

# How California's Paradise Become our Purgatory

By Victor Davis Hanson

California has become a test case of the suicide of the West. Never before has such a state, so rich in natural resources and endowed with such a bountiful human inheritance, self-destructed so rapidly.



How and why did California so utterly consume its unmatched natural and ancestral inheritance and end up as a warning to Western civilization of what might be in store for anyone who followed its nihilism?

The symptoms of the state's suicide are indisputable.

Governor Gavin Newsom enjoyed a recent \$98 billion budget surplus—gifted from multibillion-dollar federal COVID-19 subsidies, the highest income and gas taxes in the nation, and among the country's steepest sales and property taxes.

Yet in a year, he turned it into a growing \$45 billion budget deficit.

At a time of an over-regulated, overtaxed, and sputtering economy, Newsom spent lavishly on new entitlements, illegal

immigrants, and untried and inefficient green projects.

Newsom was endowed with two of the wettest years in recent California history. Yet he and radical environmentalists squandered the water bounty—as snowmelts and runoff long designated for agricultural irrigation were drained from aqueducts and reservoirs to flow out to sea.

Newsom transferred millions of dollars designated by a voter referendum to build dams and aqueducts for water storage and instead blew up four historic dams on the Klamath River. For decades, these now-destroyed scenic lakes provided clean, green hydroelectric power, irrigation storage, flood control, and recreation.

California hosts one-third of the nation's welfare recipients. Over a fifth of the population lives below the property line. Nearly half the nation's homeless sleep on the streets of its major cities.

The state's downtowns are dirty, dangerous, and increasingly abandoned by businesses—most recently Google—that cannot rely on a defunded and shackled police.

Newsom's California has spent billions on homeless relief and subsidizing millions of new illegal migrant arrivals across the state's porous southern border.

The result was predictably even more homeless and more illegal immigrants, all front-loaded onto the state's already overtaxed and broken healthcare, housing, and welfare entitlements.

Newsome raised the minimum wage for fast-food workers to \$22 an hour. The result was wage inflation rippling out to all service areas, unaffordable food for the poor, and massive shut-downs and bankruptcies of fast food outlets.

Twenty-seven percent of Californians were born outside of the

United States. It is a minority-majority state. Yet California has long dropped unifying civic education, while the bankrupt state funds exploratory commissions to consider divisive racial reparations.

California's universities are hotbeds of ethnic, religious, and racial chauvinism and infighting. State officials, however, did little as its campuses were plagued for months by rampant and violent anti-Semitism.

Almost nightly, the nation watches mass smash-and-grab attacks on California retail stores. Carjackers and thieves own the night. They are rarely caught, even more rarely arrested—and almost never convicted.

Currently, Newsom is fighting in the courts to stop the people's constitutional right to place on the ballot initiatives to restore penalties for violent crime and theft.

Gas prices are the highest in the continental United States, given green mandate formulas and the nation's highest, and still raising, gasoline taxes—and are scheduled to go well over \$6 a gallon.

Yet its ossified roads and highways are among the nation's most dangerous, as vast sums of transportation funding were siphoned off to the multibillion-dollar high-speed rail boondoggle.

The state imports almost all the costly vitals of modern life, mostly because it prohibits using California's own vast petroleum, natural gas, timber, and mineral resources.

As California implodes, its embarrassed government turns to the irrelevant, if not ludicrous.

It now outlaws natural gas stoves in new homes. It is adding new income-based surcharges for those who dutifully pay their power bills—to help subsidize the 2.5 million Californians who

simply default on their energy bill with impunity.

What happened to the once-beautiful California paradise?

Millions of productive but frustrated, overtaxed, and underserved middle-class residents have fled to low-crime, low-tax, and well-served red states in disgust

In turn, millions of illegal migrants have swarmed the state, given its sanctuary-city policies, refusal to enforce the law, and generous entitlements.

Meanwhile, a tiny coastal elite, empowered by \$9 trillion in Silicon Valley market capitalization, fiddled while their state burned.

California became a medieval society of plutocratic barons, subsidized peasants, and a shrinking and fleeing middle class. It is now home to a few rich estates, subsidized apartments, and unaffordable middle-class houses.

California suffers from poorly ranked public schools—but brags about its prestigious private academies. Its highways are lethal—but it hosts the most private jets in the nation.

The fantasies of a protected enclave of Gavin Newsom, Nancy Pelosi, and the masters of the Silicon Valley universe have become the abject nightmares of everyone else.

In sum, a privileged Bay Area elite inherited a California paradise and turned it into purgatory.

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