21</sup>

These Indigenous people, who believed they came from the earth, were deemed "primitive"—*gente sin razón*. As such they carried values not seen as worthy of being adopted or adapted for the future of what "California" was to be. In his account of Catholicism in America, Kevin Starr, himself a Catholic, noted that in spite of different intentions, in the best of cases, "Spain's colonizing efforts . . . included deliberate acts of warfare, rapine, and massacre, and led to the destabilization of local cultures." And what were the different intentions Starr refers to? He cites the case of the Jesuit priest father Eusebio Kino (1645–1711) who, according to Starr, envisioned California the following way in the first decade of the eighteenth century:

The doctrine of the Incarnation formed the foundation of Kino's spirituality and evangelization, and hence he perceived humans as upgraded beyond measure by

the Incarnation and sustained in that identity by the Risen Christ. This sensibility, this sense of the world transformed while remaining knowable on its own terms.<sup>22</sup>

The world, then, was perceived as transformed while remaining knowable *on its own terms*. Christianity therefore did not necessitate the colonialist project of subjugation, destabilization, and destruction brought about by stealing. But this is in fact what happened.

It was the destruction of place and place-centered identities that in turn gave rise to racial identities. It all happened with stealing, an act of seizing and removing bodies from the free engagement and dwelling with the land in which their lives were storied and intricately interwoven. Now they would inhabit restricted space where their bodies could no longer engage with the land as they once had, in the place where they had once found their full lives—in the earth. No more is the world seen as communicative and animate; it is now reduced to silence, subjugated. Where they once could hear themselves in the land and the land in them, they were now displaced in what Willie James Jennings calls “the geographical wound”: a wound caused by foreigners coming in to assert and insist that they can see God’s creation better than the earlier dwellers could. This kind of supercessionism signaled a kind of eschatological fulfillment that finds its end in a vision of land ownership and the destruction of place and place-centered identities that enabled the formation of private property.

It is this geographical violation that becomes the context for understanding the racialization that flows from this alien way of ordering life here. “Race is a matter of geography,” Jennings says, and in this way “racial identity and private property are two sides of the same coin.” This is because it is the parceling out of particular kinds of people who should possess something that will necessarily exclude or reduce others’ engagement with this contested space even while they have formed their whole identities around the same space, which flowed through them as much as they dwelt in it. This in turn yielded what Jennings calls a “hermeneutics of possession,” which sees private property owned by an individual or nation (or state) carrying with it a juggernaut of unrelenting territoriality, and thus seeing the world as “possession,” and not as it truly is.<sup>23</sup>

This backdrop explains many things today, among which is why it is so wonderful to recreate outdoors, for those who do. Once land had become private property, with people removed from place, we found new ways to reengage it: outdoor sports, camping, desert concerts, and all sorts of innovative ways to reconnect with the earth, the sun, to be outdoors, and once again near the land, dirt, and water, to try to find ourselves again, and make sense of things in the land, which was not so easily done in the thing we had built for us to live in.

And the violations continued, in a place perhaps as ongoingly contestable as its sprawl of diverse communities stretched out in its individual municipalities, none of which have any obvious and hard borders. This is because other than what we see in the vast distinctions between the caste-classes here—with their walled and gated communities, pristine lawns, day-laborer presence, and astoundingly impressive neighborhoods fortified by jaded security guards and shifty sheriffs, and well-endowed by the people who have made these places their own—aside from these, Los Angeles is borderless.

And while everything under the sun arguably belongs here, do these grand distinctions belong? And do borders?

### ON BORDERS AND BARRIERS

Borders have an interesting history in the occupied land of Los Angeles. Incorporating the earliest game trails from millennia ago, a privately funded Spanish grid, and the setup of the pueblo's La Plaza as the city center, land outside the pueblo was divided by roads marking the boundaries of different ranchos. Adopted under Spanish and Mexican rule, the Laws of the Indies meant that Los Angeles was entitled to 4 square leagues (about 27 square miles) held by the pueblo in common trust. Although when Frémont marched into the city its limits had not been mapped, which in turn meant that the American grip on the city would be much stronger as the land was parceled out for new settlers and real-estate spectators.

Many of these survey lines conceived by early planners were transformed into actual streets during the 1880s land boom, with satellite towns such as Pasadena and Santa Monica springing up from their erstwhile rancho lands, with then various grids and major streets sprawling out through the ranchos, as streets and several grids were imposed and then superimposed on the previous ones, meaning that Los Angeles, city and hinterlands, would be an ongoing conversation related to what already was, and what could be.<sup>24</sup> Extending city services such as gas, electricity, and (stolen) water to wherever it could was the key to the expansion, especially later amid postwar White flight giving way to endless suburbia, and what the city might be in its sputtering cascade back into its center (through gentrification) and then back out again in an ongoing ebb-and-flow endemic to the constant movement that Los Angeles elicits. And the city (and county) has grown with an ever-insatiable hunger and with an ever-flowing dynamic of rapid change that my colleague the historian William Deverell terms a juggernaut that has not slowed down, nor will it, even with the various limits (environmental, equity, access, healthcare) that will eventually produce their own momentum. With historical velocity a given for this town, ensuing and ongoing challenges must



be met by creative and imaginative coalitions that strike as unconventional a chord as the city's own existence is.<sup>25</sup>

It is difficult to think, however, that even the most bold and outrageous coalitions stepping up to handle and steer the gargantuan creature of Los Angeles will be composed of anything but those most interested in protecting what they already have, perhaps creating even new classes amid the dynamic movement. Distinctions have always been present within Los Angeles, privatized and often happenstance, even as they are now amid the municipalities and a million-plus people living in unincorporated areas, often changing and turning over. The city was never one thing, whether juxtaposed with the mission of San Gabriel or Riverside (which is certainly not Los Angeles) or El Monte,<sup>26</sup> or somewhere else.

While all of this complexifies questions about Los Angeles' borders, there is no question that we certainly have barriers. Efforts to place real roots in Los Angeles are difficult, pointing perhaps to a kind of semi-nomadic effort that David Ulin exerts with his commitment to walking the city to stay rooted here, marking his place existentialist-style as "a way for me to meander my universe into being."<sup>27</sup> But we have historical barriers to even this kind of privileged and pedestrian residing, subject to police-state surveillance. Ray Bradbury sketched the situation in his 1951 short story, "The Pedestrian,"<sup>28</sup> which reveals terrors only exacerbated against people of color, especially against Los Angeles' Black and Latino residents, with removal logic manifest in unwritten racial land covenants and gated housing communities fortified by the wealth of their residents who got theirs ahead of whatever the next wave of immigrants and refugees would be.

In this way, borders operate with the same logic of removal and exclusion that is manifest in eugenics practices, in mass incarceration, and in a host of violent practices that Gloria Anzaldúa describes in an early draft of her poem, "Del Otro Lado," written in response to her experience visiting Border Field State Park, San Diego, in 1983:

On Feb 2, 1848 a hatchet/  
comes crashing down/  
severing her body, severing [the land] ~~a nation, severing the Earth./~~  
She bleeds. The blood becomes a river, El Rio Grande./  
They build a fence across her body, Mexico,/  
a wall called El tratado de Guadalupe-Hidalgo./  
Thousands are sacrificed [*sic*] to that Barbed wall.<sup>29</sup>

While offering a British perspective to the issue, Luke Bretherton argues that "a sense of place and the existence of borders resist the homogenizing collectivism and abstraction of cosmopolitan egalitarianism (whether liberal,

capitalist, or communist) that would make everyone the same and thereby eradicate the possibility of gift exchange.” Such a perspective, however provisional, and even while recognizing that “all our human constructions of place are under judgment,”<sup>30</sup> does not adequately account for the history of social relations within places like Los Angeles and the invasive dismembering violence of the action of the carceral state (whether liberal, capitalist, communist) on its residents, the lack of due process for these residents, and how it enables a veneer of justice that leaves state actors unaccountable for ongoing official state-sanctioned injustices.<sup>31</sup>

With regard to the U.S.–Mexico border, geographer Michael Dear presents several reasons why walls won’t work in the case of the United States and Mexico: the border has long been a place of connectivity and collaboration; border walls fail miserably by encouraging other means of illegal immigration; and spaces between Mexico and the United States form what Dear calls a whole other “third nation,” which is not a formal sovereign nation state, but shares the characteristics of a nation, including shared identities, joint traditions, and language ties. For these reasons, Dear argues that the third nation endures; and amid the billions of dollars spent on the politics of border walls, a far greater investment could be made in the growing relations between the two countries since the prosperity of this third nation “may yet prove to be the most effective guarantor of our national security and linchpin of a humane immigration policy.”<sup>32</sup>

Of course, while subject to local and county laws, and to laws of the State of California and the United States, Los Angeles is not a state. Yet it remains ongoingly contestable space—that third space—embodied in the lives of its residents who come from around the world, having endured violence as often as having experienced hope. In California, borders remain ways of banishing the unwanted, whether into the noir of desert-death occupying the imagination of numerous Los Angelenos who live on the edge of existence within Los Angeles’ imaginary fear of the other<sup>33</sup> or into some other miserable place. But, indeed, while the other is *there*, the other is also *here*, resident in our neighborhoods, working in our restaurants, hiking our trails, fishing on the piers, helping their kids through online school, and sharing our same plight in the COVID-19 moment, although with greater vulnerability than the rest of us.<sup>34</sup>

Here we are—*el otro lado está aquí* (the other is here), and the other is us—melded together into the complex structurings of our city, which according to Karen Tei Yamashita in the so-called magical realist reading of the situation in her book, *Tropic of Orange*, finds Los Angeles expanding ever on. Not in the sense of Mike Davis’s *City of Quartz*’s ongoing expansion of the carceral state with its crude police-state occupation,<sup>35</sup> but actually moving. She gives us a space suspended between places—Los Angeles and Mexico City—with all of its parts (and the whole) and would-be residents

turned and moving Northward, as the elasticity of time and space moves with them, dragging along with it the very Tropic of Cancer.<sup>36</sup> Borders be damned.

## CITIZENSHIP IN THE CITY OF ANGELS

Belonging *in* Los Angeles does not necessarily translate to belonging to the whole of Los Angeles, or necessarily to any of its other parts, nor to California, nor to the United States. In this way, there remain no guarantees here, and certainly none of citizenship. Los Angeles is a life-giver, an affirmer, and a dream-weaver; but it is also a destroyer, a negator, and a death-trap. Yet it is a place where belonging is possible if you stay long enough, joining the freeway traffic on your way to somewhere. Amid the activities of the great institutions, tested oligarchs, and the nouveau riche, belonging meaningfully to Los Angeles, again, does nothing necessarily for one's citizenship and vice versa. Belonging in Los Angeles certainly has a lot to do with whether one wishes to see taco trucks on every corner. And yet it is not difficult to imagine that some of those taco trucks are owned and operated by families whose former homes now have freeways running through them, where semi-trucks daily drive over the spaces once dwelt in by removed peoples, giving way to the dynamic movement of the freeway's ontology, where Angelenos live a large part of their lives. In Reyner Bahnam's terms the freeway is "a single comprehensible place, a coherent state of mind, a complete way of life, the fourth ecology of the Angeleno."<sup>37</sup> That traffic slowed with the COVID-19 pandemic, although starting to pick up again. But even this particular form of submission to Los Angeles' horizontal icon and ontological mount does nothing for one's citizenship here.

California boldly has offered drivers' licenses to undocumented immigrants as a result of a law (AB 60) that went into effect from January 2015. Known as the Safe and Responsible Driver's Act, available to non-citizens, over one million of these licenses were issued by April 2018, with obvious economic impacts for drivers buying insurance, new and used vehicles, renting cars, and so on. And those engaged in these efforts demonstrate an enormous amount of emotional intelligence in their pursuit of transnational aspirations. Nevertheless, there seems to have been something of a shift in the last couple of years, so that I cannot imagine doing today an "Undocumented California" series the likes of what we did in the UC Press-published, *Boom California* from October 2017 to January 2018, fit with a provocative event in Tijuana, challenging the border as a statement, with writers from U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera to Chancellor Eloy Oakley of the California Community College system. Matters have become too polarized today, and the things that (we know of) have happened to the undocumented, to those

caught and incarcerated at the border, including the children torn from their parents, and so much more are impossible to know.

All who reside in Los Angeles, then, to some degree, are fighting for this place, wanting a better life. Angelenos survive and endure; and those who wish to leave may do so at any time.<sup>38</sup> The land will do whatever it will do. But those who wish to be here should be able to, not only because their respective cultural entitlements, since Los Angeles needs all the help it can get; yet ultimately none of it will be enough to save Los Angeles. No borders can protect from what will one day happen with all surety, according to the biblical perspective, reckoning with the depth of ontological judgment on all things historical, communal, and real, brought about irrefutably by divine action. The Letter of Hebrews gives the following to readers:

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven! At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.” This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe; for indeed our God is a consuming fire.<sup>39</sup>

This passage grants not a realized eschatology, like the ones often found in the empty promises of Los Angeles’ frequent utopian and dystopian visions, but it presents an eschatological realism where the future world is far more real (and objective) than the present one. Stanley Grenz noted that from this biblical perspective, this reality “lies before rather than beneath or around us. And it is discovered through anticipation.”<sup>40</sup> Not entirely foreign to Los Angeles’ persistent futurism, this orientation includes not only the reception of a kingdom that no earthquake can level, but also spells out one having a new kind of citizenship with enrollment in heaven, and not the one passing away. The one passing away is the one of Augustine’s “worldly society . . . flowered from a selfish love . . . , whereas the communion of saints is rooted in a love of God that is ready to trample on self.” Again, Augustine reasons: “The city of man seeks the praise of men, whereas the height of glory for the other is to hear God in the witness of conscience.”<sup>41</sup> The former seems

primitive and short-sighted, the kind that separates immigrant children from parents, malpracticing existing “just” laws while rejecting ones that should be, distorting justice for the many while delivering heartily for a select few—the kingdom of this world, not the kingdom of our God.<sup>42</sup>

Los Angeles, though, keeps its rich terrain as a place of becoming, less like the epicenter of Governor Gavin Newsom’s California-as-nation-state talk, and more like a regional place. It sees the good, the bad, and the ugly, from Palmdale to Pomona to Long Beach and Catalina—a region more akin to a province always developing than a fixed city with anything resembling static fortified walls. The place functions best with the locals doing peacefully and justly among themselves. Augustine prefers that the “happier state of human relations” would find that all sociopolitical entities “would remain small, and rejoice in their neighborly concord. Thus, also, there would have been in the world a great many nations, as there are many families in a city.”<sup>43</sup> This portends the eschatological vision, where the body of Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, stands as a witness to the harmony of its life, and through its equality and other solidarity can contradict and resist the exclusionary logic operative in modern democratic nation states.<sup>44</sup>

Utopianism, then, is most certainly to be avoided with regard to how Los Angeles may function in relationship to those who dwell within it. And yet dwell they do in this fallen and penultimate era plagued by sin. A localist LA-regionalism offers the best of possibilities, though, with a focus away from our social fragmentedness and more toward a less-estranged and more local emphasis on our own particular social orders.<sup>45</sup> Such a regionalism is perhaps the best antidote to a cosmopolitanism that puts down no actual roots, and thus becoming only a thin basis for, say, pragmatic or opportunistic formalized citizenship. Regionalism instead provides a different relationship with the land than the one we’ve had for the past century, where the land is seen not as a commodity but as a relative, as the Indigenous dwellers did before us,<sup>46</sup> tethering that enables a flourishing in the spirit of shared loyalty which in turn requires and rewards engagement with one’s particular dwelling place.<sup>47</sup>

This spirit of higher provincialism, in Josiah Royce’s terms, enables the best kinds of freedom and flourishing that one might expect from neighbors building together within a culture of trust, perhaps even featuring the kind of love Augustine refers to as inherent in the communion of saints, or the life sought after and shared by those residing within Royce’s “Beloved Community,”<sup>48</sup> or amid what Ed Soja identifies as a space reflecting “urban spatial causality” with its effects in a city region that can manifest the unjust effects of neoliberal globalization and serve as an active agent for new spatially informed social movements aimed at actively inhabiting the world for better. Such a position—to *occupy*—mimics the recent/current movement in

the United States and beyond protesting injustice, advocating for Black lives, and being present with a new and transformative vision of justice for all.

These movements are precisely those that demonstrate an ethics of responsibility that both destabilizes and restabilizes citizenship with potential for an even more biblical approach. Leviticus 19:34 states, “The alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God” (NRSV). This love for the alien—as one’s self—views the alien as a citizen dwelling in the land and in their midst, wherein all share a responsibility to care for the land, and the people and other things on it. But this requires an intentionality and a persistence and presence that abidingly resist various utopian and dystopian visions with a view toward an everyday learning and embodying of both particular and generalizable features, which in Los Angeles take Angelenos through the process of becoming the very best of what they could be. Beyond imagining, they (we) image the *imago*, and thereby may yet be something better than our current selves—better versions of what we already are.<sup>49</sup>

## NOTES

1. Jon Christensen, “California’s Heyday: The Boom Interview with Malcolm Margolin,” *Boom California*, December 21, 2014, [https://boomcalifornia.com/2014/12/21/boom\\_interview\\_malcolm\\_margolin/](https://boomcalifornia.com/2014/12/21/boom_interview_malcolm_margolin/).

2. Thomas J. Osborne, *Pacific Eldorado: A History of Greater California*, 2nd ed. (New York: Wiley-Blackwell, 2019), 75.

3. For a complexified account of the history (and mythology) of this account, see D. J. Waldie, “A Table of Uncertainty,” in *Becoming Los Angeles: Myth, Memory, and a Sense of Place* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2020), 21–29.

4. David Kipen, “The Américas: Chapter the First: A Novel of California Begun,” *Boom California*, November 20, 2017, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/11/20/the-americas-chapter-the-first/>.

5. David Lustig, “Field of Dreams and Land of Gold: History: By the Mid-1850s There Were 6,000 Prospectors—More Than the Population of the Pueblo of Los Angeles at the Time—Scouring Placerita Canyon for Gold,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1990, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1990-03-08-vw-2800-story.html>.

6. 1849 Constitution of the State of California, Article II, Section 1, <https://archives.cdn.sos.ca.gov/pdf/1849-california-constitution-for-website-9-16-20.pdf>.

7. Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), <https://www.ourdocuments.gov/doc.php?flash=false&doc=26&page=transcript>.

8. Kevin Starr and William F. Deverell, “The Literary Tradition in California,” in the Tales From Two Cities: Writing From California—SF Conference, October 5, 2013.

9. See also the chapter in this volume, and the notion of California as a place of “destiny”: Richard W. Flory, “City of Dreams: Los Angeles as a Cradle for Religious Activism, Innovation, and Diversity,” in *Migration, Transnationalism, and Faith in Missiological Perspective: Los Angeles as a Global Crossroads*, edited by Kirsteen Kim and Alexia Salvatierra (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2021).

10. Elson Trinidad, “L.A. County is the Capital of Asian America,” *KCET*, September 27, 2013, <https://www.kcet.org/socal-focus/la-county-is-the-capital-of-asian-america>. See also Kevin Starr, “Interpreting California: An Ever Challenging Task,” unpublished manuscript delivered at the California Workshop, Sidney Harman Academy for Polymathic Study, University of Southern California, August 26, 2015.

11. Joan Didion, “Los Angeles Notebook,” in *Slouching Towards Bethlehem* (FSG, 1968), 220.

12. Glen M. MacDonald, “The Myth of a Desert Metropolis: Los Angeles was Not Built in a Desert, but are We Making It One?” *Boom California*, May 22, 2017, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/05/22/the-myth-of-a-desert-metropolis-los-angeles-was-not-built-in-a-desert-but-are-we-making-it-one/>. See also inequalities rising in LA urban spaces in Eric Daniel Fournier, Robert Cudd, Felicia Federico, and Stephanie Pincetl, “On Energy Sufficiency and the Need for New Policies to Combat Growing Inequities in the Residential Energy Sector,” *Elem Sci Anth*, 8, no. 1 (2020): 24, <https://www.elementscience.org/articles/10.1525/elementa.419/>.

13. Lynell George, *After/Image: Los Angeles Outside the Frame* (Los Angeles: Angel City Press, 2017), 57.

14. For ways that these myths work and might be understood more theologically, see Jason S. Sexton, “Can Theology Engage with California’s Culture,” in *Theology and California: Theological Refractions on California’s Culture*, edited by Fred Sanders and Jason S. Sexton (New York: Routledge, 2014), 66–67.

15. The Los Angeles City/County Native American Indian Commission states: “The City of Los Angeles holds the second largest percentage of Native Americans in the United States, totaling around 54,236 people. Los Angeles County, home to more Native Americans/ Alaska Natives than any other county in the United States, totals around 140,764 people” (<https://lanaic.lacounty.gov/resources/tribal-governments/>).

16. See Stanley J. Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001).

17. Excerpt from Harris Newmark, “Sixty Years in Southern California: 1853–1913 (1915),” in *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*, edited by David Ulin (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 44.

18. Most of Mission San Gabriel was recently destroyed. See Brian Rokos and Nathaniel Percy, “4-alarm fire destroys most of Mission San Gabriel,” *San Gabriel Valley Tribune*, July 11, 2020, <https://www.sgvtribune.com/2020/07/11/flames-burn-roof-at-mission-san-gabriel/>.

19. William McCawley, *The First Angelinos: The Gabrielino Indians of Los Angeles* (Banning/Novato: Malki Museum Press/Ballena Press, 1996), 3. NB: the Shoshoneans are a branch of the Uto-Aztecs to which the Gabrielino belong. See also Brian Fagan, *Before California: An Archaeologist Looks at Our Earliest Inhabitants* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2003).

20. Benjamin Madley, *An American Genocide: The United States and the California Indian Catastrophe, 1846–1873* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 27–29.

21. Madley, *American Genocide*, 3.

22. Kevin Starr, *Continental Ambitions: Roman Catholics in North America: The Colonial Experience* (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2016), 189.

23. Willie James Jennings, Sprunt Lectures, Lecture 1, “The Land Speaks: ‘Rethinking both the Private and Possession’,” *Union Presbyterian Seminary*, May 8, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAsKuK\\_XAmk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAsKuK_XAmk).

24. Nathan Masters, “Gridding the City,” in *Latitudes: An Angeleno’s Atlas*, edited by Patricia Wakida (Berkeley: Heyday, 2015), 10–21.

25. William Deverell, “Fast, Faster L.A.: Looking at History to Steer Our Future,” *KCET*, October 9, 2015, <https://www.kcet.org/commentary/fast-faster-la-looking-at-history-to-steer-our-future>.

26. See Romeo Guzmán, Carribean Fragoza, Alex Sayf Cummings, and Ryan Reft, *East of East: The Making of Greater El Monte* (Rutgers, 2020).

27. David L. Ulin, *Sidewalking: Coming to Terms with Los Angeles* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 120.

28. Ray Bradbury, “The Pedestrian,” in *Writing Los Angeles: A Literary Anthology*, edited by David Ulin (New York: The Library of America, 2002), 370–374.

29. For a careful exposition of the development of this poem, see Marcel Brousseau, “Lines and Fences: Writing and Rewriting the California Fence/Wall,” *Boom California*, December 14, 2017, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/12/14/lines-and-fences/>.

30. Luke Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics: The Conditions and Possibilities of Faithful Witness* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 148.

31. For a detailed historical account of the transnational transformative rise of Los Angeles against the backdrop of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands the borderlands through urban and imperial capitalism, see Jessica M. Kim, *Imperial Metropolis: Los Angeles, Mexico, and the Borderlands of American Empire, 1865–1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019).

32. Michael Dear, “Why Walls Won’t Work,” in *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary*, edited by Ronal Rael (Oakland: University of California Press, 2017), 160–165.

33. See two topologies of the metaphorical desert found in California literature in Gary Reger, “The Deserts of Los Angeles: Two Topologies,” *Boom California*, May 24, 2017, <https://boomcalifornia.com/2017/05/24/the-deserts-of-los-angeles-two-topologies/>.

34. Stephanie Lai and Rong-Gong Lin II, “California fails to protect Latino workers as coronavirus ravages communities of color,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 15, 2020, <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2020-07-15/california-fails-to-protect-latino-workers-coronavirus-ravages-communities-of-color>.

35. See Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Verso, 1990) and *Ecology of Fear: Los Angeles and the Imagination of Disaster* (New York: Verso, 1998).

36. Karen Tei Yamashita, *Tropic of Orange* (Minneapolis: Coffee House Press, 1997).



37. Reyner Banham, *Los Angeles: The Architecture of Four Ecologies* (reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 195.

38. See the recent interview with the former California governor addressing this issue in Adam Nagourney, “Jerry Brown on a California Exodus: ‘Tell Me: Where Are You Going to Go?’” *New York Times*, September 14, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/14/us/politics/jerry-brown-on-a-california-exodus-tell-me-where-are-you-going-to-go.html>.

39. Hebrews 12.22-29, NRSV.

40. Stanley J. Grenz, “Why Do Theologians Need to Be Scientists?” *Zygon* 35 (June 2000): 352.

41. Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God, Books VIII–XVI,” in *The Fathers of the Church*, edited by Hermigild Dressler, translated by Gerald G. Walsh and Grace Monahan, vol. 14, chap. 28 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1952), 410.

42. See Jeremy Treat, *Seek First: How the Kingdom of God Changes Everything* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

43. Augustine of Hippo, “The City of God, Books I–VII,” in *The Fathers of the Church*, edited by Hermigild Dressler, translated by Demetrius B. Zema and Gerald G. Walsh, vol. 8, chap. 15 (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1950), 211.

44. See Bretherton, *Christianity and Contemporary Politics*, 137.

45. Josiah Royce, *The Philosophy of Loyalty* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press), 114; see also Josiah Royce, “Provincialism,” in *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce, Vol. 2: Logic, Loyalty, and Community*, edited by John H. McDermott (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 1067–1088.

46. I am grateful to Andrea L. Smith for this point, as well as for her comments on the entirety of this chapter. While the regionalism proposed here does not necessarily disallow the notion of a nation (including Indigenous nationhood) as she proposes it (however it may relate to Newsom’s notion of California-as-nation state), it does not argue for a particular socio-political structural entity at all. Although a particular posture to genocide not just as a historical act but as an ongoing logic should certainly be part of the posture of the kind of regionalism proposed here, which would not only include Indigenous removal logic, but also what has been ongoingly applied against Black, Latino, Asian, and other poor residents of Los Angeles.

47. George, *After/Image*, 66–67.

48. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University Press of America, 2001), 129–131.

49. Edward J. Soja, *My Los Angeles: From Urban Restructuring to Regional Urbanization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 247–267.

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