

## Changing Sense of Place in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

Robert Benedetti, CSU Sacramento, rbenedetti@pacific.edu

Current legislation regarding the management of the Delta region mandates that decisions take into account “a sense of place.” The definition of “place” has evolved as the Delta has become home to different immigrants over more than 10,000 years. The ways in which inhabitants have defined their environment provides context by which to understand attempts to reshape the Delta to better suit their needs. Shifts in a sense of place are reflected in the cycle of reclamation and restoration, in the development of technologies to tame nature, in the rise and fall of towns, and in the tensions manifest in artistic endeavors. A timeline of Delta history reflects these shifts and demonstrates how place matters. This narrative also documents significant struggles between human habitation and the force of nature; an enduring theme in American history.

**Keywords:** Place, historical cycles, immigration, nature

**Poster Cluster Title:** Delta Narratives: The History and Culture of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

## **Managing the Garden: Agriculture, Reclamation, and Restoration in the Sacramento San Joaquin Delta**

Philip Garone, CSU Stanislaus, pgarone@csustan.edu

To increase agricultural productivity, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century a complex system of levees was constructed in the Delta. However, flooding and salinity intrusion continued to be a threat to agriculture and community life. During the 1930's and 1960's ambitious reclamation projects were undertaken by both the state and federal governments. As a consequence the Delta has been "reorganized" by pumps and aqueducts to provide water for the southwestern portion of the Central Valley and metropolitan Southern California. In the struggle to re-allocate water between growing cities and expanding farms, the unique habitats of the Delta have been threatened. Since the waterways also support boating, hunting and fishing, the recreational community has become increasingly engaged. One result has been the creation of a series of preserves to respond to dislocations caused by reclamation.

**Keywords:** Reclamation, Restoration, Habitat, Levees, Water

**Poster Cluster Title:** Delta Narratives: The History and Culture of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

## **Stitching a River Culture: Trade, Transportation and Communication in the Sacramento San Joaquin Delta**

William Swagerty, University of the Pacific, wswagerty@pacific.edu

Reuben Smith, University of the Pacific, rsmith@pacific.edu

By the mid-19th century, steam powered water transport tamed the region, creating docks and warehouses. The Delta was also restructured as bridges carrying trains and trucks increasingly replaced boats to facilitate the movement of people and goods. Factories rose and fell, processing agricultural goods and building farm machines. Key technological changes here were based on the advent of electricity and the internal combustion engine. The result was innovation, including tractors and specialty boats required to exploit the Delta environs. In fact, in the early 20th century, the Delta and its surrounding cities (San Francisco, Stockton, and Sacramento) evolved into a "silicon valley" in the service of agriculture, inventing and refining equipment later used worldwide for planting, harvesting, packing, and transporting a wide range of crops.

**Keywords:** Boats, Rail, Trucks, Agricultural Technology

**Poster Cluster Title:** Delta Narratives: The History and Culture of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta

## Literature and Visual Arts of the Delta, 1849-1975

Gregory Camfield, UC Merced, [gcamfield@ucmerced.edu](mailto:gcamfield@ucmerced.edu)

America has been envisioned in Biblical imagery as a place where God has made a good life possible but also where the weaknesses of human endeavor are prophesized. The reality of the Delta experience has provided writers and artists the opportunity to test that hypothesis. 19th and early 20th century writers showed California as an El Dorado where Anglos in particular could find riches. As one moves into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, others, like Jack London, see struggles over wealth in California, but also material for the imagination and for adventure. Mid-20th century poets like William Everson have praised the subtle natural elegance of the landscape even after reclamation. Joan Didion, however, captures the dark side of pursuing the American Dream, writing about the dependence of the Delta on monolithic financial structures outside the control of local residents. A striking contrast between viewing the Delta as a promised land and as a prophetic warning of human abuse arises from the work of John Ross Key in 1860 and of Wayne Thiebaud in 2000.

**Keywords:** Literature, Painting, American Dream, Rape of Nature

**Poster Cluster Title:** Delta Narratives: The History and Culture of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta