



Where I Was From

By Joan Didion

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Where I Was From By Joan Didion

In her moving and insightful new book, Joan Didion reassesses parts of her life, her work, her history and ours. A native Californian, Didion applies her scalpel-like intelligence to the state's ethic of ruthless self-sufficiency in order to examine that ethic's often tenuous relationship to reality.

Combining history and reportage, memoir and literary criticism, **Where I Was From** explores California's romances with land and water; its unacknowledged debts to railroads, aerospace, and big government; the disjunction between its code of individualism and its fetish for prisons. Whether she is writing about her pioneer ancestors or privileged sexual predators, robber barons or writers (not excluding herself), Didion is an unparalleled observer, and her book is at once intellectually provocative and deeply personal.

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Where I Was From By Joan Didion Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

California comes under Didion's captivating, merciless microscope in her controversial look at the greed, acquisitiveness and wasteful extravagance lurking beneath the state's eternal sunshine. In admirably lean, piercing prose, she describes her ancestors, women who could shoot, handle stock and shake snakes from their boots every morning. These pioneers had lived through an arduous crossing far removed from the noble odysseys chronicled by California mythmakers and arrived in wrecked wagons, facing desolation and death. Didion dramatically highlights the gap between California's rosy notion of itself as a land that stood for individual entrepreneurship, and the reality of growing government control and reliance on federal money. As a Sacramento native now living in New York, she conveys the tension of loving an area that's also disappointed her. She utilizes the 1993 Spur Posse scandal, in which teenage boys in Southern California slept with as many girls as possible and then regarded them as notches on their gun, to portray the spiritual vacancy of young Californian men, particularly in light of an overindulgent public attitude that downplayed their moral callousness. Didion cites cozy, pastel paintings by artists like Thomas Kinkade as contributing to the hazily romantic view of a state that treated foreigners early in its history with vicious bigotry, underrated education's importance and committed disturbed citizens to institutions on unacceptably flimsy evidence of their mental state. Throughout, Didion digs deep to find the "point" of California. Many will find her conclusions inflammatory and may rise to California's defense, but the book is a remarkable document precisely because of its power to trigger a national debate that can heighten awareness and improve conditions on the West Coast and throughout the country.

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From [The New Yorker](#)

For four decades, Didion has written in masterly fashion about the contradictions of California culture. In this book, she casts an arctic eye on recent phenomena—the Rodney King riots, the Spur Posse—and on her own upbringing in the Sacramento area. Her great-great-grandparents "crossed" to California in the eighteenth hundreds, and she was brought up on wistful recollections of the past. Her family lived in dark houses, ate with tarnished silver, dressed her in "an eccentric amount of black," and prized anything that was "old." Along with a recipe for India relish and a green-and-red calico appliqué, she inherited a view that California had been spoiled. And yet "the logical extension of this thought, that we were the people who had spoiled it, remained unexplored." Addressing her own confusion about the place, she identifies the settler imperative—"the past could be jettisoned, children buried and parents left behind"—in the fact that her birthplace is now "a hologram that dematerializes as I drive through it."

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From [Booklist](#)

Didion's remarkable family history parallels that of the U.S. in its journey west, belief in starting over, and enduring stoicism. Her great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, Elizabeth Scott, was born in 1766 and left what became Virginia for Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Missouri Territory. Elizabeth's granddaughter traveled deep into the western frontier with the infamous Donner-Reed party, and others made it to the promised land of California, where Didion was born and raised. Her homeland has always influenced her work, but now in the wake of her parents' deaths, she sees her native land with startlingly fresh and revelatory clarity. As always, Didion is scrupulous in her research, discerning in her observations, and eloquent as she scours the outer world for keys to inner conflicts, and, consequently, her insights into California's psyche are perspicacious and arresting. A land seemingly dedicated to personal freedom, it is in fact a state saddled with an inordinate number of prisons, a debilitating dependence on the federal

government, and an extraordinarily high incidence of mental instability. As Didion uncovers sharp memories and incisively interprets California's messy politics and dire economics, she not only creates an electrifying inquiry into the spirit of a unique place and the soul of an uncommon family but also illuminates with piercing candor the dark side of the pioneer mythos, the very heart of the American mystique. *Donna Seaman*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Marjorie Ingram:

The book Where I Was From gives you the sense of being enjoy for your spare time. You should use to make your capable a lot more increase. Book can being your best friend when you getting pressure or having big problem with your subject. If you can make reading a book Where I Was From to become your habit, you can get more advantages, like add your current capable, increase your knowledge about a few or all subjects. You may know everything if you like open up and read a e-book Where I Was From. Kinds of book are a lot of. It means that, science book or encyclopedia or some others. So , how do you think about this guide?

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