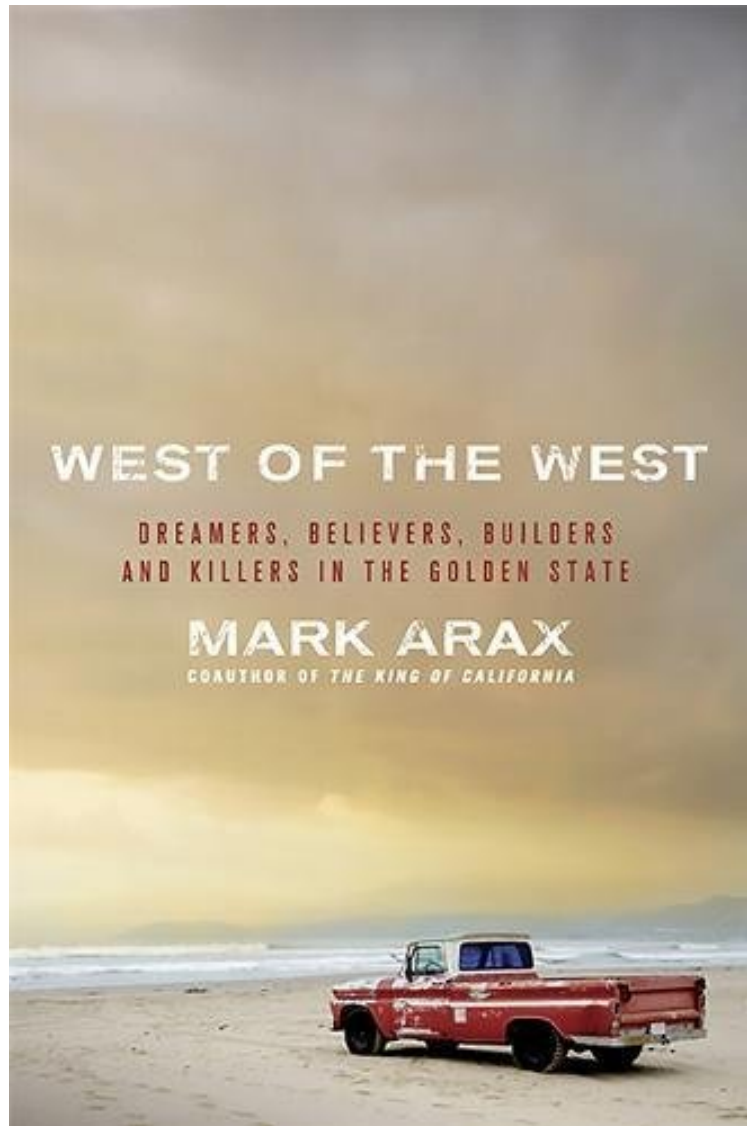


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West of the West: Dreamers, Believers, Builders, and Killers in the Golden State

Mark Arax

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Mark Arax : West of the West: Dreamers, Believers, Builders, and Killers in the Golden State before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised West of the West: Dreamers, Believers, Builders, and Killers in the Golden State:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. The New California Exposed For American Readers By Donald A. Collins
Mark Arax, for 25 years a reporter for the LA Times, has long proven his willingness to get all the facts necessary to tell a full balanced story, even to the extent of causing his own divorce, that his earlier books, *In My Father's Name* and *The King of California*, apparently triggered. In traveling for 4 years across this vast and complex state his collection of observations, anecdotes, and situations leaves one astonished at what the Golden State has recently become as rampant immigration from everywhere has turned it into an unmanageable polyglot of races, religions, and rationales, much of which he weaves into a fascinating story, like John Steinbeck's *Travels with Charley*, did earlier for the USA. From an immigrant Armenian family himself, Arax's writing about the illegal immigration issue, a currently hot political potato, burst with keen insight, to wit, "By underwriting the relocation of Mexico's most desperate, we are giving a giant handout to farmers, meat packers, home builders, hotel chains and big box retail outlets. Taxpayers are picking up the front end costs of cheap labor the same way we are subsidizing cotton and oil and home mortgages." And in the final part, Arax brings his personal life under a completely honest microscope, as he doggedly and manically seeks to find his father's killers and their motivation. If you haven't been to California lately beyond the usual big city sites of San Francisco and LA and you want a tour that will give you the most up to date story, here is your book.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A kind of modern *Tales of California*-Great Book!
By Customer I loved this book and have bought several copies for friends. Mark Arax writes with a smooth and flowing style designed to hold the reader's interest while providing an accurate accounting of true events of the day including the murder of the author's own father. I lived in the central San Joaquin Valley for many years and had a personal interest in his subject matter. However, one does not have to have lived there to appreciate the stories woven by this outstanding author. In my opinion it is a book well worth reading.
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. great book of stories
By Charles Barnard great book of stories. If you want to see the other side of California behind the scenes read this book. One of my favorites, Mark Arax writes books that you do not want to put down.

Teddy Roosevelt once exclaimed, When I am in California, I am not in the West. I am west of the West, and in this book, Mark Arax spends four years travelling up and down the Golden State to explore its singular place in the world. This is California beyond the clichés. This is California as only a native son, deep in the dust, could draw it. Compelling, lyrical, and ominous, his new collection finds a different drama rising out of each confounding landscape. *The Summer of the Death of Hilario Guzman* has been praised as a stunningly intimate portrait of one immigrant family from Oaxaca, through harrowing border crossings and brutal raisin harvests. Down the road in the Home Front, right-wing Christians and Jews form a strange pact that tries to silence debate on the War on Terror, and a conflicted father loses not one but two sons in Iraq. *The Last Okie in Lamont*, the inspiration for the town in the *Grapes of Wrath*, has but one Okie left, who tells Arax his life story as he drives to a funeral to bury one more Dust Bowl migrant. *The Highlands of Humboldt* is a journey to marijuana growing capital of the U.S., where the old hippies are battling the new hippies over pollution pot and the local bank collects a mountain of cash each day, much of it redolent of cannabis. Arax pieces together the murder-suicide at the heart of a rotisserie chicken empire in *The Legend of Zankou*, a story included in the *Best American Crime Reporting 2009*. And, in the end, he provides a moving epilogue to the murder of his own father, a crime in the California heartland finally solved after thirty years. In the finest tradition of Joan Didion, Arax combines journalism, essay, and memoir to capture social upheaval as well as the sense of being rooted in a community. Piece by piece, the stories become a whole, a stunning panorama of California, and America, in a new century.

From *Publishers Weekly* Starred . These swift, penetrating essays from former Los Angeles Times writer Arax (*In My Father's Name*) take the measure of contemporary California with a sure and supple hand, consciously but deservedly taking its place alongside Didion's and Saroyan's great social portraits. Expect the unexpected from Arax's reports up and down the state: on the last of the Okies, the latest migrants from Mexico, the tree-sitters of Berkeley, Bay Area conspiracy theorists, an Armenian chicken giant's infamous fall or the mammoth marijuana economy of Humboldt County, among much else. For Arax, a third-generation Californian of Armenian heritage who spent years covering the Central Valley as an investigative reporter, the state's outré reputation and self-representation are a complex dance of myth and memory that includes his own family lore and personal history. It's partly this personal connection, running subtly but consistently throughout, that pushes the collection past mere reportage to a high literary enterprise that beautifully integrates the private and idiosyncratic with the sweep of great historical forces. (May) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. Carolyn See, *Making a Literary Life*
Mark Arax has achieved something truly wonderful. He shows us a California we don't know or haven't yet heard about: Post 9/11 racism and craziness in the Central Valley; dunderhead FBI agents prowling the land; the plight of immigrants as it really pans out; marijuana moguls dealing in stacks of cash that stinks of weed; the disgraceful decline of the once-great LA Times all of it set in the larger frame of a generation of Armenian immigrants tied to the old country, in love with the new country, struggling to discover the meaning of life with all their might. Kirkus A

lucid, warts-and-all portrait of California by a native son.[W]orthy of a place alongside the works of Carey McWilliams and even Joan Didion. James Ellroy, author of *The Black Dahlia* and the forthcoming *Bloods a Rover West of the West* is a dreamscape as much as a landscape and heart-stirring in its style and acute perception. It could be titled *Why We Live Here Anyway*. I exhort you to read this book. Jack Miles, author of *Publishers Weekly*, starred review, February 25, 2009. These swift, penetrating essays from former Los Angeles Times writer Arax (*In My Fathers Name*) take the measure of contemporary California with a sure and supple hand, consciously but deservedly taking its place alongside Didion's and Saroyan's great social portraits. Expect the unexpected from Arax's reports up and down the state: on the last of the Okies, the latest migrants from Mexico, the tree-sitters of Berkeley, Bay Area conspiracy theorists, an Armenian chicken giant's infamous fall or the mammoth marijuana economy of Humboldt County, among much else. For Arax, a third-generation Californian of Armenian heritage who spent years covering the Central Valley as an investigative reporter, the state's reputation and self-representation are a complex dance of myth and memory that includes his own family lore and personal history. It's partly this personal connection, running subtly but consistently throughout, that pushes the collection past mere reportage to a high literary enterprise that beautifully integrates the private and idiosyncratic with the sweep of great historical forces.