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1780-1880: California in Transition

Several social, political, and economic transitions marked the conquest and cultural exchange of California's early history. Native American communities were transformed as a result of European exploration and settlement in the late 18th century. Spain constructed missions and military presidios in Alta California to increase Spanish settlement in the new colony and encourage religious conversion among Native Americans. The mission structures remained long after the collapse of Spanish authority. Following Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, vast land grants helped elite California society flourish until the 1880s. Today, the state's wealth continues to be defined through the utilization of its rich resources and its immense natural and human potential.

1848-1865: The Gold Rush Era

The few short years of the Gold Rush changed California's population and environment dramatically. Ethnic diversity grew as people from all over the world poured into the state, ignoring numerous dangers and the ever-present risk of earthquakes to follow their dreams of striking gold. This sudden influx, and the gold mining industry in general, had a significant impact on the environment and contributed to the rapid growth of cities throughout the state. The state's legal infrastructure lagged behind this growth, however, and the lawless atmosphere of the gold mining communities led to a growing problem of murder and mayhem. Law-abiding citizens began to see the need to strengthen existing legal and judicial institutions to ensure a more peaceful approach to everyday life.

1870-1900: Closing of the Frontier

During the final decades of 19th century, a transcontinental railroad was built. For the first time, the east and west coasts of the United States were connected. This opened the West to the rest of the country and, in the words of Frederick Turner, effectively "closed the frontier": the vast continent no longer seemed limitless. Native Americans felt the impact of the increasing numbers of European Americans, who attempted to remove them from their tribal lands and assimilate them into Western culture. Chinese citizens also faced daily prejudice, resulting in The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which closed the United States to further Chinese immigration. The new railroad made travel faster and safer, and westward expansion brought more and more people. As open range became settled, the emerging conservation movement advocated for laws and restrictions to protect the natural wonders and beauty that remained.

1900-1940s: Emerging Industrial Order

Technological innovation and rapid cultural change marked the first few decades of the 20th century in the United States, and California was no exception. Advances in technology led to rapid industrialization of the workplace. Factories and assembly lines became the norm, changing the way Americans worked. As people continued to migrate to California from other parts of the country and around the world in

search of work and a better life, the state grew more diverse. With factories producing greater quantities of products, a need emerged for a better way to promote those products to more people, sparking the beginning of the modern advertising industry. Technological innovations and improved communications also influenced popular culture and the way people spent their free time. The movie industry in particular put Southern California on the map, making the area a magnet for would-be stars and stargazers.

1929-1939: The Great Depression

For California, the nation, and the world, the 1930s was a period of particularly hard times. The US stock market crash of 1929 set off the most severe economic depression in the Western world. In the American Midwest, this was compounded by a severe drought that destroyed crops and farms. Of the 2.5 million Dust Bowl immigrants who left the Plains states, about 200,000 moved to California. They joined a population that was already facing massive unemployment and low wages. During the Great Depression, labor issues were commonplace and strikes occurred frequently. One of the best known was the 1934 San Francisco General Strike. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal offered ordinary Americans relief and help by funding a range of public works projects and regional development of bridges, dams, and power plants.

1939-1945: World War II

American mobilization for World War II spurred significant changes in the nation's social and economic landscape. Americans who remained on the home front contributed to the war effort in various ways. With so many men in the armed services, industry had a lot of jobs to fill. For the first time, women joined the workforce in record numbers, finding work in previously male-dominated industries such as factories and shipyards. The acute need for workers also opened up new employment possibilities for African Americans, who migrated to the West Coast from other parts of the country. Many Mexicans came to California through the government-sponsored Bracero Program, which was organized to fill the need for agricultural field workers. After the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor, the government saw Japanese Americans as possible enemies. Nearly 122,000 Japanese Americans were relocated against their will to internment camps in the West and Northwest, where they spent the duration of the war. Some Japanese American men voluntarily joined special fighting units, such as the much-decorated 442nd Regimental Combat Team.

1950s-1970s: Social Reform

From the period of the 1950s through the 1970s, struggles for civil and social rights, equality, and justice swept the United States. At universities and colleges, students championed the Free Speech Movement, demanding their right to free speech, political protest, and academic freedom. African Americans struggled for civil rights, and many groups fought for social justice — demanding equal rights, better working conditions, and an end to the Vietnam War. In 1965, feelings about racial inequality and economic and social injustice boiled over into widespread violence for the first time in Los Angeles's African American community of Watts. The community's transformation from angry frustration to

hopeful growth is just one example of what was taking place in similar neighborhoods across the country during this tumultuous time.