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Voices of Hope and Trepidation: USF scholars tackle critical issues concerning the future of the San Francisco Bay Area

Saera Khan and Christine Yeh

One might mistakenly assume that Sociologist Manuel Pastor's book [*State of Resistance: What California's Dizzying Descent and Remarkable Resurgence Mean for America's Future*](#) was written in direct response to the Trump presidency and its threat to our country and the world's well-being. As Pastor explains, however, resistance should not be against one person or focused on one specific conflict. Standing in solidarity with everyone's struggle is a value that creates a vision for what the United States can be moving forward. The story of California's fall and rise offers instructive lessons on how to create a progressive state infrastructure rooted in local movements and alliances between public and private sectors, both of which are foundations in creating an inclusive social compact that can overcome our current national demographic anxiety, economic uncertainty, and profiteering from polarization. These aforementioned struggles have already been experienced by Californians, and Pastor meticulously charts the mis-steps and successes and points to where challenges remain during our comeback. From its economic policies, scientific and technological advancements, commitment to environmentalism and diversity, union and activist movements, California represents what is possible for America but much work needs to be done to remain sustainable and equitable from multiple perspectives.

Over the last twenty years, the San Francisco Bay Area's rapid development in particular has led to its economy now growing at a rate twice as fast as our nation's. However, housing shortages, widening income inequality, health disparities, and unequal access to education stand as reminders that not everyone has benefited from these successes. Using Pastor's book as inspiration, [the Center for Research, Artistic, and Scholarly Excellence at the University of San Francisco](#) created this special issue, "Bright Future or Cautionary Tale? How the Bay Area Shapes the Future of the U.S." Eighteen university scholars representing different academic fields provide their expertise in critical issues to underscore how the Bay Area's stories of success and troubling challenges may forecast what our country could and would become. Although many of us share Pastor's optimism, we also focus on the experiences of marginalized communities which allows us to envision a version of success that is inclusive.

Specifically, several authors describe groundbreaking approaches and findings that highlight how the Bay Area may indeed help shape the future for the U.S. For example, Bay Area educators and politicians lead the way in transforming history textbooks to be inclusive of the LGBTQ experience nationwide, and another group of education activists and politicians advocate for ethnic studies to be a graduation requirement for high school. In terms of higher education, City College of San Francisco offers a free education program that may serve as a model to address educational inequities across the country. The incredible cultural and economic diversity also positions the Bay Area to be a leader in important socio-political efforts such as the multiracial movement, immigration activism and policies, transforming the

money bail system to be more equitable for low income communities of Color, and free mental healthcare in the prison system.

The resistance efforts of the Bay Area extend to its well-known initiatives in supporting the environment, agriculture, sustainability, and concerns with global warming. California faces a unique climate crisis associated with the growing numbers of wildfires and the impact on air quality and vulnerable communities. California is the largest agricultural producer and exporter in the U.S. and has been at the forefront of developing organic agricultural methods, which affects ecology on a less visible level. San Francisco has also enacted numerous policies to achieve carbon neutrality though much work still needs to be done to lower greenhouse gas emissions.

Issues associated with climate change are quite complex and interface with urban development and affordable housing. Skyrocketing housing costs, congested commutes, and other unanticipated challenges, impacting many marginalized groups, such as the growing yet underserved aging community. High rents have closed many of the small, independent, art galleries in San Francisco which has led to a new model for art commerce that may change how we envision collaborations with nonprofits and traditional businesses in the art community.

Advancements in technology and the rapid development in data science have enhanced the Bay Area's image as a center of innovation and creativity. We would have imagined that the advanced thinking emergent from the tech boom would have translated into novel trends in workplace equity, but long-standing issues in gender discrimination are ever present—especially in entrepreneurship in Silicon Valley and as evidenced by the number of workplace gender discrimination complaints. Gender inequity is not specific to the tech industry and extends to higher education, where university presidents are still predominantly male.

Does the Bay Area reflect a bright future or a cautionary tale? Ayers poetically and beautifully contemplates the shifts in cultural identity that the Bay Area has undergone and worries about its unknown future "While the Bay Area may still carry a reputation as cutting edge, creative, and innovative, I worry that the raggedy, anarchic, artistic soul of it has been eviscerated and in its place is a kind of tech-driven libertarianism. The self-confident "bro" culture of Silicon Valley, the notion that there is an engineering fix for everything and that these dudes at their computer stations can invent it, has a smothering impact on the culture and its possibilities."

There is no doubt that the Bay Area is surely a nexus for change—but a change towards what?