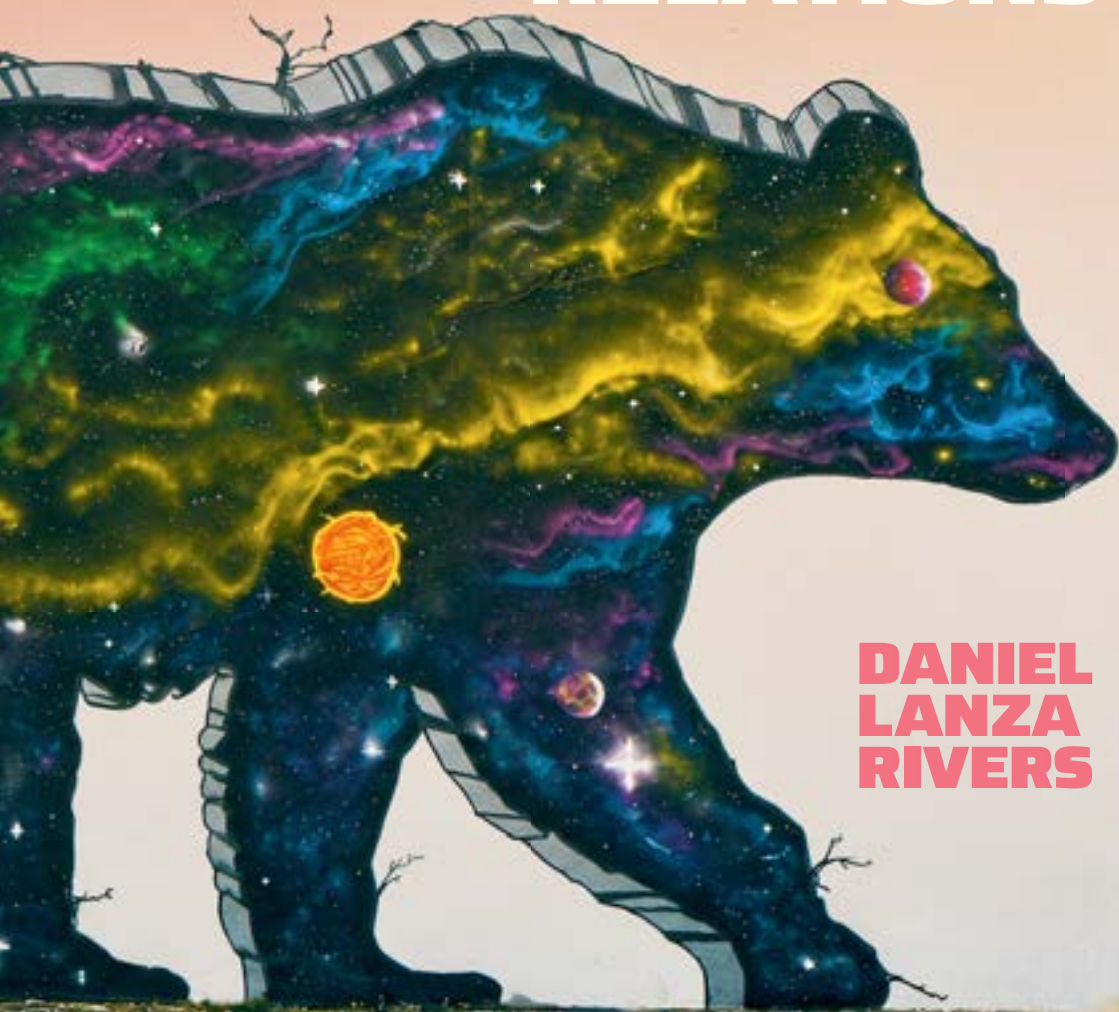


CALIFORNIA FUTURES

HAUNTED
ECOLOGIES,
DECOLONIAL
RELATIONS



DANIEL
LANZA
RIVERS

CALIFORNIA FUTURES



BUY

CALIFORNIA FUTURES

HAUNTED ECOLOGIES, DECOLONIAL RELATIONS

Daniel Lanza Rivers

DUKE

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FOR ROW,
and for everyone who has loved and lost California

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INTRODUCTION

SPECULATIVE ECOLOGIES, ANTICOLONIAL WORLDS

California has always been a speculative world. The financial bubbles that the state's residents have become so notorious for producing—in gold, cattle, almonds, real estate, technology, and so on—build upon colonial fictions of geography and profit. Across the deep time of conquest, settler colonists have marshaled the tools of commerce, statecraft, and environmental manipulation to the task of creating a verdant region of nation-making and commercial extraction. Throughout this history, California has also served as a kind of outside, a meeting ground among culture workers, collectives, activists, and artists seeking to bring about radical futures. This book is about California's pasts and futures. It approaches the state through the lenses of speculation and ecology in order to think through the futures that have taken root here: both those futures that were foreclosed years ago and those whose horizons shimmer in the present, building upon histories of abolitionist, decolonial, feminist, queer, migrant, and environmental dreaming that reach beyond our extractivist epoch and the climate crisis it has created.

This book, *California Futures*, traces the long histories of settler conquest, extractive and racial capitalism, and heteropatriarchy in order to better understand how these histories have shaped the region that became California. Along with mapping the damage across histories of colonial empire and transnational migration, this project explores ways of living otherwise that illuminate liberatory and ecologically vibrant futures, especially those that emerge from and with decolonial land relations.

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Rather than analyzing California as a polity or a set of environments, this project approaches it as a *naturecultural* imaginary, one that is constituted through the cultural and environmental matrix of coloniality. California is a fitting case study for such an inquiry because it is a state where settlers have leveraged the region's colonial associations with environmental abundance and entrepreneurial dreaming to foster international networks of immense profit at the expense of Native people and endemic ecosystems.¹ In our present time, California is often seen as a bellwether for progress, especially when US Americans articulate that progress in the reductionist terms of industrial projects and settler futures. Speaking in the summer of 2025, California Governor Gavin Newsom described the state's economy as "the fourth largest in the world," touting an international reputation for abundance that has always been entwined with global processes of financial speculation, settler conquest, and environmental extraction.² In my own approach to California as a site of colonial, decolonial, and liberatory dreaming, I attempt to dig under and around these associations with abundance and progressive futurism to ask about the futures, needs, and histories that are routinely obscured in service of this ideal.

When we speak of California's place within the matrix of the colonial Anthropocene—and its relationship to the futures that reach beyond it—it helps to bear down on the entanglements of colonial and commercial speculation that worlded California into being.³ In her discussion of financial and political structures of speculation, Aimee Bhang argues, "the financial colonization of the future builds on preexisting disparities of wealth held over from earlier histories of empire."⁴ In California, Spanish settlers' attempts to colonize the future manifested first in the material processes of search and capture, processes that set the preconditions for US Americans' military, economic, racial, and heteropatriarchal projects of genocide, enslavement, environmental dispossession, and national incorporation. Long before Alta California was territorialized by Spanish missionaries, by the Mexican government, and by US settlers, "Califia" appeared in the pages of a popular Spanish novel, *Las Sergas de Esplandián*, where it referred to an island nation populated by dark-skinned warrior women.⁵ Some of the earliest European maps of the territory reflect this novelistic invention, including Johannes Vinckeboons's map—published around 1650—which figures the region as an island hanging off the western edge of the North American continent (see figure I.1). Throughout the period of Spanish speculation and settlement, the fallacy of California as



1.1 Joan Vinckeboons, map of California shown as an island, ca. 1650, Library of Congress, Washington, DC.

an “island” was buttressed, at least in part, by settlers’ misperceptions of the region’s geography and dynamic weather. In the centuries before conquest, the Yokut people who locate their homelands in California’s broad inland Central Valley managed their ecosystems toward patches of forest, grassland, and marshes. Their practices of environmental use and more-than-human relation nurtured adaptative ecosystems across the region, which thrived in tandem with shifting years of drought and flood across deep time. In the years before settler colonists violently shifted the region toward irrigation and industrialization, the Valley’s gathered waters were sometimes so vast that Spanish explorers mistook it for an inland ocean or—as in Vinckeboons’s rendering—an extension of the Pacific. Even as this misperception fell out of favor with Euro-American explorers in the late eighteenth century, it was replaced by a belief that the San Francisco Bay fed into a vast river on the scale of the Mississippi, one that connected the Pacific coast to the Gulf of Mexico. Historian Claudio Saunt notes that the Spanish Crown sent multiple scouting parties to trace this illusory water route, to no avail.⁶

Like the Philippines, the California territory first emerged as a singular political geography within the imaginaries and institutions of settler conquest. Spanish settlers’ notions about California were initially crafted

in the late sixteenth century, as sailors in the nation's centuries-long Manila galleon trade began surveying the Pacific slope for sites of rest and resource extraction. Established by Spanish colonials in 1567, and lasting for two and a half centuries, the Manila galleon trade organized an estimated 110 voyages, which used the Pacific Gyre (a clockwise turning current that circulates in the Pacific) to transport silver mined by unfree Indigenous people in the Americas across the Pacific Ocean to Manila, the Spanish capital of the Philippines. Galleon captains who took advantage of the gyre's turning made the westward trip from the Americas to the Philippines in a relatively brief voyage, lasting only seventy-five to ninety days.⁷ Ships that made the return trip eastward across the Pacific often tracked further north to use the Kuroshio Current, which runs between Japan and the west coast of North America. These eastward trips were longer, colder, and more grueling, lasting up to six months. In order to make room for more commodities, merchant seamen regularly reduced the quantity of rations held for the galleons' Filipino, Spanish, Chinese, and Mestizo crew members, and so exposed these workers to the vicious effects of malnutrition, scurvy, and food contamination.⁸ The galleons' combination of frigid weather, sparse supplies, and unsheltered sleeping amplified these workers' exposure to harm, leading to an estimated mortality rate of one human life per 4.7 tons of Asian cargo—this at a time when the average galleon carried between 300 and 2,000 tons of cargo per voyage.⁹ Thus, Manila galleons were death machines, where captains traded the transit of commodities for loss of life, as an estimated 64 to 426 crew members lost their lives each voyage. These ships were often ragged, understaffed, and wracked by disease by the time voyagers traced their way southward along the Pacific coast of North America to land in Acapulco, Mexico. Historian Erika Lee notes that some 40,000 to 100,000 Asians migrated to the Americas along this route, with many crew members choosing to take a reduced portion of their wages and disembark in Acapulco, rather than face another voyage back across the Pacific.¹⁰ In order to attenuate this death toll and guarantee a smoother operation of imperial trade, Spanish captains in the late sixteenth century began searching for port locations along the coast of the region that would be transformed into Alta California.

Reflecting on the patterns of drought, megafire, and extreme weather that swept through contemporary California (and elsewhere) between 2017 and 2020, Melissa K. Nelson (Anishinaabe, Métis) has argued that our contemporary epoch of the colonial Anthropocene is marked by “extreme imbalances” and “disequilibrium” among land, humans, and

nonhuman life. She writes, “humans are obliged to rebalance our relationships with our internal and outer climates as a form of resistance and resurgence; that includes land, water, skies, stars, animals, plants, others, and the unseen.”¹¹ An attempt to “rebalance” our relationship with something as vastly transformed as the San Joaquin Valley, for example, requires a broad view of the violences and alterations that settler colonists have enacted across the deep time of conquest. It also calls into question the utility of the distinct terms *nature* and *culture*, especially when we speak about one of the most commercially manipulated and toxified landscapes in the world. Across 175 years of agroindustrial speculation and harvest, US settlers have irrigated, dried out, and laser-leveled this landscape. Their loosed cattle have compacted the ground—reshaping the infiltration of water and degrading riparian ecosystems. And they have used evolving groundwater pumping technologies to loot ever-deeper deposits of the aquifer—deposits that have collected across centuries—leading to underground patterns of compaction that have “shrunk” the receding land. Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, colonial farmers have also taken advantage of emergent fertilizer, irrigation, and pesticide technologies to cultivate chemicalized monocultures of “alienated species” across this geography.¹² Their successes in manipulating the political economy of migration, labor, and industrial regulation have rendered generations of migrant and working-class laborers vulnerable to carceral social systems and increasingly toxified environments. In this effort, settlers have drained the majority of the Tulare Lake ecosystem, a relation the Tatchi Yokut people call “Pa’ashi,” which was once the largest wetlands ecosystem west of the Mississippi River. Their work to convert the dried-out marshland into commercial parcels abutted by a wildlife reserve have witnessed the buildup of intense toxic accumulation across the region as a whole.¹³ This ecosystem, which was once a yearly stop on the Pacific path of hundreds of thousands of migrating waterfowl, has been transformed into a geography of salty soils and increasingly precarious farmland. This is all to say that the Valley that was once mistaken for an inland sea has been entirely transformed toward extraction, and much of the water that now feeds this system is rerouted across four to seven hundred miles of pipes and canals that draw it down from Indigenous homelands on the Trinity, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Feather River watersheds, among others.

If we are going to imagine futures beyond the colonial Anthropocene, we will need to think beyond the notions of nature, purity, and conservation

that have animated California's political ecology for more than one hundred and fifty years now. Feminist, queer, and trans science studies scholar Cleo Wölflle Hazard argues that we should think in terms of "recovery" when we speak of damaged and altered ecosystems, rather than advocating for their "restoration."¹⁴ A posture of "recovery" likens ecosystems to bodies in transition, meaning they can be cared for and have relations who want to enact that care. Restoration, by contrast, summons settler colonial frameworks of conservation that try to imagine a historical "prehuman baseline" state that an ecosystem "naturally" settled into before human "arrival," with the quoted terms serving as euphemisms for the erasure of Indigenous histories and societies.¹⁵ Throughout the history of conservation in the United States, scientists and environmental managers have channeled immense time and capital into their attempts to transform landscapes to meet this fantasy ideal of "prehuman" nature, usually without questioning the racist and imperialist notion that Indigenous people (including California Native people) eschewed environmental management. As Anna Tsing notes, commercial and nationalist notions of "progress" have uncritically framed the way that scientists have perceived landscapes, ecologies, and their possible relations throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.¹⁶ Tsing notes that progress "has often been defined by its ability to make projects expand without changing their framing assumptions," and that this drive for "scalability" has "conspired against our ability to notice the divergent, layered, and conjoined projects that make up worlds."¹⁷

In the next section, I articulate this book's relationship to scholarly discussions in feminist science studies, Native and Indigenous studies, Black studies, environmental studies, comparative ethnic studies, and transnational American studies, and I ask what it might look like to think about California's relationship to the colonial Anthropocene using the speculative and political lenses of land rematriation, Indigenous and anticolonial science, naturecultures, deep time, and decolonial political relations.

UNSETTLING NATURECULTURES: RACIAL NATURES AND QUEER/FEMINIST ECOLOGIES IN THE COLONIAL ANTHROPOCENE

As a settler construction that is at once environmental, social, and political, *nature* is a term whose spatial valence (that of nature "out there") cannot be meaningfully disentangled from colonial notions of "empty"

and “pristine” land that is ripe for conquest. As a commercial and environmental vehicle for meaning-making, *nature* is a leaky ship that scientists, social workers, entrepreneurs, and politicians have patched again and again throughout the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries: loading it with naturalist, evolutionary, eugenic, conservationist, modern, toxic, reclaimed, imperiled, and digitized meanings. As a settler imaginary, nature (out there) obscures Indigenous histories of development and multispecies relation. In this popular valence, it is also an escape from history, a pause in time, a place apart and outside the bully pulpit of national politics. Among the various fallacies that US Americans have attached to *nature*, few have played as constitutive a role in shaping its politics of perception, imagination, and possibility as another ahistorical register of nature: the notion of an interior human “nature.” Though politicians, culture workers, and scientists have dreamed of human “natures” as timeless, it only takes a subtle shift in historical perception to discover the ways that changing notions of human nature have always been enmeshed in cultural networks that racialize, gender, disable, dominate, exploit, and otherwise mark subjugated ways of being human. Within contemporary US commerce and popular culture, the notion of a timeless human nature is often associated with ahistorical visions of an evolutionary humanness that figure as universal, normative, and innate anything from fad diets, to heteronormative domesticity, to white supremacist notions of gender. Just as spatialized notions of nature emerge from cultural histories of colonialism and ecological and evolutionary thought, this second, internalized register of “nature” has been shaped by the entangled scientific and cultural politics of race, gender, sexuality, religion, class, ability, and immigration throughout US history. In using the term *natureculture* in this book, I invite you to think with me about the entanglements that emerge across and among these two iterations of nature, including the ways they shape each other, US society, and the living world. Along with defining *natureculture*—and tracing its emergence across overlapping, but often disparate strains of inquiry—this section will locate the idea of *naturecultures* in conversation with Black feminist theories of the human and Indigenous theories of relation. My goal in doing this is to better understand the term’s utility and limitations in coalitional discussions of recovery and repair. In particular, this section will interrogate the “human” as a central figure in the history of the life sciences, paying particular attention to naturecultural constructions of race, Blackness, gender, sexuality, Indigeneity, and normativity.

Donna Haraway originally coined the term *naturecultures* in 2003 as part of her broader attempt to think through a feminist ethic of multi-species accountability, coadaptation, and “significant otherness” among canine and human worlds. In particular, Haraway locates naturecultural thought within a tradition of feminist inquiry that is “about understanding how things work, who is in the action, what might be possible, and how worldly actors might somehow be accountable to and love each other less violently.”¹⁸ In the years following Haraway’s initial articulation, many cultural and environmental studies scholars have used the term to think about entanglement in new ways, especially in ways that attempt to jettison the scientific and historical baggage of “nature” and move beyond binary thinking about humans’ embeddedness in the living world. Feminist science studies scholar Banu Subramaniam writes that a naturecultural framework “challenges us to . . . attend to the constant traffic of discourses, information, and theories between the worlds of natures and cultures,” noting, “there is no nature or culture, only naturecultures.”¹⁹ Throughout the environmental humanities, scholars’ push toward naturecultural thinking participates in a broader critical move to trouble the sciences’ status as seemingly neutral bearers of truth. Naturecultural analysis invites us to think about how the natural always emerges as a culturally entangled category, one that cannot be bracketed off from the colonial, racial, heteropatriarchal, administrative, and financial contexts of producing knowledge in the sciences. In particular, I find the term *natureculture* useful for thinking across the resonances and distinct trajectories that have emerged in queer and feminist studies (including feminist science studies), the environmental humanities, American studies, and Black, Indigenous, and ethnic studies. Drawing influence from Saidiya Hartman’s practice of “critical fabulation,” and placing it in conversation with other forms of feminist fabulation practiced by Donna Haraway, Banu Subramaniam, and others, my work here queries the presences and, crucially, the absences of the historical archive in order to reach toward a more nuanced and capacious understanding of California’s pasts and futures.²⁰ Part of this practice focuses on crafting what Haraway calls “string figures”: constellations of analysis that use “a method of tracing, of following a thread in the dark . . . passing on and recovering, making and unmaking, pulling up threads and dropping them.”²¹ My approach to writing a critical geography of California also draws inspiration from Tsing’s modeling of an art of noticing that is attentive to naturecultural “assemblages,” a term she uses to refer to the

mutually influencing, multispecies gatherings that emerge at the fringes, and in the ruins, of US empire and extractive industry.²²

As a US state and a site of industrial investment and extraction, California emerged in tandem with what we recognize today as the life sciences. As Alexandra Minna Stern, Peter Alagona, Mike Davis, and others have noted, California played a central role in the development of ecological, evolutionary, and conservationist thought from the mid-nineteenth century well into the twentieth.²³ Scholars, scientists, and politicians fostered a significant eugenic presence in early twentieth-century California, and the state led the nation in involuntary sterilizations, as California's doctors targeted Latinas and other immigrant women who came to their hospital seeking care. Between 1900 and 1930, medical professionals in California performed some thirteen thousand sterilizations, often without the knowledge or consent of the women involved.²⁴ Far from being a deviation in the operation of science, Subramaniam and Willey encourage us to think of movements like eugenics as central to the historical development of scientific thought and practice in the United States and beyond. They argue that these histories illuminate the perceptual and practical limitations of the institutional sciences when those sciences are divorced from cultural context and insulated from external critique. For Subramaniam, the "ghosts" of eugenic thought "live on in almost all aspects of current biological practice," and "learning to see them is not just about seeing the ghosts, seeing the history, the political and cultural legacy of the field, but also about laying bare the epistemological and methodological apparatuses that have framed our seeing for more than a century."²⁵ After all, the sciences we associate with the environment—evolutionary biology, ecology, conservation, and agricultural science, to name a few—are deeply implicated in the cultural politics of knowledge production, and have been intimately entangled with the naturecultures of conquest, Indigenous dispossession, chattel slavery, environmental management, and the absence of meaningful regulation across extractive industries.

Over the past few decades, many scholars in Black studies and ethnic studies have demonstrated persuasively how nineteenth-, twentieth-, and twenty-first-century hegemonies of human exceptionalism (and prevailing scientific theories about humans' ecological entanglements) have relied on an axiomatic figure of the universalized and "natural" human.²⁶ Tiffany Lethabo King's concept of "conquistador humanism" refers to the hegemonic consolidations of this figure while underscoring the centrality of chattel slavery, settler conquest, and colonial violences to the shaping

of the figure of the human and its dehumanized others.²⁷ In Spanish and Mexican Alta California, colonial administrators used the label of *gente de razon* to frame settler land owners of Spanish descent as “men of reason,” while simultaneously figuring Indigenous people as dehumanized others who lacked rationality, history, and civilization.²⁸ Along with scaffolding the dispossession of Indigenous people’s homelands, labor, and political self-determination under Spanish and Mexican governance, this framework laid the political and social foundation for US Californians’ own practices of genocide, legal disenfranchisement, and commercial enslavement upon statehood. As Alexander Weheliye asserts in his reading of nineteenth-century cosmologies of race (and their afterlives), the “bio-economic” notions of the universal human that rose to prominence during the mid-nineteenth century relied on “the assumed naturalness [of] economic inequalities, white supremacy, genocide, economic exploitation, gendered subjection, colonialism, ‘natural selection,’ and concepts such as the free market.”²⁹ These notions of “the natural” also infused the settler sciences of conservation and ecology, which figured the ideal environment as one “untouched” by humans. These sciences were able to entertain such a specious fallacy of nondevelopment because the organizing frameworks of naturalism could not, and would not, think of Indigenous and Native people as either relatives to, or managers of, their homeland environments. After all, “nature” loses coherence within an Indigenous ontological framework, and to entertain such a framework troubles the project of conquest to its core.

In using *natureculture* throughout this study, I want to locate the term as a meeting ground for various strains and intersections of interdisciplinary theory, especially those that prioritize dissident, liberatory, and decolonial modes of thought, while also exploring humans’ relationships with each other and with more-than-human worlds. In that vein, I am pushing the term *natureculture* toward a capacious utterance, one that builds upon its foundational critique of the epistemic authority and assumed neutrality of the sciences, while also reaching toward interventions from Black, Indigenous, ethnic, feminist, and queer studies. Following Willey, Subramaniam, Weheliye, and so many others, I am analyzing how elite, colonial, white supremacist, and heteropatriarchal institutions of regulation, commerce, and political ecology have figured Black, Indigenous, migrant, queer, femme, and unhoused people as inhuman and closer to nature. Along the way, I am considering how queerness, neurodivergence, disability, and other forms of embodied difference have also been figured as “unnatural” within regional

and national discourses about nature and the domestic that coalesce around the farm, the homestead, the wilderness, and the municipal outdoors. As a part of this latter effort, I also explore how twentieth-century notions of farm ownership and family inheritance have been undergirded by fictions about California settlers' entitlement to abundant environments suited to commercial extraction. Throughout *California Futures*, this approach figures naturecultural thought as a site of collaboration, one that is animated by practices of thinking together, within, and across various positionalities. The contemporary problems produced by California's deep histories of extraction and environmental injustice require collaborative, interdisciplinary, naturecultural thinking—especially thinking that acknowledges that Indigenous, immigrant, non-white, and femme people are more likely to experience the harms of exposure.

For me, thinking through naturecultural connectivity is not a substitute for meaningful engagement with the incommensurability of experiences, politics, cultures, and histories that emerge from the violence of white supremacy, settler conquest, racial capitalism, homophobia, heteropatriarchy, worker exploitation, toxic colonialism, and Nativism—all interwoven strands of US empire, neoliberal privatization, and the corporate consolidation of land possession in service of extractive industry. The fields of Native and Indigenous studies, Black studies, Latine studies, queer and feminist studies, feminist science studies, and environmental justice all have their own rich genealogies of thought and practice, and naturecultural scholars seeking to work across fields need to get used to ontological shifts, to thinking after and with, and to holding spaces for incommensurability. For example, I do not use *natureculture* in this book to refer to the incorporation of Indigenous science (sometimes called Traditional Ecological Knowledges). After all, Indigenous ontologies emerge before and outside colonial science in significant ways. On the most basic level, Indigenous knowledge systems think beyond the binary divides between subject and object that have historically shaped conservationist thinking. As a feminist science studies project, *California Futures* examines naturecultures of entanglement that tend toward the anticolonial, and it thinks with Max Liboiron's definition of "the anticolonial" as both a set of methods that "are characterized by how they do not reproduce settler and colonial entitlement to Land and Indigenous cultures, concepts, knowledges (including Traditional Knowledge), and lifeworlds," and an approach to "work, positionalities, and obligations that let us 'stand with' one another as we pursue good land relations, broadly defined."³⁰ As a

work of thinking-in-alliance that seeks to create solidarities across axes of incommensurability, *California Futures* approaches natureculture as a tool for making connections across time and space. It also approaches it as a tool for pursuing good relations, both in terms of the decolonial return of land, and in terms of a queer and feminist ethics of care that emerges within and across various activist, artistic, and revolutionary interventions that challenge normative settler naturecultures. As Kim TallBear and Angela Willey argue in their discussion of the intersections among queer, Indigenous, and multispecies belonging, “our ability to imagine nature and relationality differently are deeply enmeshed, and this imaginative work is vital to the re-worlding before us.”³¹ In order to better unpack how naturecultures offer a tool for thinking and practicing good land relations, decolonization, and significant otherness within and beyond the human, I turn toward two more conceptual frameworks that animate and shape this book. The first is temporality—including theories that arise across Indigenous ontologies, Black studies, queer theory, and climate justice movements. The second is relations, which also incorporates a discussion of method and positionality that articulates this book’s relations and approach toward promiscuous worlds.

YOSEMITE IS STOLEN LAND, YOSEMITE IS HAUNTED: SETTLER TEMPORALITIES AND ANTICOLONIAL FUTURES

Yosemite Valley has come unstuck in time. As a site of settler recreation located in the mountain range settlers have renamed the Sierra Nevada, Ahwahnee Valley (also called Yosemite Valley) has seen a buildup of undergrowth throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries that has left it prone to devastating megafire.³² The valley’s largest fire on record, the Rim Fire, burned an estimated seventy-seven thousand acres in 2013, and was thought to be the state’s second largest wildfire on record. By 2024—just eleven years later—the Rim Fire would not even register in the top ten of California’s most devastating wildfires.³³ This proliferation of large-scale wildfires, sometimes called “megafires,” is undoubtedly exacerbated by climate change, but it might also be useful to think of it as a kind of haunting, one that underscores the centuries of conquest that have separated Miwok people from the valley they have shaped across deep time.

In using “deep time” here and elsewhere, I am thinking with Wai Chee Dimock, who describes deep time as a perceptual mode that moves across various transnational and cultural frames to query a subject that overflows national narratives and notions of progress.³⁴ My thinking about haunting is similarly indebted to Avery Gordon, whose *Ghostly Matters* is a lovely, and indeed haunting, meditation on the histories rendered “ghostly” by hegemonic forces of domination and erasure.³⁵ As modes of perception, both haunting and deep time move us outside institutional, linear, and progressive narratives of the nation-state in favor of accountings that do not see our present arrangements of power as inevitable. For Gordon in particular, haunting allows us to “imagine what was lost that never even existed,” and so recognize that the past and the present could have been different.³⁶ By “reckoning with what we lost but never had,” we can learn to see “what has been missing, which is sometimes everything.”³⁷ An anticolonial approach that sees Yosemite Valley as one such site of haunting might enable us to recognize the national park not as America’s Best Idea, but instead, following David Truer (Ojibwe), as “a crime scene”: a site of unresolved theft, whose fires reflect histories of settler violence and institutional erasure that knock about the edges of California’s consciousness, like specters in a stolen house.³⁸ Throughout colonization, settlers’ incomplete historical and naturecultural accounts of Ahwahnee Valley have played a constitutive a role in the development of US cultures of conservation and outdoor recreation. The story of the park’s naming, misnaming, theft, and development illustrates the structural role that settler discourses of “nature” have played in obscuring Indigenous histories of ecocultural relations, and it demonstrates the importance of moving across multiple temporal frames, and among various “worlds,” in order to comprehend, challenge, and envision life beyond the perceived conjuncture of the colonial Anthropocene.

The Ahwahnechee, a tribe of Southern Miwok people, have located Ahwahnee as their homeland for between an estimated 5,500 and 7,000 years. Living in “small, nonagricultural, mobile communities isolated from the coast,” the Ahwahnechee people were largely overlooked by Spanish colonials in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, but this didn’t prevent their worlds from being torn by colonial violence. According to Damon Akins and William J. Bauer Jr. (Wailicki/Concow), oral histories tell of a “black sickness” reaching the valley in the late 1780s, brought either by a neophyte fleeing the missions, or transmitted along the kin-based trade routes that connected Ahwahnee to Yokut communities in the Central Valley and to Paiutes further north. Following the arrival of

the disease, the Ahwahnechee people left the valley for Mono Lake, where they lived alongside the Mono Lake Paiute for some thirty years, until a contingent of three hundred Ahwahnechee returned to the valley and renamed it “Yosemite,” after the Miwok word for “Grizzly Bear.” Twenty-five years later, settlers began migrating to the Sierra, seeking land, mineral wealth, and state-sponsored financial rewards for the murder of Native people. Amid the so-called Mariposa War—a two-year campaign of state-sponsored genocide and dispossession—a militia of two hundred miners and settlers, mostly white men, entered the Ahwahnee Valley in 1851 and attempted to starve, murder, and displace the Ahwahnechee people they found there.³⁹ In the 175-plus years of theft, violence, and institutional menace that followed, settlers transformed Yosemite Valley into a pivotal site for the formation of US conservation policy and national recreation. In Ken Burns’s popular documentary series about US national parks, Peter Coyote narrates a sensational take on the valley’s misnaming that still circulates today. In Coyote and Burns’s rendering, the name “Yosemite” is mistranslated as “those who should be feared” and “killers,” and so reflects the violent ignorance of the Mariposa Battalion.⁴⁰ I believed this story for years, and even saw it reflected in a popular travel guide, before learning better by reading Akins and Bauer’s recent history of Native California.

The myth that Ahwahnee Valley was unmanaged (or left “undeveloped”) by Native people was commonly held among nineteenth-century naturalists, including California icon John Muir, whose own writing about Indigenous and immigrant people is shaped by dehumanizing notions about racial nature. For Muir and other conservationists in his network, the racial and colonial epithet “digger” captures the specious belief that California Native people lived off of a naturally fecund, undeveloped region of plenty. This fallacy shaped conservationist practice and transnational California imaginaries throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and lingers in the twenty-first, shaping projects that seek to “restore” environments to what is often called their “prehuman baseline” state.⁴¹ Muir’s vision of a public Yosemite park was motivated by similarly deceptive notions about restoring an “untouched” and naturally balanced landscape that had been degraded not by genocide, but by US tourism.⁴²

Muir and the Sierra Club’s move to “protect” the park by permanently dispossessing the valley’s Native residents and channeling settlers’ encounters through state-sanctioned tourism set the course for racist, colonial, and conservationist approaches to managing public lands in the century to come.⁴³ It simultaneously extended the violent dispossessions

of Ahwahnechee and Miwok people by further removing the valley from temporalities and relations of care—including from the regimes of cultural burning that prevented the buildup of fuels that precipitate large-scale wildfires like the Rim Fire.

Though baseline theories (and related notions about “self-regulating” ecosystems) have been thoroughly disputed, they have nonetheless shaped popular discourse and conservationist attitudes about nature from the late nineteenth century into the twentieth and twenty-first. Along with erasing deep Indigenous histories of more-than-human relation and adaptive environmental management, the perceptual limitations of baseline theories fail to account for the randomness and changeability that characterize ecological systems, also called “stochasticity.” Speaking about the endurance of baseline approaches in 2011, Daniel Botkin noted, “The balance of nature idea is so deeply ingrained [in conservationist circles] that it is still dominant. . . . If you ask an ecologist if nature never changes, he will almost always say no. But if you ask that same ecologist to design a policy, it’s almost always a balance of nature policy.”⁴⁴ Although an account of the histories that haunt Yosemite Valley can offer some insight into how broader US regimes of conservation are “haunted” by the erasure of Indigenous histories, this is only a partial view of the worldly violences and erasures that have shaped California. I turn here toward a review of decolonial and anticolonial notions of time and temporality in order to help us think through the intersecting and distinct forms of temporality and worlding that move outside and against nationalist and institutional accounts of history and possibility.

In his study of settler and Native ontologies of time, Mark Rifkin encourages us to think of temporal multiplicity as a mode of investigation and perception. For Rifkin, the “discrepant temporalities” that emerge from various ontologies and cultures should be “understood as affecting each other, as all open to change, and yet as not equivalent or mergeable into a neutral common frame.”⁴⁵ These “multiple temporalities,” though distinct, engender a “diversity of process of becoming and the variety of potential interrelations among those processes.”⁴⁶ In my own thinking about temporal multiplicity, I am particularly interested in resonances and distinctions that emerge among temporalities that have been theorized across Native and Indigenous studies, Black studies, comparative ethnic studies, feminist and queer theory, and climate change studies. Rather than trying to subordinate various entangled temporalities and worlds into a unified whole, *California Futures* moves across time and place to attend to forms

of Black, Indigenous, queer, migrant, and decolonial temporality that are as various, distinct, intersecting, and entangled as the folks who inhabit and create them. Although I often locate these temporalities in relation to the material and institutional histories of white settler heteropatriarchal violence, extractive development, and national futurisms, my goal is not to circumscribe or foreclose readings of these times as various, open, and distinct. Instead, I am attempting to lay out the ways that Indigenous and non-Indigenous folks who have been exiled from normative and white supremacist regimes of nature—including notions of the universal human—have nonetheless contested settler colonizations of the future. In the chapters that follow, I am particularly interested in how shared cultural resonances and political solidarities can emerge among dissident practices of speculation and worlding, especially those that generate radical, abolitionist, anticolonial, and coalitional futures within the present. Across the past two decades, scholarly theories of queer and Black time have tracked the ways that queer and Black people, arts, acts, and worlds can carve out rebellious and errant relationships to the present. In a time of climate chaos, these works have much to offer to those of us who are interested in living otherwise and creating otherwise worlds. However, most contemporary discussions of climate change in the United States attempt to safeguard settler investments and national narratives of progress by forging uneasy alliances with the same industrial, colonial, heteropatriarchal, white supremacist, and imperial modes of environmental management that have produced the colonial Anthropocene. These conservative responses to the environmental and economic disruptions wrought by a changing climate tend to privilege techno-utopian schemes whose foreseen and unforeseen consequences fall most painfully on communities, regions, and people who have already borne the brunt of the United States' cultures of imperial violence. Despite growing movements toward climate justice, many corporate, state, and national goals related to global warming focus on rescuing nationalist and corporate visions of the future by attempting to contain risk and sustain hegemonic arrangements of power. In fact, those settler societies that have produced and continue to produce the majority of greenhouse gas emissions have yet to meaningfully engage with the inequities of development and vulnerability that are on track to shape our biospheric futures for generations, indeed centuries, to come.

Rather than viewing climate change as a problem of time, Kyle Powys Whyte (Potawatomi) encourages us to approach it as a problem of relations. He writes, “When people relate to climate change through linear

time . . . they feel peril and seek ways to stop the worst impacts immediately. Yet swift action obscures the responsibilities to others who risk being harmed by the solutions.”⁴⁷ Whyte, thinking at the juncture of environmental justice and Native and Indigenous studies, encourages us to shift from a crisis management mode into a framework of “kinship time,” one that is anchored in an ethic of accountability and mutual care for each other’s safety, well-being, and self-determination. Kinship time straddles multiple temporalities as it balances an accountability for the settler violences and dispossessions of the past against the responsibilities of the present, while also considering the work needed to create flourishing futures for human and multispecies worlds. Whyte notes that kinship time “focuses on understanding that kinship relationships are in peril, and we must take urgent action to establish or repair kinship relationships; otherwise, we will not have the interdependence required for responsiveness that prevents harm and violence.”⁴⁸ As a project that moves among various histories, worlds, and temporalities of relation, *California Futures* attempts to chart a history of relations by reckoning with the naturecultural specters that haunt the present and exploring the decolonial and naturecultural futurities that come into view when we take each other’s futures as a matter of care and attempt to repair relations.

MEET ME OUTSIDE: DECOLONIAL RELATIONS, OTHERWISE FUTURES

Before I move on to discuss my critical and theoretical approach to relations, and to the scholars I am thinking with and learning from in this text, I want to introduce my own positionality and relationships to California and to this work. I’m a white queer, nonbinary, and trans settler who was raised by white parents in homes that we owned, mostly on unceded Ohlone Lisjan land in what is often called the San Francisco Bay Area. My mother was born on unceded Yokut land in a town called Fresno; she was raised, on unceded Ventureño Chumash land in what’s called Ventura, by a single mother (a white woman of Scandinavian descent who spent her career teaching second grade in the farming community of Santa Paula). My father was born on unceded Pueblo, Tiwa, and Piro land in what’s called Albuquerque, New Mexico, and he and his siblings were raised mostly by a single father (a white man of Italian descent who spent his career working as an engineer at Lockheed Martin) on Muwekma Ohlone

homelands in the Santa Clara Valley. My family was sustained by my dad's work in the tech sector of Silicon Valley. My engagement with California, as an idea, and as a set of environments and histories, has been shaped by my own relation to the region. I grew up mostly in the south and east Bay Area, and attended California public schools from elementary through undergrad, completing my bachelor's degree on unceded Pomo land at Sonoma State University. I pursued my master's degree on the ancestral lands of the Lenape people in Manhattan, and completed my PhD on unceded Tongva homelands in East Los Angeles County. I lived in California for the majority of the time that I wrote this book, and as of this writing, I've been teaching with the California State University system for the past thirteen years. Throughout that time, my relations with the texts and regions discussed here have been shaped by my own and my students' asymmetrical relationships to property, access, and the settler state. As a California State University employee writing a book about California, I have directly benefited from my university system's historical role in dispossessing the Indigenous people of the Santa Clara Valley and beyond, as well as its participation in a real estate market that produces precarity and vacancy. In my current position at San José State University, I work on the unceded homelands of the Ohlone people, including the historical lands of the Verona Band, which are identified as ancestral homelands by the Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, the Tamien Nation, and possibly others.⁴⁹

This book moves across many Indigenous homelands in its analysis of California speculations. I have worked to mark the original inhabitants of territories and to use their traditional names when possible. Following Damon Akins and William Bauer, I tend to use Indigenous to refer to tribes and nations before colonization, and move between using "Indigenous people" and "California Native people" throughout, favoring the latter when I'm discussing later time periods, when it has become a term that many California Native people use to describe themselves.⁵⁰ My rendering of historical homelands draws on a range of sources, including conversations with research partners; resources posted on the websites of tribal governments as well as Native-Land.ca; and scholarship by Native and Indigenous authors, activists, scholars, and culture workers of the tribe in question.⁵¹ When possible, I include claims by tribes without federal recognition. When presented with conflicting or multiple affiliations to land, I have tended toward a broad inclusion of land claims, rather than acting as an authority over these claims. My goal in identifying land claims is to honor centuries-long legacies of residence, relation, and survival that have

been erased and obscured in national, transnational, and environmentalist accounts of California history. I am still on a journey of learning and relation, and I am grateful to the folks who have taken the time to teach me and offer corrections where they've been needed. Any errors in attribution are my own and reflect where I am in my own developing understanding.

This book is a product of more than a decade of relations with students, scholars, artists, administrations, and the state of California. I was an adjunct lecturer for six years of this book's creation, and I sometimes taught as many as twenty-two units a semester. This is to say that my thinking here is deeply shaped by conversations with colleagues and students about the texts and questions I explore. This text leans toward Northern California, the Bay Area, and the Central Valley. It moves backward and forward in time to query naturecultural entanglements and relations, looking in particular toward the ways that histories of genocidal violence, erasure, and environmental transformation have shaped the present. Questions I explore here include, What rests outside, beyond, or at the fringes of settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and the heteropatriarchal structures of domesticity and normativity? How might we conceive of a meeting ground, a naturecultural ethic, that is inclusive of worlds outside and reaches toward the decolonial futures that become visible there? How might we reach toward iterations of the outside that are inclusive of Indigenous and decolonial cosmologies, of reciprocal relations with the multispecies world, and of Black, brown, queer, migrant, and femme people and communities who have been menaced by institutions, markets, and politicians seeking to create, exploit, and sustain a fervor for extraction that is rooted in conquest? I also ask how the racial, colonial, nationalist, and heterodomestic naturecultures of redlining, environmental injustice, dispossession, de/regulation, incarceration, and extractive governance have shaped regional relations between California Native people and the state, and I explore how thinking "outside" might offer a framework that challenges the coloniality of "nature," its baseline thinking, its recreational outdoors, and its cosmologies of humanity and dehumanization.

I move into this nexus of questions with an eye toward the decolonial futures, practices, and horizons that are coming into being in this moment. My approach to thinking Indigenous futures (especially in relation to past histories of survivance and action) is influenced by the work of historian Nick Estes, an enrolled member of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe and co-founding member of the pan-Indigenous liberation group the Red Nation. Reflecting on long traditions of resistance by the

Indigenous communities of Turtle Island, Estes argues that such resistance is animated both by “our ancestors refusal to be forgotten,” and by contemporary Indigenous thinkers’ and activists’ “refusal to forget our ancestors and our history.”⁵² This centering of Indigenous histories and intergenerational cultures of resistance and survival is also reflected in theories of “radical relationality” articulated by Melanie K. Yazzie (Diné) and Cutcha Risling Baldy (Hupa/Yurok), who assert that relations with the more-than-human world can draw on histories of ancestral thought and practice while also functioning as contemporary sites of solidarity among Indigenous nations and their allies. For Risling Baldy and Yazzie, “radical relationality” articulates an Indigenous feminist orientation toward decolonial struggle that is anchored in good land relations.⁵³ They write, “The tide of history is with us. So long as we remain committed to building a successful liberation movement and embracing a far-reaching relational politics of life, the web of radical relationality will only grow until it blankets the world in stunning beauty and restores the balance that our stories and prophecies have always foretold.”⁵⁴ As a project that queries the interplay among settler speculation, decolonial relations, and post-extractive futures, *California Futures* charts the ways that activists and artists have worked to create an expanding “web of radical relationality” that prioritizes a decolonial and multispecies ethics of care within and beyond the human. In the chapters that follow, I contribute to this web by exploring dissident and decolonial visions of relation and reciprocity within and across incommensurable ways of living and relating. And I ask how Indigenous, Black, queer, Latine, migrant, and feminist orientations toward relation and futurity contribute to a broader vision of life “after” racial capitalism and the colonial Anthropocene. Speaking with Maria Hinojosa on the podcast *LatinoUSA*, Cherríe Moraga reflected on the ways that feminist solidarities and kin relations bring us into each other’s struggles, noting that women of color feminisms reorient movements and alliances toward the most affected members by asking, “Who’s missing in this picture?” and by refusing to subordinate care and accountability to one’s family and kin in service of movement goals.⁵⁵ This intersectional vision of accountability and relation resonates with Farhana Sultana’s definition of critical climate justice as an intersectional and internationalist form of inquiry and action that is fundamentally “about paying attention to how climate change impacts people differently, unevenly, and disproportionately.”⁵⁶ Throughout *California Futures*, I query writers, activists, and culture workers who seek to expand and deepen Indigenous nations’ ability

to control the fate of their homelands, practice self-governance, and challenge and disrupt the perceived “naturalness” of extractive economies and imaginaries. This book reaches toward decolonial and relational futures that conceive of the colonial Anthropocene as an inheritance that doesn’t have to determine the future inheritances (and afterlives) we leave behind. Many of the texts considered in the coming chapters offer blueprints for coalitional futures that practice worldly relations with humans and more-than-human worlds, with the aim of decolonizing lands, dismantling white supremacy, and reclaiming relations with an outdoorsness that rests outside and against settler, extractivist, anti-Black, anti-immigrant, and anthropocentric frames of belonging to the nation, its histories, its futures, and the violent normativities that shape its perceptual horizons.

The projects of decolonization, environmental remediation, and social equity are necessarily entangled, but they are not commensurable. When Black and performance studies scholar Fred Moten asks, “What’s outside the outside?” he is not seeking decolonization (at least not directly, or only); instead he is speaking toward the Black modes of fugitivity that create worlds beyond the structural and institutional logics of white supremacy, carceral violence, property, and other forms of anti-Black political dispossession in the Americas.⁵⁷ As such, his gesture “outside the outside” articulates a kind of meeting ground, a rendezvous point, where Black, decolonial, anti-white supremacist, and naturecultural convenings can work in tandem. As I take it up in this text, Moten’s call to explore “What’s outside the outside?” is not, or not merely, a recuperation of a humanity that has been violently dismissed, but it is instead a mode of relationality *within* difference that is attuned to the interlocking resistances, spaces, and ways of life that can be crafted beyond the perceptual horizons of extractive nationalism and the white supremacist state.

In the case studies included in this book, I am especially interested in those futures that practice reciprocity with the multispecies world and use postures of relation and mutual aid as a meeting place for a movement to force the settler state and its institutions to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and to work to support and expand the ways that California Native people can practice customary relations, Indigenous science, and political self-determination within their own sovereign homelands. For Glen Coulthard (Yellowknives Dene First Nation), Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Alderville First Nation band of Missisauga Anishinaabe), and others, the term “grounded normativities” refers to pan-Indigenous modalities of governance, self-determination, and embodiment that are

grounded in both Indigenous systems of intelligence and in ethical orientations toward being in the world.⁵⁸ Coulthard offers grounded normativities as a strategic project that aims to expand and deepen Indigenous tribes', bands', and nations' ability to practice sovereign political relations and enact responsibilities to human and nonhuman relatives. Thinking with Coulthard here (and with Whyte's comments about the temporality of relation), I approach kinship time as a naturecultural mode of care, one oriented toward reestablishing and repairing relations in service of a collective response to climate change that is anchored in safeguarding each other's sovereignty, well-being, and futurity. My understanding of this mode of relation is deeply invested in a politics of Indigenous land rematriation, Black liberation, queer collectivity, and radical movements for mutual aid and self-determination. Dr. Robin R. Gray defines rematriation as "an embodied praxis of recovery and return [that] is about revitalizing the relationship between Indigenous lands, heritage, and bodies based on Indigenous values and ways of knowing, being, and doing."⁵⁹ I have drawn substantial inspiration and guidance from the authors mentioned so far, and my own futural imaginings emerge in solidarity with Julie Sze's definition of "restorative environmental justice" as a practice that seeks to centralize Indigenous and Black perspectives in ways that are "explicitly decolonial and integrative, including humans as animals and imagining humans and nonhuman nature in nonextractive models."⁶⁰ As an orientation toward futurity, restorative environmental justice marks "the end of capitalism as we know it as different from the end of the world."⁶¹ My analysis here is also inspired by the work of the coalitional Indigenous direct action group the Red Nation, especially *The Red Deal*, their collaboratively authored response to the Green New Deal. In *The Red Deal*, the authors assert that "#LandBack is the soundest environmental policy," and that any meaningful response to the climate crisis must acknowledge that "What creates the crisis cannot solve it."⁶² This means that we must work actively toward foundational and transformational change that includes reparations for the climate debt, the abolishment of incarceration, and a reinvestment in caretaking through "infrastructures of liberation" anchored in local knowledge and networks of relation and accountability, both within and beyond the human.⁶³ In turning toward the past to envision decolonial and liberatory futures of mutual survival, I am indebted to Avery Gordon for her encouragement to speak to ghosts. She reminds me, "To be haunted in the name of the will to heal is to allow the ghost to help you imagine what was lost that

never existed. . . . [Because,] if you let it, the ghost can lead you to what was missing, which is sometimes everything.”⁶⁴ *California Futures* is a reflection of what I’ve learned, and of the foreclosed futures I’ve found along the way. Any omissions or missed turnoffs are my own. And it is written from and with love and anger and longing, and, sure, fear for those whose well-being has always been at stake. As I come to finishing this book, I also find that it is written with hope. A hope born of and sustained by my relations with the thinkers, artists, and activists who have traveled with me, both those whom I’ve had the pleasure of knowing while writing this book and those who have been generous enough to share their own thoughts and worlds through paper.

Thank you, reader, for following me this far. I invite you to think with me across these pages, to meet me—meet us—outside. It’s a place that’s always been there because it’s not a place that can be taken from us—no matter how others may try (and try and try). Our coalitional work began a long time ago, and it will be carried forward by those who come after us. The future is ours to create; it is waiting in the now, in the past, and in the meeting grounds outside.

CALIFORNIA FUTURES: CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first three chapters explore the naturecultural visions of California’s extractable abundance that have been perpetuated by settlers throughout conquest, while also unpacking the notions of racial nature—especially the universal human and the less-than-human—that have been deployed to misrepresent and obscure Indigenous societies’ histories of science, customary relations with nonhumans, and regimes of environmental management. Along with analyzing the ways that settler artists and institutions have crafted visions of California that frame it as a providential site of extraction, these chapters chart the naturecultural specters of extractive abundance that haunt the agroindustrial logics of enclosure and development, figuring colonized landscapes as material extensions of settler-nationalist regimes of heterodomesticity. Throughout, I ask how these figurations of human un/belonging have been marshaled to justify genocidal, ecocidal, and anti-immigrant regimes of violence. And I explore how settlers’ broad and ongoing transformation of California landscapes have emerged from and reproduced environmental imaginaries that are proving increasingly precarious in the time of climate change.

Chapter 1, “Grizzly Country,” conducts a decolonial and critical environmental interrogation of place, nature, genocide, and ecology by analyzing the visual, written, and environmental cultures of grizzly eradication during the early decades of US conquest. Along with interrogating how notions of white environmental dominance and racial nature have shaped US policies of genocide, Indigenous dispossession, and enclosure, this chapter offers an ecocultural analysis of how settlers cultivated markets, discourses, and policies that exploited and perpetuated the popular assumption that living grizzlies were irreconcilable with US life. Along the way, I discuss how Americans’ goals of transforming captured environments into sites of agriculture and extraction were articulated in relief to a racialized, unruly, and anticolonial outdoors. The chapter then closes with a discussion of contemporary moves to reintroduce grizzlies to California, including their anticolonial commitments and resonances with histories of conquest.

Chapter 2, “The Fecund Valley,” analyzes the ways that California’s arrhythmic drought seasons have been rendered spectral in settler discourses and speculations, especially those that frame California as a region of rare natural lushness that is well-suited to agroindustrial economies of scale. This chapter charts the ways that boom-and-bust cycles of drought and development have reshaped the state’s land holdings, waterways, and agricultural economies across two centuries. Along the way I analyze three key texts: Charles Nordhoff’s nineteenth-century handbook, *California for Travelers and Settlers*; Ohlone-Costanoan Esselen author Deborah Miranda’s memoir, *Bad Indians*; and the popular California author John Steinbeck’s neglected climate novel, *To a God Unknown*. Throughout, I query the ways that California’s political ecology of land consolidation and water management has worked to sustain settler misperceptions of extractable abundance, including the ways it has relied on colonial romances of enclosure and domesticity that have infused discussions of settler agriculture in California throughout the *longue durée* of conquest.

Chapter 3, “Our Homes Are No Longer Our Homes,” builds on the previous chapters’ discussion of the development of California’s agroindustry to examine how Plantationocene histories of white heterodomesticity and racialized labor have shaped late twentieth-century patterns of environmental injustice and toxic exposure in the southern San Joaquin Valley. Placing Cherríe Moraga’s play *Heroes and Saints* in conversation with local histories of toxicity, scientific evaluation, and popular memory in McFarland, California, from the 1980s to the 2010s, this chapter analyzes how dominant narratives about farming in the Central Valley have

normalized patterns of racialized and reproductive violence that menace migrant farmworker communities. In particular, I analyze how this harm is figured as an acceptable consequence of the mass, underregulated application of fertilizers and pesticides that are used to maintain robust crop yields. In addition to analyzing the 2006 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report on environmental toxicity in McFarland, this chapter explores the visual and narrative staging of race and reproductive futurism in the sports drama *McFarland, USA*, released by Disney films in 2015. This chapter ends with a reflection on the anticolonial horizons that infuse Moraga's call for farmworker justice, as well as contemporary negotiations of Yokut sovereignty in the valley.

Whereas the first three chapters of this project interrogate settlers' speculative constructions of California as a region of extractable abundance, the final three chapters examine contemporary negotiations of futurity, belonging, and climate change adaptation across rural and urban environments, with an eye toward the climate change solidarities they imagine and enact in the present. These chapters place a particular emphasis on radical, Black, queer, feminist, and Native archives, as well as speculations that seek to reimagine humans' relationships and responsibilities to the more-than-human world, and to each other.

Chapter 4, "Kinship Parables," assembles a constellation of interlocking archives of settlement, imagination, and utopian living in the Klamath Mountains, ranging from nineteenth-century histories of gold mining and Black township formation, to 1960s era Black mutual aid activism and white back-to-the-land communalism, to Octavia Butler's speculative visions of Acorn, a mixed-race utopian community that settles among the Klamath Mountains in her dystopian novel *Parable of the Talents*. Drawing on theories of Black and queer temporality, this chapter moves across archives of oral history, small-press publications, documentary film, broadsides, natural history, and autoethnography to explore the histories and legacies of Black Bear Ranch, one of California's longest-functioning wilderness communes. Along with exploring histories of relation among the ranch's founding members, Roy Ballard of the Black People's Free Store in San Francisco, and local Indigenous nations, this chapter charts the ranch's eventual turn toward feminist and queer forms of relationality, communal labor, and environmental activism. The chapter ends with a reflection on the afterlives of Butler's fictional commune, as well as on contemporary critiques of Black Bear Ranch's relationships with rural gentrification and the cannabis industry that have emerged alongside calls to unsettle the land.

Chapter 5, “Recovery,” analyzes decolonial visions of watershed futurity that infuse Yurok poet Shaunna Oteka McCovey’s collection *The Smokehouse Boys*, as well as the community-based play *Salmon Is Everything* (crafted by Theresa May and the Klamath Theater Project) and the climate adaptation plan developed by the Karuk Tribe. Across this range of texts, I explore the ways that Indigenous science and ecocultural relations on the Klamath River resonate with broader movements for dam removal and climate change adaptation. Along with locating the political dynamics of dam removal, water rights, and Native ecocultural restoration in relation to the historic fish kill of 2002, this chapter discusses the ways that the Native arts and sciences of the mid- and lower Klamath watershed continue to challenge the settler imaginaries and economies of homesteading that shape regional and national cultures of enclosure, extraction, and colonial governance.

Chapter 6, “Oaklandish,” shifts focus to the municipal outdoors in present-day Oakland, California, and analyzes the material conditions and public discourse of unhoused encampment. While paying particular attention to archives of public memory, belonging, and decolonial imagining, this chapter examines the history of unhoused management in Oakland between the housing crisis of 2008 and the COVID-19 pandemic of the 2020s. Throughout, I explore how city administrators have mobilized racialized notions of the house, the domestic, and the municipal outdoors to justify the policing and removal of unhoused people and encampments from spaces of commercial speculation. In particular, I discuss four locations: the residential and recreational spaces of Lake Merritt; the encampment zone that emerged in the shadow of the Fruitvale district Home Depot; the Wood Street encampment of West Oakland; and Joaquin Miller Park, a space of public recreation that also became a site of unhoused encampment during the early months of the statewide shelter-in-place order of 2020. Along with examining the ways that the speculative gaze of white residential investment shapes and racializes public discourse about encampment, I explore the resonances among unhoused people’s claims to public space and decolonial public art by Oakland-based Native artists who craft otherwise considerations of the municipal outdoors, its environments, its politics of belonging, and its decolonial futures.

This book’s conclusion continues to dwell with Lake Merritt by analyzing the ways that Gerald Vizenor’s (Minnesota Chippewa Tribe) novel *Dead Voices* articulates life outside of the settler regimes of dispossession that position the lake as a site of real estate speculation and municipal governance.

There are many ways of reading this book. The first and second halves of the book model different temporal and critical concerns, with the first half focusing on how settler environmental speculations continue to haunt the present, and the second half moving toward decolonial negotiations of futurity. Some readers will no doubt move through the book in chapter order, whereas others who are interested in engaging with particular questions, regions, and/or case studies may prefer to save some chapters for later reading. In that vein, I'll share that some of the chapters pay attention to particular environments and species relationships that are associated with California as a naturecultural ideal. Chapters 1 through 4 approach the farm, the commune, and the homestead as sites of naturecultural contact that are entangled with the histories and politics of colonialism, agroindustry, and climate precarity. Chapters 1 and 5 sit with the extirpated California grizzly and the critically endangered salmon as subjects of naturecultural conflict, solidarity, and recovery. Chapters 4 and 5 explore interlocking projects of speculation, activism, and place-making in the Karuk, Hoopa, Yurok, Shasta, and Konomihu homelands of the lower and mid-Klamath watershed, first by Black mutual aid activists and white back-to-the-land communards, and then by Native scientists, policymakers, and creative writers. Chapters 2 and 6 look to cattle and canines, respectively, as domesticated species whose presence in the region is entangled with agricultural and urban development projects that translate white heterodomic and normative logics of environmental belonging into practices of spatial displacement and racialized, colonial, and anti-Black un/belonging.

On the whole, this book is an attempt to think through the history, ecology, politics, and afterlives of California as a settler speculation, one that has been grafted onto Indigenous homelands in service of settler financial and political futures. In the pages that follow, I explore how regional and transnational archives, projects, and histories draw from the past in order to chart new modes of relation—both within and beyond the human. I also ask how they reach outside the extractivist worlds imposed by settler conquest. Along with analyzing the deep history of colonial genocide, ecological violence, and extraction, *California Futures* gathers together archives of resistance and world-making, and it approaches them as interlocking blueprints for the creation of Indigenous, decolonial, Black, queer, feminist, and anti-white supremacist futures.

NOTES

INTRODUCTION. SPECULATIVE ECOLOGIES, ANTICOLONIAL WORLDS

- 1 Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*, 3.
2 California Governor's Office, "California Is Now the 4th Largest
3 Economy in the World," April 23, 2025, <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/04/23/california-is-now-the-4th-largest-economy-in-the-world/>.
4 Gómez-Barris, "Colonial Anthropocene."
5 Bhang, *Migrant Futures*, 5.
6 Starr, *California*; Healey, "California's Island Heritage."
7 Saunt, *West of the Revolution*, 74.
8 Lee, *Making of Asian America*, 20.
9 Morris, "Cruel Ships of Prosperity."
10 Morris, "Cruel Ships of Prosperity."
11 Lee, *Making of Asian America*, 22.
12 Nelson, "Wrestling with Fire," 81.
13 For more on "alienated species" as a reference to non-endemic
14 species transported by settler colonists and alienated within
15 the commercial and geographic flows of capital, see Lisa
16 Fink's "Alienated Species and Unsettled Ecologies."
17 Brechin and Dawson, *Farewell Promised Land*.
18 Hazard, *Underflows*, 23.
19 Marris, *Rambunctious Gardens*, 3.
20 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 5.
21 Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 22.
22 Haraway, *Companion Species Manifesto*, 7.
23 Subramaniam, *Ghost Stories for Darwin*, x. My approach to na-
24 turecultures that trouble the human-nature boundary is also in-
debted to Stacey Alaimo's foundational text *Bodily Natures*.
Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11; Haraway, *Staying with
the Trouble*; Subramaniam, *Ghost Stories for Darwin*.
Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble*, 2-3.
Tsing, *Mushroom at the End of the World*, 23.
Stern, *Eugenic Nation*; Alagona, *After the Grizzly*; Davis, *Ecology of Fear*.
Stern, *Eugenic Nation*.

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- 25 Subramaniam, *Ghost Stories for Darwin*, 22.
- 26 See, for example, McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*; Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*; Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*; and Holland, *an other*.
- 27 King, *Black Shoals*.
- 28 As Sylvia Wynter notes of the ways this process shaped Spanish empire in the Americas, “the quite Other form of life and mode of being human of the indigenous peoples were therefore simply seen by the Spaniards as the irrational lack of their own”; Wynter, “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom,” 288.
- 29 Weheliye, *Habeas Viscus*, 24. See also Allewaert, *Ariel's Ecology*.
- 30 Liboiron, *Pollution Is Colonialism*, 27.
- 31 TallBear and Willey, “Introduction: Critical Relationality,” 6.
- 32 See, for example, Mayer, “Yosemite Fires.”
- 33 Kerry Klein, “Ten Years Later, the Rim Fire Remains Yosemite’s Largest Wildfire,” KVPB, August 23, 2023, <https://www.kvpr.org/local-news/2023-08-23/ten-years-later-the-rim-fire-remains-yosemites-largest-wildfire>.
- 34 Dimock, “Deep Time.”
- 35 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.
- 36 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, lxi.
- 37 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 183, 58.
- 38 Truer, “Return the National Parks to the Tribes.”
- 39 Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*, 103.
- 40 *The National Parks: America's Best Idea*, episode 1, “The Scripture of Nature (1851–1890),” directed by Ken Burns, performed by Peter Coyote, aired September 27, 2009, on PBS, at 16:06, <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/the-national-parks/>.
- 41 A common term in twentieth-century conservation, a “prehuman” or “historical” baseline refers to a speculative state of ecological equilibrium that is thought to predate colonial conquest and the arrival of “humans” (read: settler colonists). Baseline thinking, and the related notion of a self-regulating “balance of nature”—one that occurs in the absence of human action—gained popularity in US naturalist circles in the late nineteenth century as ecologist Eugenius Warming put forth the notion of “succession.” For Warming, succession refers to the process of calibration that ecosystems supposedly move through before eventually arriving at a stable, self-regulating endpoint. Building on Warming’s work, Frederick Clements, a turn-of-the-century ecologist and early conservationist, called this point a “climax,” and argued that once an ecosystem reached its “climax” state, it would remain relatively unchanged unless its equilibrium was disrupted by human action and/or a major geological or climatological event. For more, see Marris, *Rambunctious Gardens*, 28.
- 42 DeLuca, “Trains in the Wilderness,” 639.
- 43 Taylor, *Rise of the American Conservation Movement*.

- 44 Marris, *Rambunctious Gardens*, 30.
 45 Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 3.
 46 Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time*, 16.
 47 Whyte, “Time as Kinship,” 39.
 48 Whyte, “Time as Kinship,” 53.
 49 Muwekma Ohlone Tribe, “Historical Overview,” accessed February 4, 2025, <https://www.muwekma.org/historical-overview.html>;
 Tamien Nation, “Tamien Nation,” accessed February 4, 2025, <https://www.tamien.org/>; Association of Ramaytush Ohlone, “Muwekma Myths, Part II: The Myth of Supremacy,” February 7, 2023, <https://www.truthbeforehealing.com/copy-of-tamien-2>.
 50 Akins and Bauer, *We Are the Land*.
 51 A cautionary note posted on this website remarks that its world map of Native lands is “a living document, informed by the contributions of Indigenous communities, Indigenous knowledge holders, and their stories”; Native Land Digital, accessed January 20, 2025, <https://native-land.ca/>.
 52 Estes, *Our History Is the Future*, 236.
 53 Yazzie and Risling Baldy, “Introduction: Indigenous People and the Politics of Water,” 2.
 54 Yazzie and Risling Baldy, “Introduction: Indigenous People and the Politics of Water,” 10.
 55 Moraga, “Enduring Feminist Wisdom of Cherríe Moraga.”
 56 Sultana, “Critical Climate Justice,” 118.
 57 Moten et al., “Black Outdoors.”
 58 Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 13; Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.
 59 Gray, “Rematriation,” 5.
 60 Sze, *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger*, 78–79.
 61 Sze, *Environmental Justice in a Moment of Danger*, 82.
 62 Red Nation, *Red Deal*, 7, 32.
 63 Red Nation, *Red Deal*, 58, 24, 32.
 64 Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 57–58.

CHAPTER 1. GRIZZLY COUNTRY: GHOST SPECIES, RE-INTRODUCTION, AND THE NATURECULTURES OF CONQUEST

This chapter draws on “Grizzly Country: Settler Worlding and the Politics of Species on the California Frontier,” *American Quarterly* 72, no. 2 (2020): 351–76. My thanks to the editorial board for their support and helpful critiques.

- 1 Alagona, “California Grizzly.”
 2 Alagona, “California Grizzly.”
 3 Peet, “Endangered Species Mural #14.”