

# Opinion: My dark California dream

By Daniel Duane, New York Times

California's over, everything I love about this place is going to hell.

I knew there was something familiar about this thought from the moment it occurred to me in Yosemite National Park. My sister and I started going to those mountains 40 years ago with our parents, who taught us to see the Sierra Nevada as a never-changing sanctuary in a California increasingly overrun by suburban sprawl.

Once we had our own families, we indoctrinated our kids in the same joys: suffering under backpacks, drinking snowmelt from creeks, jumping into (and quickly back out of) icy lakes, and napping in wildflower meadows. Yosemite remains my personal paradise, but the impact of drought and climate change has become overwhelming – smoky air from fires, shriveled glaciers leaving creeks dry and meadows gray, no wildflowers.

Confusing one's own youth with the youth of the world is a common human affliction, but California has been changing so fast for so long that every new generation gets to experience both a fresh version of the California dream and, typically by late middle-age, its painful death.

Kevin Starr, a professor of history at USC and author of a seven-volume history of the California dream, told me recently that he considered the mid-1960s – 1963 specifically – the end

of modernist California, that period for which it makes sense to speak of “an agreed-upon, commanding” version of the dream. In Starr’s view, around the time I was born, in 1967, California entered a postmodern phase with multiple dreams in parallel: back-to-the-landers on communes; migrant farmworkers organizing in the San Joaquin Valley; gay and lesbian life proudly out in the open; and, of course, the outdoorsy-liberal existence that my parents found in Berkeley.

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