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Philip L. Fradkin. *The Left Coast: California on the Edge.* Photography by Alex L. Fradkin. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. Illustrations. x + 115 pp. $29.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-520-94877-8.

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Not Just Fun in the Sun: A Closer Look at California's Coast

Of the many images of California that have captured the national imagination, few are as culturally pervasive as that of the beach, evoking suntans and surfing, and a culture of relaxation and play. But how many legions of tourists have been cruelly disappointed by the foggy summer shore and by the cold bite of the Pacific in most parts of California? In *The Left Coast* author Philip L. Fradkin and photographer Alex L. Fradkin explore the divide between myth and reality along California's coast, perpetuated not only by an outsider's imagination but also by full-time residents' own obstructed self-reflection. Examining the relationship between coastal dwellers and their iconic environment, *The Left Coast* offers an engaging tour of the perils and the promise of the communities that currently live "on the edge."

Philip Fradkin has added to his terrific body of work on western environmental topics, this time working with his photographer son to explore diverse cultural and ecological coastal settings within California. *The Left Coast* leads the audience through selected themes: the wild, agricultural, residential, tourist, recreational, industrial, military, and political coasts. Each theme is represented in a stand-alone chapter by one city or area of settlement, introduced by primary source quotations that span the ages, and composed of artfully told narrative. This approach provides an effective platform for introducing perhaps unexpected stories, more nuanced and complicated than one might expect from what first appears to be a popular audience-geared photography book. The Fradkins explore iconic southern coastal communities, including Venice Beach and Marina del Rey, but also introduce less visited regions, such as the Lost Coast in the wetter and chillier northern California, and the contested wetlands space just south of Los Angeles in Orange County.

These settings, among others, are the backdrop of a larger discussion: how local identity evolves over time, largely influenced by the environment and the industry that environment supports (or struggles to support). This relationship between local culture, industry, and the environment has hardly been static, as illustrated by "the agricultural coast" of Marin County, north of San Francisco. "The regime changes were dizzying," remarks Philip Fradkin, discussing the evolution from indigenous California, through the Spanish mission system, the Mexican rancho era and finally to the American occupation (p. 20). In Marin, these population shifts reveal a stark contrast of ways in which humans have lived within the coastal landscape, ranging from a healthy population of Miwok Indians who practiced subsistence agriculture and lived within the limits of what the environment provided, to the environmentally taxing monoculture enterprise of the Shafter dairy, established in the latter half of the nineteenth century. But Fradkin does not deliver a simplistic story line of environmental devolution. Rather, he embraces the perpetually changing cultural context and its impact on the land; currently, the settlers of this region have reintroduced a diversified, and now organic, agricultural industry, and this space has become home to the federally protected Point Reyes National Seashore. And yet Fradkin does not necessarily leave us believing that reason has emerged, and the environment has been saved. Instead, we wonder what comes next.

Particularly compelling in this book is the tension between the self-promoted identity of a region and the degree to which the natural landscape can support it. California's environmental history is rife with stories of settlers remaking the environment to conform to their expectations, often with environmentally destabilizing results. While commentators on California frequently note how visitors project an iconic image on the state, here the Fradkins explore how Californians themselves perpetuate these images. The divide between reality and

self-perception is at times chilling, such as in the case of risky construction within landscapes that are seismically volatile or otherwise unstable. As Philip Fradkin writes of the landslide-prone coastal route south of San Francisco: "drivers want coastal views and ease of access. Caltrans thinks it can impose them" (p. 35). Perhaps less immediately dire, but equally ominous, are the stories where Californians perpetuate an industry without forethought to environmental health or sustainability. The recreational coast hosts a local industry that seems to deny any danger of water pollution, while promoting extraordinary patterns of consumption. In describing Los Angeles's Marina del Rey, the author notes how this 4,500-vessel marina has eschewed its potential for housing small craft and become a haven for extreme wealth and indulgence; in doing so, the marina has become less functional and "more of a state of mind, or rather the imagination" (p. 55).

In and around familiar environmental story lines of population pressure on resources and precarious settlement choices, the Fradkins also undertake narratives of restoration. Of particular note is the discussion of the "tourist coast," where the author introduces the Monterey Aquarium. Initially, the impressive aquarium appears to fit with California's "custom of doing things on a massive scale," while amping up tourist traffic and ostensibly pressure on the coastal environment of Monterey and Pacific Grove (p. 43). But the aquarium represents more than another story line of irresponsible development. It was not designed as another aquatic sea park, but rather as a center for conservation and marine biology education, and since opening in 1984, it has inspired the development of a notable marine research community. Again rather than delivering indictment or celebration, *The Left Coast* allows readers to draw their own conclusions.

Alex Fradkin's photographs complement the elder Fradkin's provocative writing by evoking the iconic and romantic, as well as the gritty and the ironic. Noting in his afterword that "the left edge of the continent has always inspired the fusion of myth and reality," he, too, is inspired by the complexity of the coast (p. 92). His images are not necessarily directly linked to the narrative, and thus add depth to the discussion rather than simply illustrate it. While his work satisfies with the inclusion of California's often spectacular scenery, many of Fradkin's shots offer commentary as well. From the fantastical wealth of Carmel to the political reality of the southern border, his subjects fill out the story of the coast. He also reminds us of the culture within these communities–tattoo artists, fishermen, military personnel–providing a human face in a contemporary setting to tie us to the history described within. The photographer admits that in this work he "had begun to develop an emotional response to this landscape rather than a strict representational view," and "let ambiguity and curiosity guide" (p. 93). Indeed, "letting ambiguity guide" is also good advice for the reader in taking in this complex region and its story.

The Fradkins' joint effort picks up where the research journey they took together in 1974 left off (the journalist with his then very young son). That trip resulted in Philip Fradkin's first book *California: The Golden Coast* (1974). While posited as a follow-up on that journey, *The Left Coast* is actually quite reminiscent of the author's other works. The organization of the book borrows from and compliments *The Seven States of California* (1997), Fradkin's tour of the diverse micro-environments of California. Further, his discussion of precarious settlement choices and potentially destructive environmental behavior is reflective of *Magnitude 8* (1999) and *Fallout* (2004), respectively. This book is not a traditional scholarly monograph and is perhaps less detailed and thorough in its analysis and citation compared to the above titles. But like these works, *The Left Coast* provides an excellent entrée into the complex environmental relationships humans have constructed in the western United States.

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