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Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963 (Americans and the California Dream)

By Kevin Starr



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A narrative tour de force that combines wide-ranging scholarship with captivating prose, Kevin Starr's acclaimed multi-volume *Americans and the California Dream* is an unparalleled work of cultural history. In this volume, Starr covers the crucial postwar period--1950 to 1963--when the California we know today first burst into prominence.

Starr brilliantly illuminates the dominant economic, social, and cultural forces in California in these pivotal years. In a powerful blend of telling events, colorful personalities, and insightful analyses, Starr examines such issues as the overnight creation of the postwar California suburb, the rise of Los Angeles as Super City, the reluctant emergence of San Diego as one of the largest cities in the nation, and the decline of political centrism. He explores the Silent Generation and the emergent Boomer youth cult, the Beats and the Hollywood "Rat Pack," the pervasive influence of Zen Buddhism and other Asian traditions in art and design, the rise of the University of California and the emergence of California itself as a utopia of higher education, the cooling of West Coast jazz, freeway and water projects of heroic magnitude, outdoor life and the beginnings of the environmental movement. More broadly, he shows how California not only became the most populous state in the Union, but in fact evolved into a mega-state en route to becoming the global commonwealth it is today.

Golden Dreams continues an epic series that has been widely recognized for its signal contribution to the history of American culture in California. It is a book that transcends its stated subject to offer a wealth of insight into the growth of the Sun Belt and the West and indeed the dramatic transformation of America itself in these pivotal years following the Second World War.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This volume concludes Starr's unprecedented seven-volume history of a single American state. While out of chronological order (Starr covered the period 1990–2003 in *Coast of Dreams*) and often ranging far beyond the book's stated dates, this final volume is of the same high quality as the previous ones: spirited in style, comprehensive and long. Starr covers a broad range of subjects: demography, water, freeways, politics, culture, the state's major cities, race relations. As in all other volumes, he hangs his story on sketches of many of California's often larger-than-life individuals, among them Buffy Chandler, Cardinal McIntyre, Pat Brown, Dave Brubeck, Clark Kerr, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Herb Caen. But too often biography substitutes for analysis. Letting others speak for him, Starr rarely lets an authorial voice shine through or a critical stance intrude. The result is wonderfully readable descriptive history, but not a history that leaves readers with a fresh take on the Golden State as a whole. That's a pity, for no one knows more about California than Starr. We could have used at least his concluding thoughts on the state's past and future. 30 b&w photos. (July)

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Review

"With the publication of *Golden Dreams: California in an Age of Abundance, 1950-1963*, Kevin Starr has completed his transformation from the state's greatest historian to its indispensable one.... His eight-volume series, published under the umbrella title *Americans and the California Dream*, constitutes as comprehensive a social, political, ethnographic, cultural and philosophical history as any state is ever likely to achieve. It was conceived in dazzling ambition and masterfully executed. The author's scholarship and erudition animate each volume without once falling into the trap of self-regard. It is, in sum, an achievement made even more remarkable by the fact that it is wonderfully readable."--Tim Rutten, *Los Angeles Times*

"This final volume is of the same high quality as the previous ones: spirited in style... [a] wonderfully readable descriptive history...."--*Publishers Weekly*

"Monumental."--Benjamin Schwarz, *The Atlantic*

"Starr's masterly accounts of Los Angeles, San Diego and San Francisco."--*The Economist*

"Who besides Kevin Starr could cover the entire social, economic, political and artistic history of California during the era and somehow extrapolate it into an engaging, dazzling account of the emerging American Century."--Phyllis Filiberti Butler, *San Francisco Chronicle*

"Starr's magnum opus-eight volumes to date, and still not complete- will endure the test of years, not least for its heft and its dogged ambition. Students of California history-of the history of the American West generally-have no choice but to confront this impressive oeuvre penned over decades by the State Librarian of California Emeritus, now a professor at the University of Southern California."--*Books & Culture*

"Kevin Starr's *Golden Dreams*...is marvellously cohesive and concise, and Starr's engaging style makes it a pleasure to read." --*Times Literary Supplement Online*

"Without parallel. Each volume in the series demonstrates again that this is one of the commanding achievements of American letters, and of the state he celebrates." --*Western American Literature*

About the Author

Kevin Starr is University Professor and Professor of History, University of Southern California, and State Librarian of California Emeritus. His *Americans and the California Dream* series has earned him the National Medal for the Humanities, the Centennial Medal of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences of Harvard University, the Gold Medal of the Commonwealth Club of California, a Guggenheim fellowship, and election to the Society of American Historians.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Russell Bussey:

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life in this era. So now let us explain to you the relaxing pattern here is your body and mind will likely be pleased when you are finished looking at it, like winning a casino game. Do you want to try this extraordinary shelling out spare time activity?

Laurel Ramer:

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