

# Opinion: Stop blaming California for Trump

By Joe Mathews

Is California to blame for Donald Trump?

That may seem a preposterous question to ask of a state that voted so decisively against the new American president that it was responsible, all by itself, for his loss of the popular vote.



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Yet, the president's opponents and allies have fingered California as the place that produced Trumpism.

The case starts with hard geographic facts. Twitter, which the president uses to spew bile, is a California creation. Reality television, which turned the real estate developer into a national entertainer, is a Hollywood gimcrack. And Breitbart—the alt-right media entity that modeled the toxic mix of xenophobia, authoritarianism, and conspiracy-mongering that is Trumpism—is based in L.A.

Also, many leading figures in Trump's world have California ties. Among these are top White House strategist Steve Bannon, who lived in L.A. while working in Hollywood; top Trump policy aide Stephen Miller, from Santa Monica; Breitbart writer-turned presidential special assistant Julia Hahn; influential

Trump national security official Michael Anton; and UC Irvine economist Peter Navarro, now helping Trump un-make the global trade system.

More broadly, as Jason Willick and James Hitchcock showed in "The American Interest," California thinkers—including billionaire Peter Thiel, the Hoover Institution's Victor Davis Hanson, Bay Area entrepreneur Ron Unz, software developer Curtis Yarvin, journalist Mickey Kaus, blogger Steve Sailer, and affiliates of the Claremont Institute—have helped build a case for Trump's disruptive, anti-immigrant nationalism.

The leap from this roster to the idea of Trumpism as California product involves many competing narratives, most of which divide into two camps.

Those who dislike Trump point out that Trumpism draws from various historical strains of prejudice that California incubated: anti-Chinese laws in the 19th century, the Japanese internment during World War II; the California Legislature's persecution of people for "un-American activities" (before Joe McCarthy), and anti-immigrant politics in the second half of the 20th century. Even today, our most high-profile industries—Hollywood and Silicon Valley—practice exclusionary policies, visible in everything from the paucity of minority leads in films, to the sexism in the executive suite at Uber.

Those more sympathetic to Trump argue the converse proposition—that California has been far too welcoming to immigrants, embracing demographic change at a pace that's too fast for too many people. "The American Interest" essay identified Trumpism as a backlash against "mass immigration... which produced a demographic transformation of the Golden State without parallel in the rest of the country."

The Trumpians themselves have gone further, justifying their own bigotry as a rebellion against California's supposedly tyrannical liberalism and political correctness. Miller railed

against diversity programs at his own Santa Monica High; Bannon has called the presence of Asian American CEO's in Silicon Valley a sign of breakdown in American civil society.

It's tempting to dismiss such flawed logic out of hand. Most children know that it's wrong to blame one's own poor conduct on the conduct of others. And California contains so many multitudes that it has always been a big, rich, easy target for any narrative of blame. "Success makes so many people hate you," Marilyn Monroe, child of Los Angeles, once said.

But the "Trump as California product" narratives, while bogus, touch on just enough truth that they deserve a more impassioned response.

That response starts with acknowledging California's problematic history, and present. The liberals in charge here really do have feet of clay, prejudice remains too present, and the state faces big challenges in infrastructure, housing and schooling.

But we also should assert our hard-earned success: California has made profound progress in becoming a more inclusive place. It was not easy—we had to survive the L.A. riots and divisive 1990s ballot fights over immigration and affirmative action.

Despite predictions from the left (especially the writer Mike Davis) and from the right that a diverse California would come apart, our state is better off by nearly every measure. As we became more diverse, our inner cities became safer, our valleys less polluted, our people better educated.

California is thus the most effective rebuttal of Trump's false and bigoted claims that American inner cities are full of violence, that immigrants bring danger and voting fraud, and that foreigners are taking American jobs. Which is why the Trumpians are so fixated on discrediting California.

It's tempting to call such people traitors to California, but

that would give them too much credit and feed their overdeveloped sense of victimhood. They're really opportunists, who irresponsibly scapegoat a whole state for its supposed bigotry when their own bigoted appeals have elevated them to power in Washington.

California has its problems and prejudices. But that's no excuse for Trumpians to put their crap on our home state.

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