

Edited by **Christine Bacareza Balance**  
and **Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns**

# CALIFORNIA DREAMING

**MOVEMENT AND PLACE IN THE  
ASIAN AMERICAN IMAGINARY**



## California Dreaming



# INTERSECTIONS

*Asian and Pacific American Transcultural Studies*

RUSSELL C. LEONG

DAVID K. YOO

*Series Editors*

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MOVEMENT AND PLACE IN THE ASIAN  
AMERICAN IMAGINARY

*Edited by*

Christine Bacareza Balance

Lucy Mae San Pablo Burns



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CHAPTER 1

# *California Dreaming*

## *An Introduction*

CHRISTINE BACAREZA BALANCE

SINCE 1893, THE “FRONTIER MENTALITY” has overwhelmingly figured our visions of the American West. In his canonical essay “The Significance of the Frontier in American History,” Frederick Jackson Turner argued that the frontier was a place where an essential American character was forged. This character, the rugged individual who conquers the elements of an unforgiving landscape and an otherwise lawless society, was predicated upon and helped further a mindset of human superiority. Turner argued that, rather than being affected by the presence and actions of humans, nature simply functioned as provider of unlimited resources. Rather than regard Native peoples, already living in the West, as equals, the frontier individual viewed them as another aspect of the natural landscape to be tamed.

Yet, the frontier mentality also informed much of the U.S. exceptionalist discourse that fueled the nation’s empire-building project overseas—the moral and ethical need to civilize and tame the wilderness and its primitive inhabitants, vis-à-vis an “Edenic discourse,” the desire of U.S. business and government to tap natural resources in systemic ways otherwise unrealized by locals and/or previous settlers. Military and colonial tactics used in seizing and settling Native lands in the western United States were also used in the seizure and settling of lands in the Pacific and Caribbean. Frontier states, like California, provided the training grounds for U.S. war and empire overseas. Many parts of the Golden State, most notably Fort Mason in San Francisco,

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