**The Many Golds of California**

A Collaborative Essay Written by Students in ESL/Transition-to-College at CE Mesa

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Named the Golden State for more than one reason, California has allured, transformed, and eventually enriched or destroyed the lives of millions of people, who in turn have helped to bring the state to its current prosperity. The nickname comes from the Gold Rush, when gold was discovered in the Sierra Nevada, but it also refers to the fields of golden poppies that can be seen across the state in the spring, the golden sunshine we can enjoy here every day, and the Golden Bridge, the symbol of its most beautiful city. Today, the state wins the gold medal as the number 1 economy in the U.S. and one of the ten largest economies in the world. In this essay, we examine the major industries which have shaped California since, if not before, the discovery of gold in 1848: agriculture and wine production, tourism including national parks and themes parks, and the high technology industries of recent decades, and take a closer look at how they started, what helped them grow, and how they contributed to the wealth of the state.

California’s quick rise to prosperity began on January 24, 1848, when a millwright named James Marshall discovered gold along the banks of Sutter’s Creek in what is now Sacramento Valley. By 1849 tens of thousands of gold-seekers, thus called *forty-niners*, had come overland from the east, facing substantial hardships along the way, and later by sea from places such as Latin America, Europe, and Asia. In all, some 300,000 people came to California from the rest of the United States and abroad.

With rapid improvement in gold-recovery techniques, the Gold Rush soon became California’s first major industry. At first, simple panning was used to recover gold accumulated in the deposits of sand and gravel in stream beds, but by 1853 advanced technologies such as hydraulic mining had allowed collection of gold on a much larger scale. The large number of newcomers also had a dramatic effect on California. In the middle of the Gold Rush, a state constitutional convention was called, a state constitution was written, election was held and representatives were sent Washington D.C. to negotiate the admission of California as a state, which finally happened in 1850. Large-scale agriculture started, and roads, churches and civic facilities were set up. Transportation between California and the East coast was also improved. For example, railroads were built from the East coast to the West and steamships began regular service from San Francisco to Panama. The influence of the Gold Rush also expanded abroad and stimulated the world economy. Farmers in Chile, Australia and Hawaii found a huge new market for food. British manufactured goods were strongly needed, and Chinese clothing and prefabricated houses were imported.

By 1855, California’s gold was exploited. The Gold Rush, however, gave impetus to other areas of economy. Agriculture, for example, became commercialized as farmers started to sell their products to non-natives miners who arrived from all over the country. When the Gold Rush was over and the construction of railroads had been completed, many workers transitioned to agriculture, creating a strong reliable workforce.

Exploitation of land in California started in fact long before the Gold Rush. The beginning of agriculture, for example, dates back to 1760's, when Spanish missionaries extended their activities to Alta California. In order to develop a string of missions from San Diego to Sonoma from 1769 to 1823, their strategy was to introduce livestock, field crops, and horticulture. They produced mainly grains, specially wheat and maize, and cattle. They also invested in irrigation schemes and brought some primitive process, for example, producing wine from grapes and flour from the wheat, with the only purpose of feeding the settlers and natives in the area.

Today, agriculture is very important to California’s economy, employing over 17.5 million people and generating about $40 billion in revenue. The state is the number 1 producer of diary in the country. California has 81.700 farms distributed on 25.4 million acres, which represents less the 4% of the U.S. farms. However, it is the world 5th largest supplier of agricultural commodities and the largest producer of food in the U.S. The unique climate allows farmers to grow over 450 different crops, some exclusive to the state: almonds, of which California is the largest exporter in the world, artichokes, dates, figs, kiwifruit, olives, which production equals 70 – 80% of all the ripe olives in the U.S, persimmons, pomegranates, pistachios, prunes, raisins, cloves and walnuts. California also produces about 80 - 90% of lemons, processed tomatoes, and fresh and frozen strawberries, half of green onions, and a quarter of onions of the country.

Similarly, the history of winemaking in California started in the 1600s, when Jesuit monks tried to plant the first vineyards at their missions. In 1779, Junipero Serra, "The Father of California wine," planted the first sustainable wine yard in the Mission of San Diego de Alcala. The vine was called "Mission Grape" and dominated vine production until 1880. The first documented imported wine vines were brought in 1833 from Europe and until 1980 the wine industry was dominated by the Bordeaux varietals and Chardonnay. Later, a wave of Italian winemakers dubbed “Cal-Ital” reinvigorated the industry with new varieties like Syrah, Viognier, Sangiovese, and Pinot Grigio. The advantage California has had over other countries is the warm weather and humidity, which allows many wineries to use very ripe fruit, which allows for higher alcohol levels, with many wines having over 13.5% of alcohol.

There are several types of wine California is famous for. Cabernet Sauvignon put California on the world’s wine map. Merlot is the highest selling of all varietals. Pinot Noir here is more intense and fruity. Red Zinfandel is more acid and the white is sweeter. While the grape does have European origins, Californian Zinfandel is considered a unique style grape. The optimal climate conditions allow the production of vintage-dated sparkling wine every year while in Champagne it would only happen in exceptional years. And thus hard-earned secrets of soil, climate, and vine growing which have been passed from generation to generation provided California wine with its unique legacy and spectacular range.

Today, California is America’s top wine producer and a billion dollar industry. The state makes 90% of all U.S. wine and is the world’s 4th leading wine producer after France, Italy and Spain. Wine is also a lure for tourists, who stay at luxurious hotels and eat at gourmet restaurants in Napa Valley, Sonoma and Mendocino, strengthening the state’s hospitality industry.

While California has always been a destination for the curious and the daring, tourism on a commercial scale started much later. Its beginnings date back to the creation of Yosemite Park. [The park](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yosemite_National_Park) was developed as a tourist attraction in the late 1850s and early 1860s for an audience who wanted a national icon and place to symbolize exotic wonder of the region. In 1890, John Muir, America’s most famous and influential naturalist and conservationist, and Robert Underwood Johnson, editor of *Century Magazine*, launched a campaign to set this area as a national park. On October 1, 1890, Congress determined to establish the forth national park in the U.S. and the first in California, soon to be known as Yosemite National Park. The U.S. currently has 59 national parks, ten of which are in California: Ash Mountain, Channel Islands, Death Valley, Joshua Tree, Kings Canyon, Lassen Volcanic, Pinnacles, Redwood, Sequoia, and Yosemite.

Besides the ten national parks, as well as the spectacular coastline along the Pacific Ocean, and several [historic sites](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_National_Historic_Sites_of_Canada) documenting the diversity of California's pre-Columbian, Spanish, and Mexican heritage, the other major attractors of tourists in California are theme parks. The most famous of them: Disneyland, Universal Studios Hollywood, and Sea World are top travel destinations in the world. Disneyland originated in the mind of Walt Disney when one day, as he was visiting Griffith Park in Los Angeles and watching his daughters ride a merry-go-round, it suddenly came to him that it would be wonderful to have a place where adults and their children could go and have fun together. The thirty acres of land he bought in Orange County became the most popular amusement park in the world. Today, Disneyland has its parks not only in the U.S., but also in Japan, France and Hong Kong, and is planning to construct another one in Shanghai. The Disneyland Resort has generated $19 billion in economic activity for Southern California and nearly 75% of that was distributed in Orange County. In the recent decade, the Disneyland Resort has grown its workforce by 15% adding 3,000 new jobs to support expansion, plus 1,700 construction jobs every year.

Universal Studios was first opened as a film studio by Carl Laemmle in 1915 in Los Angeles. It is one the oldest and most famous Hollywood film studios still in use. Laemmle had the brilliant idea to invite the general public to see all the action for an admission fee of just $0.05, which also included a lunch box. The idea caught on and in 1964, a modern tour was established to include a series of dressing room walk-throughs, peeks at actual production, and later, staged events. This grew over the years into a full-blown theme park, which today has locations in Florida, Japan, and Singapore, with new ones coming in Dubai, South Korea, Moscow, and Beijing. In 2014, Universal Studios Hollywood had over 6 million guests, ranking 17th in world and 9th in North America.

According to the data from TNS Global and U.S. Department of Commerce, during 2013 tourism generated over 100 billion dollars in spending in California, which supported almost a million jobs in accommodation, food services, arts, entertainment, and recreation. Twenty percent of tourism-related dollars in the state in 2013 were attributable to spending by international travelers.

With the continued investment in science and technology, the state helped establish new high-tech industries, which in the second half of the 20th c. became a new kind of gold for California. One of them is biotechnology, a technology which uses living organisms to make innovative products that improve our lives. Since the mid 1950’s, the Bay Area in Northern California, where Stanford University, UCSF and UC Berkeley are located, has been known for innovation, research, and discovery. The world’s first biotech company, Genentech, was founded in 1976 by venture capitalist Robert A. Swanson and biochemist Dr. Herbert W. Boyer, who pioneered a new scientific field called recombinant DNA technology. In 1982, Genentech was approved to sell the first biotech drug, human insulin. This date marked the beginning of biotechnology industry making profit.

With Genentech’s success, biotechnology in Northern California grew enormously. By 1987, it boasted 112 companies, 19400 jobs, and total sales of $2 billion. Since then, California has been one of the major centers of biotechnology in the U.S. The factors that have contributed to the level of biotechnology are a comprehensive higher education system with distinguished research institutions, an educated and highly skilled workforce, and abundant private and public funding in the form of research grants and venture capital. Today, California has the largest number of biotechnology companies in the U.S.: 2700 companies with 100,000 to 150,000 employees. Seven top biotechnology companies have locations in California and three of the top companies: Amgen, Genentech, and Gilead, are headquartered here. With all these humongous resources, biotechnology promises a brighter future for California and the U.S.

Silicon Valley, another leading hub for high-tech innovation and development, is located in the southern portion of the San Francisco Bay Area of Northern California. The term “Silicon Valley”, which is attributed a local industrialist, Ralph Vaerst, was first published as the title of a series of articles in the weekly trade newspaper, Electronic News. The term became popular in the early 1980s. The *silicon* part of the term originally referred to the region’s large number of silicon chip innovations and manufactures, but now it generally indicates the American high-technology economic sector. Stanford University’s affiliates and graduates have played an important part in the development of this area. During the 1940s and 1950s, Frederick Terman, Stanford’s dean of engineering and provost, encouraged his colleagues and students to start their own businesses. Silicon Valley then grew up around the Stanford campus. Terman is often called “the father of Silicon Valley”. Silicon Valley accounts for one-third of all of the venture capital investment in the U.S.

Thousands of high technology companies are headquartered here, including Apple Inc., eBay, Facebook, Google, HP, Intel. It is also home to the high-tech superstore retail chain Fry’s Electronics. Today, Silicon Valley is the biggest hi-tech center in the United States.

Since the time when gold was found here in 1848, many gold seekers have come to California. Today, there is no more gold to be mined in California and many mining villages which once brimmed with life and activity have turned into ghost towns, but gold-seekers continue to come. They seek promising future, and find it in agriculture, winemaking, tourism, biotechnology, and in Silicon Valley. With the fast progress Californians have made in the last two centuries, who can guess what their next gold is going be?