

MAN OF
TOMORROW

The Relentless Life of Jerry Brown

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Little, Brown and Company
New York Boston London

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Two Californias

The San Francisco of Jerry Brown's childhood was normal. Sort of. Few cities have defined themselves more enthusiastically around change—migration, disaster, boom and bust, sleaze and glamour—and the war years were typical in a city where tumult was the norm. On the day of Edmund G. Brown Jr.'s birth, April 7, 1938, the local papers carried news of strikers commandeering a sugar plant, Hitler gaining influence in Germany and strengthening his hold on Austria, and a local nurse stabbing a woman—a crime blamed on the nurse's use of “mad weed.”¹

Brown was born in a city that had been turned into a battlefield in a country on the cusp of war. In 1934, a general strike, the largest in American history, brought labor and law enforcement into fierce San Francisco combat after a confrontation that left two dead and scores wounded.² The state called in troops to force open docks; labor mounted barricades and tossed bombs to shut them down. Struggling to recover and with an eye toward the grand, city leaders set out to hold an international exposition and plunged into the task of building a man-made island in the middle of San Francisco Bay. Its name: Treasure Island. The Golden Gate International Exposition opened on that whimsical piece of landfill in February of 1939, but sputtered, closed, then reopened in 1940, when exhibits such as *Sally Rand's Nude Ranch*, featuring half-naked women playing sports, did the trick.³

It was a city of grand gestures and discreet enclaves. Lofty homes in Pacific Heights peered down through the fog into the military base at the Presidio—and the Golden Gate beyond. The Tenderloin teemed with vagrants, their desperation leaking into the nearby Financial District, still reeling from the collapse of the stock market and its slow recovery. City Lights bookstore attracted the early glimmerings of the beatniks, soon to take root in North Beach beneath the city’s tribute to its firefighters, Coit Tower. Newly constructed bridges linked San Francisco to Marin County (via the Golden Gate Bridge) and to Oakland (via the Bay Bridge). As the 1940s opened, the Bay Area was bustling and busy, worried about war but removed from the troubles of Europe and Asia.

That changed on December 7, 1941. Bombs fell on Hawaii, and Americans recoiled at the duplicity of Japan’s surprise attack. Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared war against Japan the following day. Germany followed by declaring war on the United States. The America First Committee, the leading isolationist group of the period, folded its opposition and retreated into what would prove a protracted state of remission. States of emergency were declared in most American cities. Schools closed along the West Coast. Military recruiting limits were lifted, and recruitment centers stayed open twenty-four hours a day to keep pace with enlistments. The Customs Service blocked departures of all vessels attempting to leave the United States. Authorities called for the distribution of one million gas masks, then asked for more.⁴

Racial tensions moved up the dial. “Jap town is under strict surveillance,” San Francisco police announced.⁵ In Washington, the Justice Department announced that it had “seized” 2,303 “enemy aliens,” including 1,291 Japanese.⁶ In Tokyo, Japan’s Home Ministry announced that it had taken 1,270 American and British nationals into custody.⁷ In defiance of those actions, some sounded a call for unity. “We are fighting,” the *Oakland Tribune* declared in a front-page editorial. “We must now put to one side all of the petty differences among us. We must mobilize every last resource.”⁸ Pleas for unit, and common sense would soon become vanishingly rare.

As America plunged into war—two wars, really, on opposite sides of the planet—San Francisco became the operations center of the Pacific

theater and, along with San Diego, emerged as one of two major disembarkation points for sailors, soldiers, marines, and airmen headed into combat against Japan. The Bay Area was anchored by the army's Presidio but also included major air corps installations in Marin County and San Francisco. Fort Mason bordered the Presidio, and the East Bay included major facilities in Oakland and to the north, where Mare Island trained sailors and pumped out vessels. One million soldiers were processed through Camp Stoneman, a little-known base northeast of San Francisco, where as many as thirty thousand men lived at any given time.⁹

The navy ruled Southern California, though it had a major presence in the north as well. Treasure Island, in fact, served as the navy's western command. To the south, the hastily built Camp Pendleton, with its main entrance at Oceanside, straddled an enormous stretch of the Pacific coast between Orange and San Diego Counties.¹⁰ A few miles north, Marine Corps Air Station El Toro shuttled troops and equipment, while to the south, the San Diego harbor hummed with America's growing fleet of carriers, battleships, destroyers and submarines.

California would never be known for its calm, and war only exacerbated the state's tendency to flail and blame. More than 110,000 Japanese and Japanese American men and women lived along the West Coast of the United States, and though two-thirds were American citizens—many having never even seen Japan—their loyalty came into question. No less a champion of fairness than California attorney general Earl Warren surveyed Japanese landholdings and imagined suspicious patterns—farms near rail yards and airports and other sensitive installations. Maps prepared by Warren's office became some of the most convincing, and absurdist, evidence of sinister intent. "Such a distribution of the Japanese population appears to manifest something more than a coincidence," Warren testified before the US House of Representatives' Tolan Committee on February 21, 1942.¹¹ Never mind that Japanese people owned those parcels because they were cheap and because the owners were prevented by racial discrimination from acquiring more desirable property: in the dim light of fear, Warren saw subversion. It was not his best moment.

Nor was he alone. The removal of the Japanese from the West Coast was ordered by FDR in February of 1942 and upheld by the United States Supreme Court twice. Their absence left a hole in the life of the region, a vacuum temporarily filled by the arrival of thousands of young men, most of them volunteers, clamoring to fight the Japanese forces in the Pacific while dreading it as well. Those men swarmed into San Francisco, swelling the city's bars and brothels, both of which it boasted in abundance: indeed, this migration was in some ways reminiscent of California's first, when gold miners, almost all of them men, stopped over in San Francisco for a last taste of women and booze before heading to the Sierras. Then it was for fortune, later for country, but 1940s San Francisco would have been familiar to a forty-niner.

It was there that a young family was setting out on a life that would shape California as abruptly as any earthquake, as profoundly as any migration. Pat and Bernice Brown were compatible but different—he a gregarious, Catholic, ambitious, and outgoing young man, she a more intellectual, Protestant, and retiring young woman. They met in high school and, once their quite different educations were complete, were together the rest of their lives.

Born in San Francisco in 1905, Pat hawked Liberty Bonds in World War I and was so spirited that his friends took to calling him Pat, short for Patrick Henry. The name stuck, and when he took to politics, he recognized the political value of it in San Francisco, where it didn't hurt to be thought of as Irish. In fact, his ancestors were mostly German. The family progenitor, August Schuckman, a German farmer and businessman, had arrived in California with his wife, Augusta, in 1863, in the fading years of the gold rush. They settled northwest of Sacramento, establishing a ranch in Colusa County, tucked into unnamed foothills at a modest crossroads—one leading to San Francisco, the other to the dwindling gold fields. They built a home and boardinghouse, and they started a family.

Bernice Layne was the daughter of an honest cop and a quietly Episcopalian mom. She was born in San Francisco in 1908, when the city was still recovering from the ruin of its 1906 earthquake and fire, and she was raised there with her four brothers and sisters. Bernice

was a solid student, accomplished in math and intoxicated by reading. She plowed through her young studies and entered Lowell High School early, before age twelve. The following year, Pat, a few years older but still at Lowell as well, asked her out. Her parents would not allow her to go. Pat persisted.¹²

Thus began the pattern of their lives—Pat dogged, eager, and open-faced; Bernice angular, incisive, and quietly determined.

After high school, Pat went to work—first at his father’s poker club and later as an apprentice to a local lawyer. He skipped college and moved directly to San Francisco Law School. Bernice, true to her form, crossed the bay and attended the University of California, Berkeley. Pat and Bernice courted across the bay, no small feat in the days before the Bay Bridge. Still running ahead of her age, Bernice graduated in 1928, not yet twenty, and took a job as a schoolteacher. One condition of her employment was that she remain single. She defied it.

Bernice and Pat eloped to Reno, Nevada, and were married there on October 30, 1930. She was twenty-one. He was twenty-five.¹³ They complemented each other. He loved people and crowds and parties; she preferred family and travel and quiet. But he appreciated her calm, and she learned to love more garrulous company. Bernice even came to enjoy politics. Still, they retained their essentials: when the two took up golf, Pat began playing immediately with friends. Bernice took lessons for eighteen months before playing with anyone else. Once she did, she regularly beat her husband.¹⁴

Pat and Bernice eventually would live in Sacramento and Los Angeles, but their early years were set in San Francisco. They rented an apartment on Fillmore Street, then moved to Chestnut Street, both in the Marina, then to the Twin Peaks neighborhood, and then to the corner of 17th Street and Shrader Street—on the edge of Haight-Ashbury, which was then far different from what it would become. They settled there with their two daughters, Barbara, born in 1931, and Cynthia, born two years later. Bernice was pregnant with their third child, and the Shrader Street home had an extra bedroom.¹⁵ Jerry was born in April of 1938, and a few years later, the family—now complete with the youngest, Kathleen—moved one more time, to 460 Magellan Avenue,

in a neighborhood known as Forest Hill, where the Browns stayed for the rest of Jerry's youth.

Pat Brown was excited by politics early and for good reason. His combination of intelligence, engagement, and genuine compassion made him a natural for public service—and, specifically, for elected office. Many politicians resent campaigning—the showmanship, the grubbing for money, the pleading for attention. Indeed, although those aspects of politics would later irritate Jerry, once he sidestepped into his father's business, the demands of vote getting did not bother him. He loved the rub and hustle.

Pat Brown started his political life as a Republican and made his first stab at elected office at the age of twenty-three, when he ran for the California state assembly. He got walloped, but defeat did not deter him. After switching his party affiliation in 1935, he supported Democrat Culbert Olson for governor only to be disappointed by not landing a job in the administration. He then took aim at San Francisco's district attorney, Matthew Brady, a veteran with a reputation for losing cases and absconding with money. Brown lost again, but this time he made an impression on the electorate. In 1943, Pat Brown was elected district attorney for San Francisco. His son, Jerry, was five years old.

Given their common careers, Jerry would most often be compared to his father, but he was more his mother's son. They looked alike, for one thing. Jerry inherited his mother's profile and her incisive eyes. She read for pleasure, unlike her husband, who devoured newspapers and reports but was never much drawn to books. There, too, Jerry followed after his mom. Pat was so extravagantly extroverted that it would be difficult for anyone to resemble him there: Jerry was less shy than some assumed, but he found greater succor in close company, again resembling his mother.

Finally, and perhaps most relevant to Jerry's career, Bernice Brown was studiously frugal, a coupon clipper from the earliest days of her marriage into her husband's governorship and beyond. Pat never got the hang of counting pennies, but Jerry did. Once grown, he would elevate government parsimony to a near-moral command, and his devotion to

balanced budgets and limited government would set him apart from his Democratic colleagues and rivals for most of the rest of his life. He had his mother's example, reinforced by later vows of poverty and a general inclination toward cheapness, to thank for that.

At West Portal Elementary School, the kindergarten class assignment one day in November was to draw. Jerry, not destined for a career in art, sketched a colorful but uninspired clown. To his surprise, the teacher gathered all her students' work into a book and presented it to Pat Brown, the newly elected district attorney, to congratulate him on his victory. Naturally, the teacher put Jerry Brown's work on the cover: Jerry sensed the favoritism—he knew his picture was not the best and did not deserve the special attention it received—and he was mortified, the first of many instances when he drew extra, sometimes unwanted, praise for being his father's son.

Bernice Brown ran the family home. She cooked, often with assistance from her daughters. When things broke—a hinge twisted or a light burned out—her brother, who lived down the street, came to lend a hand. Pat Brown, at least in the memory of his children, did not change a lightbulb or boil a pail of water. He responded with a flash to the problems of his constituents, but he did not help around the house.¹⁶

The family often skipped breakfast—Bernice liked to sleep in—but gathered for dinner.¹⁷ They would wait for Pat to return home from work and then would sit down together. There were “big, volatile conversations,” Kathleen Brown recalled. “You were expected to have a position and defend it.” Not everyone enjoyed it. The oldest, Barbara, was entering high school and was enchanted by literature and learning; the dinner table conversation didn't have much place for Chaucer. Her aversion to politics started early.¹⁸

As young Jerry grew older, he and his father often clashed, as fathers and sons will, especially when both are as strong-willed as Edmund Brown senior and junior. The two would remember these conversations differently over time. To Pat, they were exciting and provocative. Jerry sometimes regarded them as oppressive, forcing him under rather propelling him upward.

Jerry veered from his father's approach to debate. Pat stirred the pot,

urging his children to join in boisterous disputes. Jerry staked out more cerebral ground. Pat was in the world; Jerry somehow beyond it. Even their Catholicism was different. Pat was culturally Catholic but hardly devout. It was not until Barbara was seven years old that her mother and father were married in the church. Until then, they were bound by the civil ceremony of their elopement, without any religious blessing.¹⁹ But Jerry, whose study with the Jesuits began in high school, absorbed both the order's intellectual and spiritual commands, energized by its love of learning and drawn to the exploration of the infinite and the mysterious.

If Pat and Jerry had their differences, they had their bonds as well. One was Pat's enthusiasm for the outdoors, particularly California's vast and varied landscape. Family vacations were almost always in California and usually outdoors—the valleys and peaks of Yosemite National Park, the gurgling waters of the Russian River, beaches and deserts, arroyos and redwood groves. Some of Jerry's earliest memories are of camping in Yosemite, of sloshing through streams and gathering in campgrounds, of cold baths and bracing morning air. Many years later, he would discover an intellectual and spiritual kinship with the environment, and he would connect with it on that level. It is worth noting, though, that his earliest appreciations of it were more primal and offered a rare opportunity for him to connect with his father entirely outside the distracting business of politics.

Meanwhile, there was a war to win. California did its part, and the Brown family adjusted its patterns, meals, and travels to suit an all-consuming conflict. Little Jerry followed the war in the newspapers and was left with images and fleeting memories. MacArthur evacuated Manila, and that stuck because it sounded like *vanilla*. Ration stamps doled out meat and butter and gasoline. When the family traveled to Palm Springs for a vacation, the train passed through orchards draped in camouflage.²⁰

California's other major center, Los Angeles, enjoyed a far different history and midcentury status. Conservative cousin to San Francisco's counterculture, Los Angeles was unlike its northern "relative" in other

ways as well. San Francisco was compact, stuffed onto the tip of a peninsula, its city and county consolidated into a single government. Los Angeles was vast, “seventy-two suburbs in search of a city,”²¹ more than four hundred square miles, straddling a small mountain range and stretching from barrio to beach.

Los Angeles created itself as not-San Francisco. The city to the north was home to dockworkers and labor, strikes and, later, beatniks, and, even later, hippies. Los Angeles was an “open” city—open to businessmen, that is. Los Angeles cultivated its reputation for hostility to labor and did so under the enthusiastic leadership of its puckish and parochial newspaper, the *Los Angeles Times*. Under a succession of owners—the founder, General Harrison Gray Otis, followed by his son-in-law Harry Chandler and grandson Norman Chandler—the *Times* of the mid-1900s dedicated itself to two things: the expansion of Los Angeles and the cabining of organized labor. It was largely successful at both, though not without cost.

Culturally and physically, Los Angeles was not-San Francisco as well. San Francisco came to life in the gold rush, which affected every aspect of its existence. Its immigrants were needed to build rails, to make and maintain camps. So it attracted miners and campers—Chinese, especially, and a large number of Chileans. As the gold petered out, many of those migrants went home, but others stayed, settling into familiar fields. Chinese ran laundries and restaurants and eventually built the transcontinental railroad. Japanese entered landscaping and truck farming. Chileans scattered in search of other ores. All centered in San Francisco, they gave northern California its early experience of multiculturalism.

Southern California, meanwhile, grew up in farming, ranching, harvesting—and, later, munitions and defense. At first, that meant seasonal work—harvesting crops, driving cattle—and those who came to do it largely arrived from Mexico, often returning at the end of a season, though sometimes settling down. Despite state laws prohibiting Japanese from owning land, Japanese immigrants and their children managed to acquire parcels, often as leases. As California historian Kevin Starr notes in his seminal history of the period, by 1940, Japanese farmers

“maintained a 50 to 90 percent position in such crops as celery, peppers, strawberries, cucumbers, artichokes, cauliflower, spinach, and tomatoes.” The total value of Japanese agricultural land in California in 1940 was approximately \$65.8 million.²²

Finally, there was the look and feel of the two cities. San Francisco was tall, compact, and grand. The Golden Gate Bridge, its signature monument, was built more for aesthetics than transportation (there weren't many people living in Marin County or other areas north of the city when it was complete). Los Angeles, meanwhile, was sprawling and residential. Its great works of architecture were homes, while its center was spongy and uninviting. Sprawl suited a city whose leaders were landowners and developers, so Los Angeles reached over the Hollywood Hills into the San Fernando Valley. It was a land of suburbs and all that flowed from that.

Those were the poles of California politics in Jerry Brown's youth—the politics of the state he would come to master and that would coalesce again during the years of his governorships and the long gap between them. Successful politicians found a way to unify the state's disparate instincts—liberal San Franciscans could exist under the same tent as urban Angelenos, mustering enough votes to overcome conservative Orange County, moderate San Diego, and the state's Republican interior. Or sometimes that Center-Right coalition would dominate: San Diego, Orange County, and suburban Los Angeles would band together to block Northern California liberals and Los Angeles minorities, with the Central Coast splitting its vote. Through the early twentieth century, as California grew, its politics oscillated as those coalitions formed and reformed.

For the most part, however, until 1934, California's center of gravity resided largely within the Republican Party. Individual districts and regions moved back and forth between columns, but the state as a whole hewed to the right or center-right. That was aided by the way California, and most of the rest of the country, parceled out voting power. In California, the state assembly and governorship wobbled back and forth, but the districting system of the day—one state senator per county—ensured

that rural areas had influence in excess of their populations (much the same way as small states have outsize authority in the US Senate and Electoral College). In California, rural, mostly Republican legislators controlled the state senate, a system that allowed Butte County or Imperial County, for example, to have the same number of votes as Los Angeles or San Francisco. That system would persevere until 1964, when the United States Supreme Court, in *Reynolds v. Sims*, struck it down as a violation of the principle of one man, one vote. “Legislators are elected by voters, not farms or cities or economic interests,” the chief justice, writing for the majority, memorably asserted. The chief justice who wrote that decision was Earl Warren.²³

In statewide elections, San Francisco offered up liberals, but the *Los Angeles Times* hewed a strict line in Southern California, and its free-market conservatism helped elect a series of moderate to conservative Republican governors, in varying degrees controlled by the state’s business elites.

The Depression rattled that. Dispossessed and disheartened, California’s poor rallied in 1934 around a campaign so unlikely and a candidate so outlandish that it is difficult to comprehend in retrospect. Upton Sinclair—novelist, vegetarian, Socialist, anti-Semite, kook—had run unsuccessfully for governor before on the Socialist Party ticket. Now he reemerged as a Democrat and tapped the anxieties of a careening state. “End poverty in California” was his slogan—EPIC, as it became known. Sinclair presented himself as a man for his time.

Gaunt, devoted, and driven, Sinclair campaigned for governor but set out to change the world—a dual sense of purpose that some of his successors, including Jerry Brown, would emulate. “We plan a new cooperative system for the unemployed. Whether it will be permanent depends upon whether I am right in my belief about the permanent nature of the depression,” he wrote, full of vigor.²⁴ At first dismissed, Sinclair grabbed the cognoscenti by their throats when he secured the Democratic gubernatorial nomination, in August of 1934. He polled 436,220 votes, 51.6 percent of the Democratic ballots cast in the primary, and faced off against a colorless incumbent, Frank Merriam, who had only recently ascended to the office upon the death of his

predecessor.²⁵ For the guardians of order, certainly Republican order, the devil was at the door.

The *Los Angeles Times* framed the debate in terms its readers expected. Merriam, it said as its editors sifted through the devastating election results, “represents sound, liberal, broad and thoroughly proven leadership.” Sinclair, by contrast, “is a visionary, a consorter with radicals, a theorist. Whether deluded by his own doctrines and schemes, he has succeeded in deluding thousands of persons into giving him their support and confidence.”²⁶ In the view of the *Times*, the recently converted Socialist was “a political opportunist” to boot.

The powers of California gathered against Sinclair that fall. Hollywood, the *Times*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the state Republican Party, big business, big agriculture, and even a young Earl Warren mounted a campaign to defeat Sinclair and wipe his influence from politics. Daily newsreels included one infamous spot featuring fake vagrants flocking to California to sign up for Sinclair’s promised benefits. “They keep coming,” the narrator intoned, a theme that would return to California under another guise some sixty years later, proof that demonizing immigrants was neither new nor novel but rather time-tested and effective. By the fall of 1934, voters may not have been persuaded to think much of Merriam, but they were at least terrified of Sinclair. That was enough. A third-party candidate, Raymond L. Haight, ran on the Progressive Party ticket and carried nearly 13 percent of the vote, enough to deny Merriam a majority but not the governorship and enough to keep Sinclair far away from the levers of power. Merriam’s 1.1 million votes handily topped Sinclair’s 879,537. The establishment held.

But not for long. Four years later, Merriam had lived down to his potential, and the Depression remained in control of California. Sinclair himself was no longer viable as a candidate, but one of those drawn to the EPIC campaign picked up where his mentor had left off. Culbert Olson, born and raised as a Mormon in Utah before migrating to California, was a dedicated pacifist and devoted atheist. Upon winning the November election, the distinguished, nattily dressed Democrat became the first representative of his party in forty-four years to seize the California governorship, which he assumed even as Pasadena’s annual

Rose Parade opened under gray skies four hundred miles to the south. When Olson took the oath of office as California's governor, in 1939, he raised his right hand and put his left hand in his pocket rather than atop a Bible, refusing to swear to God. Warned that the oath might not be valid without a Bible, Olson took a second oath a few days later, this time smiling impishly and crossing the fingers of his right hand.²⁷

For Olson, the joys of governing were short-lived. In his first week on the job, he presided over the pardon and release of Tom Mooney, a labor activist and political prisoner, an icon of California's Left. Just hours later, at the state fairgrounds to attend a barbecue in celebration of Mooney's release, Olson began to speak, faltered, and fell into the arms of his son. A statement by the governor's office explained that he was rushed to Sutter Hospital, where he was recovering from "nervous exhaustion." Olson would be bedridden for weeks, recovering just in time for his wife to fall ill and die. His administration never again found its footing, and, with the outbreak of war on December 7, 1941, his pacificism would seem naively out of place.

Four years after Olson's triumphant swearing-in and dramatic pardon, he would turn the office back to the Republicans. This time, however, it would take on a different cast.

Earl Warren began the study of law in awe of the man who would become California's first great governor. Then a young prosecutor, Hiram Johnson took over a corruption case against mob boss Abe Ruef when a dismissed juror, furious at what he perceived as the insult of not being seated, arrived in court with a loaded pistol and shot Johnson's senior colleague. The lawyer, amazingly, survived, but Johnson was elevated to first chair and took on the senior prosecutor's duties. The electrifying case launched Johnson on his political career—he would be elected the first progressive Republican governor of California, in 1910. Warren, elected in 1942, could be said to be the second.

As it was with Johnson, Warren's progressivism was both reformist and sometimes blindered. Warren joined with the vast majority of Californians in enthusiastically—and tragically—supporting the internment of Japanese and Japanese Americans during World War II, a position for which he never entirely or adequately apologized. It was, he often

reflected, a sad but understandable expression of wartime necessity. Indeed, *necessity* was a watchword for Warren and the progressives, whose pragmatism could be limiting—confining adherents to problem solving rather than indulging grand imagination—but also liberating from partisan bonds. Warren did not accept the view of many of his fellow Republicans that government was suspect and required containment. On the contrary, Warren believed that government should ease the burdens of the governed but that it should do so practically, within sensible limits.

Warren assumed the governorship in 1943 and held it longer than any other person until Jerry Brown surpassed him during his return to the governorship in the twenty-first century. Warren's tenure was significant in many respects: he expanded the state's highway system (with a model that Dwight Eisenhower copied for his interstate highway act), added to its university system, and presided over extraordinary growth, including the reintegration of Japanese Americans after the war. He quietly advanced the desegregation of its schools and pursued, though unsuccessfully, universal health insurance for Californians. Perhaps his most lasting contribution, however, was to reorient the politics of what soon became the nation's largest state. Gone, at least for a time, were the teeth-gnashing gyrations between voracious conservatives such as Merriam and ethereal liberals such as Olson. In their place arrived Warren's particular brand of progressive Republicanism, an alternative to partisanship that countered ideology with common sense and a fusion of activist government and fiscal restraint that would skip a generation with the Browns—Pat was a more conventional Democrat and loved to spend, but Jerry would come to embrace much of Warren's worldview.

In practice, that helped to create a Center-Left consensus in California, open to taxes so long as they produced discernible public benefits and averse to deficits and government handouts. After his disastrous support of the internment, Warren—and, with him, the state—would quietly overcome progressivism's racist history and appeal to a grander sense of inclusion and equity (in Warren's case, some of his growth would only become visible during his consequential tenure as chief justice of the United States). In the meantime, California's parties bent

around the force of his popularity. In 1950, seeking his third term—something no predecessor had ever achieved—Warren defeated FDR’s son Jimmy Roosevelt by more than one million votes. Big as the victory was, it surprised no one, given the results from his reelection in 1946. In that campaign, Warren took advantage of his stature and the state’s Progressive-era election rules, filing for both the Republican and Democratic nominations. He won both. No governor before or since has ever registered such a triumph.

Warren unsuccessfully sought the presidency in 1952 but left the campaign on good terms with Eisenhower, who promised Warren the “first vacancy” on the Supreme Court.²⁸ Following the sudden death of chief justice Fred Vinson, in 1953, Eisenhower produced, after a brief hesitation, the promised nomination, and Warren accepted. He delivered his farewell address to California on October 2, 1953. He donned the robes as chief justice three days later, on October 5. The transition was so abrupt—he would not be confirmed by the Senate until March 1, 1954—that Warren had to borrow a robe for the occasion. As he strode to the bench to take the oath of office, he tripped and nearly fell.

As the 1950s closed, California rested comfortably in the grasp of its leading Republicans—Governor Goodwin “Goody” Knight, Senator William Knowland, and Senator Thomas Kuchel—all of whom owed their jobs to Warren, whose politics they reflected. California was hardly tranquil. Any place as big and diverse as California would always have crises. But the state’s politics seemed to have settled into equilibrium. Modeled on Warren’s leadership and populated by his appointees and allies, Republicans held sway but did so by cooling partisanship and emphasizing progress. True, for many that was an act, but it worked. The 1958 elections seemed an opportunity to solidify and extend that reign.