



IAM READERS GUILD

Discussion Guide

Where I Was From by Joan Didion

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1. Discuss Didion's unique use of personal and historical prose. Reference areas where this was particularly rhetorical. Did you find the mix effective? Did you gather a fair understanding of the place as she shared about the lives of people who personified the California "spirit"?
2. Josiah Royce writes, "One sought a romantic and far-off golden land of promise, and one was in the wilderness of this world, often guided only by signs from heaven..." Discuss how this sentiment shaped the formation of early California community and settlement. What effect does this eventually have on its social structure?
3. Henry George in his *Overland Monthly* article tried to locate "the peculiar charm of California." He concluded that: "there has been a feeling of personal independence and equality, a general hopefulness and self-reliance, and a certain large heartedness and open-handedness which were born of the comparative evenness with the way property was distributed..." How is this evidenced in CA political & economic structure? How was this seen in the community of Lakewood?
4. How does the decline of the city of Sacramento as illustrated in Didion's novel *Run River* run parallel to her eventual departure from California to New York?
5. Discuss Didion's recollection of the rezoning attempt she and her brother worked towards that was halted by a resident of only six months in the city of Gilroy. Page 174.

The questions below are merely prompts to get your discussion going. Keep a brief record of the most interesting ideas that come up during your discussion, and after the



meeting, send us a summary (around a paragraph long) to post to the Readers Guild blog! (Email your summary to readersguild@internationalartsmovement.org).