

CALL FOR PAPERS

California Dreaming: Visions, Spaces, and Shadows from the Golden State

12-13 June 2025, University of Naples “L’Orientale”, Italy

Epitomizing America’s quest for the frontier, California stands island-like in the collective imagination of North America. Its location on the edge of the western world, and its history at the margin of the dominant discourse on the United States up until the beginning of the twentieth century, has allowed the Golden State to develop a set of unique features, both culturally and politically. Advertised as a Mediterranean Eden for newcomers, this seemingly verdant heaven came to represent a last horizon, the last opportunity for a nation that has defined its most fundamental identity in terms of pursuit of happiness, independence, and limitless opportunities. To a large extent, throughout the past century California’s self-styled uniqueness came to represent either an exception to, or a most authentic realization of, “the American way.”

On the other hand, California’s environmental and social exceptionalism progressively clashed with the repercussions of hostile ecologies, racial inequalities, historical and geographical erasure, so much that it has become impossible to envision and narrate the “Land of Sunshine” without evoking the possibility of impending doom. Besides being a recurring issue on both the actual life and the narratives of Californians (through earthquakes, fires, drought, urban riots, ethnic conflicts, etc.), disaster has come to the forefront in critical regionalist studies, especially in the studies of urban theorists and historians. It was Mike Davis who said that Los Angeles is the city “we love to destroy,” referring to the city’s propensity for spectacular catastrophes. Torn between unique megacities and pristine wildlands, modern-day narratives about California are increasingly questioned with the notions of crisis, exception, and disaster.

The aim of the conference is to gather scholars from different fields of expertise with an interest in California, its many cultures, conflicts, and histories, and provide a meeting opportunity for the growing scholarship about California in Italy and in Europe. We encourage papers that acknowledge and interrogate a history of California’s exceptionalism and its unparalleled cultural development and self-definition, and that challenge its mythology, its state rhetoric, and its many contradictions, especially through a focus, to borrow again from Mike Davis, on its “imagination of disaster.” Discussions about California range far beyond the domain of literature: while we welcome any proposal concerning the Golden State’s literary tradition, we also invite scholars from fields like urban studies, geography, history, political philosophy, cinema studies, and beyond.

The conference will host four keynote lectures by esteemed scholars whose research offers unique perspectives about California:

Alison Rose Jefferson (*Living the California Dream. African American Leisure Sites during the Jim Crow Era*, 2020), publicly engaged independent historian, and heritage conservation consultant;

David L. Ulin (*Sidewalking. Coming to Terms with Los Angeles*, 2015; *Writing Los Angeles. A Literary Anthology*, 2002), author and editor of several books, columnist and former book critic for the *Los Angeles Times*, and Professor at USC Dornsife, Los Angeles;

J. Scott Bryson (*Ecopoetry: A Critical Introduction*, 2002; *The West Side of Any Mountain*, 2005), Professor of English at Mount St. Mary’s University, Los Angeles;

Robb Hernández (*Archiving an Epidemic. Art, AIDS, and the Queer Chicana Avant-Garde*, 2019), Professor of English at Fordham University, New York.

Topics may include, but are not limited to the following:

- California and the myth of the American West
- California and the New American Studies
- California's urban spaces: social conflicts, spatial justice, and gentrification
- California as a space of exceptionalism and disaster
- Environmental protection, climate change, extractivism, and eco-critical perspectives
- California as a space of racial conflicts and historical amnesia
- California as a space of new life opportunities and identity reinvention
- Architectural perspectives on California
- Representation and impact of the Silicon Valley
- Hollywood industry, the entertainment industry, and the (new) Hollywood novel.
- (Free) Journalism and California
- Countercultures, civil rights movements, and campus revolts
- California as a space of migration
- (Neo-) noir depictions of California
- California and pop culture
- Utopia, dystopia, and apocalypse
- The cultures of Native Californians
- Black California and its representation
- Asian America and its California
- Latinx and Chicanx cultures
- Queer studies in a Californian context
- California in Comics

A selection of the presented papers will be considered for publication within a collection of essays on the conference topics.

Submission Guidelines

Please send paper proposals of 300 words maximum for a 15-min talk and a short bio note of 100 words to californiadreamingconference@gmail.com. The deadline for abstract submissions is **January 15, 2025**. Notifications of acceptance will be sent out by February 1, 2025.

Conference Fees

The registration fee will be €40 for non-tenured faculty members and Ph.D. candidates and €70 for tenured faculty members.

Host University

The Conference will be held fully in person at "Palazzo Du Mesnil," University of Naples "L'Orientale," Via Chiatamone 61, Naples (Italy).

Website

<https://sites.google.com/view/california-dreaming/>

Local Committee at Università degli Studi di Napoli “L’Orientale”

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**UNIVERSITÀ DI NAPOLI
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