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## Introduction to Theme 1: Society, Culture and Identity

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### **THEME 1 - *Society, Culture & Identity***

The first theme remains rooted in the idea of both California's separateness and commonality; unity in diversity by connecting the stories of ourselves to the world around us.

On May 3, 1535 Hernán Cortés's men landed on California's shores and called the place 'Santa Cruz'. As early as 1539 the voyage of Francisco de Ulloa referred to this place as the "Isola of California" and in 1541 Friar de Meno gave evidence back in Spain of an "isla de California". Later, the first map of California as an island appeared in 1622 and, in rapid succession, a number of maps between 1624 and 1625 all asserted California's island status. Approximately fifty years later in 1681 Jesuit Father Eusebio Kino was sent to Baja and founded the first mission at Loreto in 1697.

Perhaps it is indicative that the present-day Santa Cruz is nowhere near that original landing site as it also marked the beginning of California's 'identity crisis' that the mysteries around not only its name, but its very shape imply. Theories and sources for the name of the state vary, but the idea that California was remote and exotic was not in question and the possibility it might be an island only made it more plausible to call down centuries of voyagers' tales. Thus, almost from the outset, this home to Amazons that was understood to be at "the right hand of the India...very near to the region of the Terrestrial Paradise, which was populated by black women...There ruled on that island of California, a queen great of body, very beautiful...more than any other who had ruled that kingdom before her...Queen Calafia" (Polk, 125) was called into being.

Given that we begin with the theme of identity, the persistence and relevance of this particular story is worthy of some note. The origins of the Amazon story are obscure and it is unknown if there is any basis in fact for a race of women living without men (sometimes portrayed as white and at other times as black – sometimes breeding with men only to kill them and often taming wild beasts including griffins) but they are among the oldest mythological characters in the global pantheon.

In Greek literature, they “took after their mother Harmonia, in grace and beauty and after their father, Ares, in warlike disposition” while a similar story is also found in oriental mythology where “accounts of marvels such as giant trees, lakes of tar and burning mountains” clearly invite comparisons with California. More interesting still, is Polk’s suggestion that they might be “two ends of the same myth, girdling the earth...from the Orient to the Mediterranean, or vice versa...carried in opposite directions to the farthest reaches east and west, to meet again in the place we now call California” (Polk, 8).

Such stories of the peoples of the place could also be linked, again according to Polk, through the term Calif which is a Spanish spelling for a sovereign Muslim power and perhaps making Calafia a female Muslim leader. Thus, California’s identity connects to the Muslim world, the Middle East and Africa as well as Rome, Greece and medieval Europe more broadly. The state was ‘global’ even before more and more peoples of the world arrived.

The Associate Editors of this theme bring a breadth and depth to ideas and questions of identity. They demonstrate the possibilities for enquiry in this area by literally starting with the same story (and yet another origin story for the state of California) that links statehood to Athena and the idea that California sprang into being not so much as a frontier, but a fully formed entity and going concern of ranchers, miners and soon thereafter cities and railroads. As Cary McWilliams puts it, for California “the lights went on all at once” (*California: The Great Exception*, 1976). Kerri Malloy from San Jose and Dana Belu from Dominguez Hills ask about the effects that arrival had on our Society, Culture and Identity and invite others to do the same.

Themes could include, but are not limited to:

- Social movements originating in or influencing California society and culture that challenge or support institutions, structure, or power;
- Particular effects and aspects of California’s past on how it engages with the international community;
- Identities formed and influenced by a multicultural California;

- California as an economic power and its impact on global societies and cultures in the contextualized in the networks of economy and trade and its impact on the environment;
- Domestic and international perspectives of California as a place and ideal/multicultural utopia (medical, technological, political);
- Influence on the formation of individual and group identities of the entertainment, technology, and progressive movements of California;
- Future challenges that the state will face and proposed solutions.
- Effects of California as a driver of scientific essentials and sustainable environments on society, culture, and identity regionally, nationally, and internationally.