

## Will the last one to leave California please turn ON the lights

Living in the land of denial doesn't automatically come with a passport. It does, however, require a commitment to suspend reality. Take California...please. If Ronald Reagan's America was a shining city on a hill, then California is the state that has been living in the darkest corner of its shadows. In actuality, it's a place that resembles one of its most famous residents -- Disneyland -- in that it has managed to create its own mythology and then live according to its own set of fantasy-based rules.

Rule number one is "if you can dream it you can do it." Most of us who put on our pants one leg at a time know that dreams are wish lists not to-do lists but not in the Golden State. There, reality is the enemy of *progress* and of reaching for the stars. Speaking of stars, the Academy Awards is over (thankfully) and this quintessentially California-style event has shown that the state and the industry are in the business of changing our culture not reflecting it - something particularly common to Hollywood. The California of the past, back in the 'good old days' of the 19th century, was a beacon whose light shone high above its soaring mountains -- all the way to the East Coast. Like the movie premier searchlights, it sent a signal to pioneers to "go west, young man" (thanks to Horace Greeley the editor of the New York Tribune for that one). Greeley is reported to have said, "Washington [D.C.] is not a place to live in. The rents are high, the food is bad, the dust is disgusting and the morals are deplorable. Go West, young man, go West and grow up with the country."

Greeley's message was unmistakable and remarkable because it came from a committed Republican and moral man who promoted the land of milk and honey as a place for people like himself. But that was then. California has since become the reincarnation of the biblical city of Sodom and Gomorrah where living a morally-based life is as rare as an Elvis sighting in Siberia. Since Greeley's time, the state has been locked in a perpetual state of puberty. Always the rebelling adolescent, California has lived on the edge of its own hormones, trying to create a Utopian society where "every man's a king." Thanks to Huey Long for that in his radio address in 1934 which extolled the virtues of socialism: *"I contend, my friends, that we have no difficult problem to solve in America, and that is the view of nearly everyone with whom I have discussed the matter here in Washington and elsewhere throughout the United States - that we have no very difficult problem to solve. It is not the difficulty of the problem which we have; it is the fact that the rich people of this country - and by rich people I mean the super-rich - will not allow us to solve the problems, or rather the one little problem that is afflicting this country, because in order to cure all of our woes it is necessary to scale down the big fortunes, that we may scatter the wealth to be shared by all of the people."*

Actually, while modern-day Californians may like to wear the T-shirt that says "I did it my way," the truth is that the state has an unwritten motto: "One opinion, strictly enforced, is better than many." This is especially true when that opinion originates from the 'woke' politicians and the academic intelligentsia. But California wasn't always that way. For a century or more it was a place where a man and his family could carve out a comfortable living and be either left alone to enjoy the fruits of their labors or join with others who shared a more communal view of life. Somewhere along the way, the state closed its mind and its borders to conservatism and adopted a one-party mentality, complete with a set of blinders which could be worn any time a contrarian view came to mind. Most citizens adopted the 'group think' mentality proffered by the extreme Left...as long as their personal economies weren't suffering.

Californians were like the proverbial frog that's being slowly boiled to death one degree at a time. A few more taxes here and few more regulations there became a lot more taxes here and a lot more regulations there. Many California home-owners found themselves being squeezed by rapidly-increasing property tax rates and onerous and costly environmental regulations while their communities were frantically trying to fund enormous unfunded liabilities like sky-high pensions guaranteed to municipal workers. No one wanted THEIR ox gored. So, when it became clear that no economic or ideological turnaround was in the cards, the 'great Californian exodus' began.

Families that either couldn't make ends meet or who disagreed with government, school or corporate policies that were turning their lives upside down, put their homes up for sale while they searched for a 'new California' that resembled the 'old California' that valued personal freedom and offered a healthy balance between risk and reward.

Once great cities like San Francisco lost their appeal (and tax base) as companies and people left. Once thriving metropolises like Los Angeles became the capital of 'smash and grab' and carjacking criminals while homeless encampments sprouted up placing a further strain on property values and ushered in an era of insecurity as criminals of every stripe became bolder in the wake of reduced sentences and cashless bail.

Long a place for innovation, but short-sighted when it came to sound financial investments (think the California-based company, Solyndra, which sucked up \$535 million of guaranteed 'stimulus' tax dollars in 2009 and then went broke leaving U.S. taxpayers holding the bag), the latest shoe to drop is the failure of 'Silicon Valley Bank' last week. But fear not, like major U.S. corporations and some financial institutions that have been deemed as *too big to fail*, states like California now qualify to join that august body of TBTFs. The Feds have now made 'an exception' and have propped up SVB, guaranteeing that ALL depositors will now get ALL their money back (so much for our banking regulations that only safeguarded up to \$250K per depositor).

Why? The Feds say that they fear 'contagion' (read: a run on banks) and that this action is justified and is not to be considered a 'bailout.' Californians have once again been spared the pain of facing reality and the equal application of America's laws. They are still free to continue to live comfortably in the land of eternal darkness and self-delusion. At some point, however, someone somewhere will compel the state to turn on the lights of its own consciousness...that is if its power grid and its sense of personal responsibility can stand the strain.

*Stephan Helgesen is a retired career U.S. diplomat who lived and worked in 30 countries for 25 years during the Reagan, G.H.W. Bush, Clinton, and G.W. Bush Administrations. He is the author of twelve books, six of which are on American politics and has written over 1,300 articles on politics, economics and social trends. He operates a political news story aggregator website: [www.projectpushback.com](http://www.projectpushback.com). He can be reached at: [stephan@stephanhelgesen.com](mailto:stephan@stephanhelgesen.com)*