
CHAPTER 1

CALIFORNIA SOCIETY, ECONOMY, AND POLITICS: YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW

Chapter Summary

Is California a “failed state,” as some argued during the state’s recent budget crises, or is a “California Comeback” now in progress, as Governor Brown asserts? Chapter One raises this question and then takes readers through the evolution of California's political system from colonization through statehood, the Gold Rush, the railroad political machine, the Progressive reformers, the Depression and World War II, and boom and bust cycles of the California economy in the last half-century. California’s constitution is introduced and the political and economic evolution of the state is described with an emphasis on the themes of continuity and change. The impact of technological development and immigration in all these periods is another theme. The chapter concludes with a description of California's people, economy, and regions today. Throughout the chapter, the state's economic and cultural diversity is highlighted, along with the competing political interests this diversity produces. These themes are also repeatedly referred to in subsequent chapters.

Multiple Choice

1. California's native (Indian) population
 - a. dominated the state until the arrival of the railroad.
 - b. thrived under Spanish rule.
 - * c. declined precipitously under Spanish rule.
 - d. was well integrated with Spanish and Yankee immigrants.

2. The event that brought a population surge to California in the early 1850s was
 - a. the opening of the Panama Canal.
 - * b. the Gold Rush.
 - c. a peace treaty with Mexico.
 - d. completion of the Southern Pacific railroad.

3. The political machine that ruled California beginning in the 1880s was dominated by
 - a. Hiram Johnson.
 - b. the holders of the great Mexican land grants.
 - c. the *Los Angeles Times*.
 - * d. the Southern Pacific Railroad.

4. Which of the following is NOT true about the Workingmen's Party?
- * a. It promoted integration with the Chinese.
 - b. It blamed the railroad for California's economic problems.
 - c. It played a major part in the Constitutional Convention of 1879.
 - d. It blamed economic problems on Asian immigrants.
5. Which of the following did the Progressives introduce to California politics?
- a. nonpartisan elections
 - b. the Public Utilities Commission
 - c. direct democracy
 - * d. all of the above
6. Which sector of California's economy employs the largest number of workers?
- * a. services (business, health, leisure)
 - b. government
 - c. technology
 - d. agriculture
7. Who is the biggest landowner in California today?
- a. the Southern Pacific Railroad
 - b. Apple, Inc.
 - * c. the state and federal governments
 - d. California Agribusiness, Inc.
8. Which region of California has seen the most rapid population growth in recent years?
- a. the Bay Area
 - * b. the Central Valley
 - c. San Diego
 - d. the mountain counties
9. As of 2010
- * a. no single racial group constituted a majority in California.
 - b. Asians were the largest single minority group in California.
 - c. whites remained a majority in California.
 - d. Hispanics became a majority in California.
10. The gap between the rich and poor in California is
- * a. growing.
 - b. shrinking.
 - c. about the same as the gap between rich and poor nationally.
 - d. much smaller than the gap between rich and poor nationally.

True/False

1. California was sparsely populated before the discovery of gold in 1848. **True**
2. The Chinese first came to California as farm workers. **False**
3. The political machine that ruled California beginning the 1880s was dominated by the Progressives. **False**
4. The Progressive movement introduced reforms aimed at strengthening California's political parties. **False**
5. The Workingmen's Party blamed the railroad and the Chinese for the state's economic difficulties. **True**
6. Approximately 75% of California's population is foreign born. **False**
7. Since the 1990s, central and inland areas of California have grown most rapidly. **True**
8. Despite immigration of various groups, whites still comprise more than three-quarters of California's population. **False**
9. Amendments to California's constitution must be ratified by the voters. **True**
10. Recently, political differences between California's regions have been greatest between coastal and inland areas. **True**

Essay Questions

1. Today's California is the result of continuous economic and demographic change, complicated by the state's sheer physical scale and geographic complexity. Discuss how these factors have influenced state politics.
2. Provide perspective on the issue of immigration in California politics today by discussing its historical role in California politics.
3. Compare and contrast the impact of the Workingmen's Party, the Southern Pacific Railroad, and the Progressives on California politics.

4. Why was California perceived by some as a “failed state”? What are some factors that suggest a “California comeback?” Which perception—“failed state” or “comeback”—do you think applies best to California today? Why?

Project

Find the most recent census data for your city or county at the library or on the Web and compare the statistics for your local area to those for the state of California as reported in Table 1.3.