

2014

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Recommended Citation

Becker, Lauren, "The Myth Still Lives: Pachuco Subculture and Symbolic Styles of Resistance" (2014). *Scripps Senior Theses*. Paper 360.
http://scholarship.claremont.edu/scripps_theses/360

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**THE MYTH STILL LIVES: PACHUCO SUBCULTURE AND SYMBOLIC
STYLES OF RESISTANCE**

By

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**SUBMITTED TO SCRIPPS COLLEGE IN PARTIAL FULLFILLMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF BACHELOR OF ARTS**

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APRIL 18, 2014

INTRODUCTION

When I was a child my grandparents were my babysitters. They picked me from school in the afternoons and entertained me during the summer. Though my grandparents did take me on typical childhood outings like theme parks or McDonald's playgrounds, the places I remember best are the mall trips. My grandfather was the best talker I've ever known; he could strike up a conversation with anyone. His favorite thing to do was go out somewhere to get coffee and then sit and talk to whoever he could find. Though that kind of outing could easily happen at many places, my grandfather did this at the mall for a reason. He placed an incredible amount of importance on appearance and clothing; after he passed away, I discovered he had more pairs of shoes than I did.

Since I did not enjoy talking to random people like he did, these frequent mall trips turned me into an incredibly experienced shopper for my age. I liked looking for bargains as I quickly learned the tricks to getting more for less. I remember that after I exited a store with a purchase my grandfather always asked me what I'd bought and wanted to see the items. His clothing expertise was legendary in our family. We have an old anecdote: my grandfather was in court one day as a young man (I've forgotten the reason), but he was dressed so smartly that officials assumed he was the lawyer (he wasn't). My baseline for judging the character of young men today stems from my grandfather's belief that a man's shoes and belt should always match.

Like many others, my grandfather understood the importance of appearance in American society. As a dark-skinned Mexican American man, he certainly felt pressure to look a certain way or risk being labeled with any number of negative assumptions about Mexican character. His standard outfit was a polo shirt, impeccably ironed slacks, and a pair of loafers. Unlike most men, if a female family member got a haircut my grandfather would comment on it. After he passed away, I remember the determination I felt to find a classy dress for the funeral, in order to pay my respects through fashion.

Thus when I first heard about zoot suits and pachucos, I became very interested. These individuals dressed with such intention. Though they were not the suits I was used to seeing, the long coats and strange pants of the zoot suit style were still far different than the image I associated with words like “gang” and “delinquent”. I had seen instances of pachuco imagery in later artistic works by Chicanos, but I had never known the real story or heard of the Zoot Suit Riots. I wanted to know more about these individuals and the legacy they left upon later Mexican Americans.

Like my grandfather’s clothing choices; the zoot suit had an important influence over those individuals who wore it. In an interview conducted by Luis Alvarez, an ex-pachuca explains: “I felt good dressing like that. I think it’s because ... you felt like people were kind of looking down on you. You didn’t feel like you belonged. But it didn’t bother me, but I know a lot of people it did. They wanted to belong to a certain group, so we formed our own little group.”¹ Feeling contempt from the rest of American society during the tense years of World War II, working-class Mexican American youths in Los Angeles developed their own way of coping. Zoot suiters chose to emphasized

¹ Alvarez, Luis. *The Power of the Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance During World War II*. American Crossroads 24. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008; 3.

their differences rather than hide them, “at a time when Americans adhered to calls for wartime unity and conformity as the primary means to achieve economic success, social mobility, and more effective political representation.”² Though the zoot suit was seen as entirely un-American, it was actually an example of the ever-popular melting pot of American society. Allegedly based on Clark Gable’s costumes in *Gone With the Wind*, “African American, Mexican American, Asian American, and white zoot suiters shared fashion trends, listened to the latest jazz and big band music, and danced the jitterbug or Lindy Hop together.”³ Though the pachuco subculture came to symbolize the fears of American society at large, it formed from the racial tension Mexican Americans youths felt from the dominant culture.

As Alvarez explains, “people’s everyday cultural practices, including fashion, music, and dance, are often among the most common resources they use to garner strength, make their lives better, and shape the society in which they live.”⁴ Thus a true study of zoot suits and pachuco subculture requires treating these individuals and their successors with respect. Unlike the allegations of the press in the 1940s which demonized zoot suiters as unpatriotic delinquents, I endeavor to demonstrate the environment which necessitated the identity building in which pachucos engaged. In my first chapter, I delve into the historical context of the 1930s and 1940s. The racial tension which existed in this time period as a result of the Great Depression and the Second World War indelibly influenced the Mexican American community. In my second chapter, I discuss the pachuco subculture at length. Exploring the origins and connections to other ethnic

² Alvarez, *Power of the Zoot*, 4.

³ Ibid, 5.

⁴ Ibid, 8.

communities and the importance of style, I seek to create a more positive and complex image of a much maligned youth group. I also discuss the turning point of the 1940s era, namely the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots. The influence of these traumatic events and the negative treatment of Mexican Americans within the events provide the transition to my third chapter. I examine the relation between the identity building of the pachuco and that of the Movement-era Chicano. By focusing on the influence of Luis Valdez, especially his 1970s play, *Zoot Suit*, I illustrate the continuities between the pachuco subculture and that of the Chicano. Overall, I argue that the pachuco subculture was important to Mexican American identity as it challenged the dominant culture's expectations and accepted racial behaviors. Rather than let themselves be marginalized by Anglo-American society, pachucos and Chicanos expressed themselves as they chose and emphasized their differences as a method of asserting their own self-worth.

CHAPTER 1: RACIAL TENSION AND PERFORMANCE AND THE LOS ANGELES MEXICAN/MEXICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITY, 1930s &1940s

The Anglo-American discrimination towards minorities, including Mexicans and Mexican Americans, that erupted in the 1940s had early foundations. Rapid expansion and constant change in Los Angeles during the early twentieth century laid the foundation for the distrust which exploded in the tense, war torn era of the 1940s. Mexicans and Mexican Americans occupied a complex space within the structure of American society. As Laura E. Gómez states, they were “sometimes defined as *legally* white,” but “almost always defined as *socially* non-white.”¹ This duality of identity has complicated Mexican and Mexican American existence in the United States from the beginning of Mexican dealings with the U.S. through to the current day in one form or another. This chapter illustrates the context of events in the 1930s and 1940s that influenced the emergence of the pachuco subculture. This complicated status inspired pachucos of the 1940s to escape expectations imposed upon them by creating a new sense of individual and collective self which embraced a mixed identity. By drawing influence from many cultures, the pachuco subculture would assert self-worth by emphasizing difference.

¹ Gómez, Laura E. *Manifest Destinies: The Making of the Mexican American Race*. New York: New York University Press, 2007, 149; Emphasis is author’s own.

Jobs

Mexicans were drawn to the southwest region due to the large number of menial jobs available. Though the main industries they came to work in were “mining, railroad maintenance, and agriculture,” they also found work as “laborers, on construction sites, in public works systems, in service and food establishments, in lumbering camps, and on ranches.”² The entire intention of Mexican migration to the United States was employment, yet the low-class status attributed to the jobs Mexicans worked only reiterated the negative assumptions that white society made about Mexican identity. Before the 1930s, immigration quotas, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1880, had been placed on Asian immigrants, as well as immigrants from southern and eastern Europe. These groups had previously been a source of cheap labor. However the lack of that cheap resource created opportunities for Mexican immigrants and resulted in the exploit of Mexican labor.³ As James Diego Vigil shows, employers took advantage of “lower expectations” and the “often desperate situation” of Mexican immigrants, and paid migrant workers less than they would others racial groups.⁴ Because of their cheap cost “Mexican labor was desired,” however the “permanent settlement” of Mexican immigrants in the area was not wanted.⁵ Rather than employ Anglo-Americans at a higher cost and decrease the use of Mexican labor, agricultural employers continued to employ a demographic who was not fully accepted by the larger public, contributing to

² Gonzales, M.G. *Mexicanos: A History of Mexicans in the United States*. 2nd ed. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009; 121.

³ Vigil, James Diego. *From Indians to Chicanos: The Dynamics of Mexican-American Culture*. 2nd ed. Long Grove: Waveland Press Inc., 2012, 197.

⁴ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 9.

⁵ Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos*, 197.

racial tension in the region.

Nativism and Americanization

Los Angeles attracted both minority groups as well as a number of Anglo-Americans, specifically middle-class Midwesterners.⁶ In *Becoming Mexican American*, George Sanchez explains that these Midwesterners “brought with them a familiar Protestant worldview,” which not only differed from the cultural background of the Mexican community but also conflicted with the reality of a racially and culturally mixed urban setting.⁷ Before moving to Los Angeles, this worldview manifested in anti-urban conceptions, “since the city appeared a corrupting, sinful environment, full of immigrants and liquor.”⁸ Despite being drawn to live in Los Angeles, these negative impressions of urban decay did not necessarily completely disappear and became manifested as a part of later wartime frustration towards minority groups and their behavior.

Once settled in the mixed area of Los Angeles, nativist fervor among Anglo-Americans festered. As early as Andrew Johnson’s presidency, commissions, specifically the Commission of Immigration and Housing (CIH), were being set up to “[investigate] the working and living conditions of immigrants to California and spearhead the efforts to teach English to and Americanize foreigners.”⁹ Instead of being able to freely choose where to live, the CIH set a precedent for excluding immigrant minorities from primarily

⁶ Sanchez, George J. *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 91.

⁷ Ibid, 91.

⁸ Ibid, 91.

⁹ Ibid, 94.

Anglo-American neighborhoods; “homeowner’s associations were organized to maintain racial and class exclusivity” in order to create those desired communities.¹⁰ Whether the Mexican immigrant population desired to live in better areas, it was not possible. Because of the limited income on which immigrants subsisted as well as the efforts of outside groups, they could not live in nicer areas, contributing to the creation of barrios. In rural and urban settings, “dirt streets, makeshift shacks, dirt floors, and single-room habitations for entire families were common conditions.”¹¹ A harmful cycle was established wherein negative assumptions about Mexicans and Mexican Americans resulted in their subjugation, which prevented them from climbing the social ladder, which fed into negative assumptions. This nativism would contribute to the formation of minority-filled barrios by Anglo-American policies, out of which the pachuco coalesced.

While there was already a population with Mexican heritage living in Los Angeles, this established group was often more monetarily successful and had embraced a lifestyle of assimilation. Many identified as Spanish rather than Mexican in order to emphasize a greater connection to European ancestry instead of indigenous roots. Due to their already established assimilation efforts, this earlier community of Mexican Americans would not pose the same threat as the influx of new immigrants. When Mexicans and Mexican Americans who had not fully embraced assimilation would fight back against the poor conditions they endured, they “aroused the ire of Anglo employers and the general public and in many instances brought even more repressive

¹⁰ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 92.

¹¹ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 10.

counterattacks.”¹² Viewing Mexicans as a lower class of human led white society to dismiss their attempts at greater equality and reinforced the notion that even those born in the United States were not American. Thus at the beginning of the 1930s, the Mexican community “had become much more visible and ... much more identifiable.”¹³

Nativists saw the immigrant as the nefarious outsider intruding on an established status quo, and thus opposed unrestricted Mexican immigration.¹⁴ While they wished to curtail that stream of immigration, the captains of industry opposed them, favoring Mexican immigrant labor for its cheap cost. With the river of Mexican immigration continuing to flow, nativists employed a different tactic: the aforementioned Americanization of Mexican immigrants. They targeted Mexican immigrant women, as these women were assumed to control the “transmission of values” in the household.¹⁵ As mothers, they were traditionally tasked with raising the children and affecting the moral values exercised within and without the private sphere. In the event that these attempts at Americanization failed to take root within the immigrant generation, these nativists held out for hope for the next generation.¹⁶ Ultimately the advocates of Mexican assimilation hoped that effect of these Americanization policies would be the “abandonment of a culture” which the nativists considered “inherently inferior.”¹⁷ While attempts at Americanization did have an effect on the children of immigrants, culturally assimilated

¹² Vigil, *From Indians to Chicanos*, 204.

¹³ Gonzales, *Mexicanos*, 8.

¹⁴ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 91.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 99.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 105.

Mexican Americans continued to be treated as inferior to Anglo-Americans regardless of their efforts.¹⁸

Segregation in Schools

Working as part of these Americanization efforts, schools in Los Angeles were unofficially segregated until the end of the 1940s. Since the Southwest agricultural system relied on the labor of migrant families, “the seasonal nature of this type of work affected the schooling process for members of the entire region and for Chicanos in particular.”¹⁹ With the large numbers of Mexicans in certain areas, this demographic determined the way in which schools were set up and materials were taught. Though no laws officially required the segregation of schools, “educators did invoke the state power granted to school administrations to adapt educational programs to the special needs of a linguistically and culturally distinct community,” and in the mid-1930s, as many as “85 percent of surveyed districts in the Southwest were segregated in one form or another.”²⁰ Determining that the educational needs of Mexican students could not possibly be on the same level as those of Anglo students, schools constructed a specific identity for students of Mexican descent. Gilbert G. Gonzalez asserts that “schooling programs throughout the nation assumed the task of creating among minorities, the political consciousness and

¹⁸ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 124.

¹⁹ Gonzalez, Gilbert G. *Chicano Education in the Era of Segregation*. University of North Texas Press, 1. Though the term *Chicano* would not have been used in the same way during the 1940s, it is the term Gonzalez uses to retroactively label the Mexican American community. I suspect it is sometimes easier to use the Chicano label to refer to all individuals of Mexican descent in situations which affected both Mexicans and Mexican Americans.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 2, 12.

productive skills necessary for stability and growth in the economy.”²¹ Thus schools endeavored not to better the lives and minds of Mexican and Mexican American students, but to mold Mexican students into future productive workers, content within their already determined hierarchical status.

As a whole, the Mexican community during this time was younger than the rest of American society: “fifteen percent of the Mexican population was preschool age and 35 percent of school age” whereas “for the total U.S. population, the corresponding figures were 9.3 and 30 percent.”²² Since schooling was mandatory, the school systems faced a larger amount of students than before. Anglo American society was reluctant to contribute to the education of the Mexican community. Mexicans represented cheap manual labor; their jobs did not require an education and thus the dominant society did not see the point in providing them with the same quality of education reserved for Anglo American children who would go on to more important occupations. Even children that were already “Americanized” were subjected to the segregation, if only to reiterate their place in American society as individuals of Mexican descent.²³ Efforts like Americanization and the segregation of schools served to create a “common culture” in order to “bind together the various classes” while still maintaining Anglo Americans at the top of the social hierarchy.²⁴ The segregation of schools reflected the ways in which the dominant society maintained segregated in all other areas of life, including residential

²¹ Gonzalez, *Chicano Education*, 6.

²² *Ibid*, 10.

²³ *Ibid*, 13.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 7.

areas, wages, and politics.²⁵

Olvera Street and Racial Performance

In addition to attempts to force assimilation on the Mexican community, Anglo-American society also developed an acceptable performance of Mexican identity with the recreation of Olvera Street in Los Angeles. Before the 1930s, Olvera Street was “an unpaved alley of warehouses and loading docks.”²⁶ Upon the arrival of San Franciscan society woman Christine Sterling, this would change. Sterling became invested in cultivating a more beautiful and romantic image of the area, in line with the “picturesque past that Southern California had been advertising for decades.”²⁷ Recruiting *Los Angeles Times* publisher Harry Chandler, among others, the group formed Plaza de Los Angeles, Inc. and reconstructed Olvera Street as part of their greater real estate enhancement project.²⁸ With the backing of the publisher of a prominent newspaper, the ability to advertise and promote the new project was apparent. Through the publicity in the Los Angeles Times, “columnists performed much of the interpretive work, explaining to readers what Olvera Street should mean for them.”²⁹ The idyllic street’s image was cultivated as “a Mexican street of Yesterday in a City of Today.”³⁰ However, the street of

²⁵ Gonzalez, *Chicano Education*, 12.

²⁶ Kropp, Phoebe S. “Citizens of the Past?: Olvera Street and the Construction of Race and Memory in 1930s Los Angeles.” *Radical History Review* 81, no. 1 (2001): 35–60, 37.

²⁷ *Ibid*, 38.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 38.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 38.

³⁰ Owens, Charles H. “A Mexican Street of Yesterday in a City of Today,” drawing, *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1929.

yesterday specifically referred to Mexicans while the city of today belonged to Anglos. By labeling the Mexican population as the past and insinuating the Anglo population as the present, the street worked as a “method of affirming an Anglo ascendancy in southern California.”³¹ Relegating representations of Mexican identity to a performance of an imaginary past, Olvera Street “projected... a kind of intellectual colonialism.”³² Olvera Street functioned as a “small space Anglos created to exhibit their preferred view of the Mexican past”³³ Rather than understand and work with their contemporary generation of Mexicans and Mexican Americans, Anglo-Americans of the 1930s chose to value the Mexicans of the past with whom they did not have to physically interact.

In re-contextualizing Olvera Street, the “persistent popularity of mythic western pasts” proved influential.³⁴ Creating an idealized past allowed Anglo society to avoid thinking about the real past as well as their complex present. In his book, *Los Angeles: City of Dreams*, *Times* contributor Harry Carr described the street as a “bit of old California, sheltered from modernity like some lovely princess who has slept through the ages.”³⁵ This quote reveals a desire to cling to a past which had been remembered in a specific way rather than understood in its entirety. According to this mythical past, Mexicans were a romanticized other. In the present, however, they were seen as “dangerous outsiders.”³⁶ Further solidifying the position of Mexicans in relation to white

³¹ Kropp, *Citizens of the Past*, 37.

³² *Ibid*, 37.

³³ *Ibid*, 36.

³⁴ *Ibid*, 36.

³⁵ Carr, Harry. *Los Angeles: City of Dreams*. New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1936, 9–10.

³⁶ Kropp, *Citizens of the Past*, 37.

citizens, white businesses were housed in the permanent buildings on the street while the kiosks, or *puestos*, in the middle of the street were run by Mexicans and Mexican Americans. Kropp explains the subtle colonial nature of this business design, mentioning that “however long a puesto merchant (puestro) might remain in business, the puestos always appeared temporary, both by their construction and by their placement on the roadway.”³⁷ This sense of temporary existence related to the perception of Anglo society that Mexicans were a temporary source of labor, rather than permanent residents of the area. The temporary feel of the puestos juxtaposed with the permanence of the Anglo businesses further demonstrated the inferred permanence and greater importance of Anglo influence over Los Angeles.

Mexican Repatriation

Due to the detrimental economic effect of the stock market crash, people living in the Depression-era United States became desperate for work and Americanization efforts were halted in favor of expelling Mexican immigrants entirely.³⁸ Whereas farm owners had been glad of the cheap labor Mexicans and Mexican Americans gave them, the American public felt threatened by the presence of foreign individuals holding jobs in their country. Though these agricultural jobs were held by Mexicans precisely because white labor refused to work them, the Depression spurred the United States to remove Mexicans “from the jobs they were said to hold at the expense of American citizens.”³⁹

³⁷ Kropp, *Citizens of the Past*, 40.

³⁸ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 106.

³⁹ Hoffman, A. *Unwanted Mexican American in the Great Depression*. Tuscon: University of Arizona Press, 1974, 2.

Mexican immigrants were encouraged and even forced to return to Mexico in an attempt to open up jobs for Americans, in a process called repatriation. This view neglected to consider that many of the targeted workers were Mexican American, and thus American citizens. White society grouped Mexican Americans into a single category with their Mexican brethren, refusing these individuals the rights that their birth afforded them as Americans. Kropp states that “this depression-era scheme originated in the widespread assumptions that Mexican immigrants were taking the lion’s share of public relief.”⁴⁰ In the end, Los Angeles sent an estimated “35,000 Mexican nationals back to Mexico,” in addition to many Mexican American citizens.⁴¹

Though these efforts did not succeed in their goals of ridding California of all Mexican immigrants, it did “[weaken] the traditionally acknowledged leadership of the immigrant generation,” and pave the way for the rise of the second generation.⁴² This second generation struggled with their Mexican past, American present, and Mexican American future. A group representing middle-class Mexican Americans called the Mexican American Movement emphasized the importance of education in rising above their situation and escaping barrio life.⁴³ However, these efforts did not work for all Mexican Americans. Because of the economic and social effects of the depression upon the American population, the working-class Mexican American youth in Los Angeles “became increasingly estranged from a society unable to provide adequate jobs or

⁴⁰ Kropp, *Citizens of the Past*, 35.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴² Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 255.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 257.

education.”⁴⁴ Working-class youths had to drop out of high school and even middle school and find work in industrial jobs to help support their families in the wake of the depression, which contributed to the dissatisfaction with their already dissatisfactory living situation. Nativist feelings were reignited in the wake of economic turmoil as Mexican American youths “were increasingly viewed as a threat to the stability of Los Angeles by a large portion of the Anglo-American population” who were also worried about gaining and maintaining job security.⁴⁵ As the decade wore on, the children of immigrants increasingly became the focus of Anglo-American society’s scrutiny. Sanchez asserts that “American society was inhospitable” to these youths, causing the need for “creative adaptations... to a society that did not make them feel welcome.”⁴⁶ One of the forms of this creative adaptation was the formation of pachuco culture as a means to have control over their identity. Both the attempts at Americanization and subsequent complete rejection of the Depression era provided the basis for both the distance from Mexican culture and rejection by Anglo-American society felt by the first generation of Mexican American youths. These feelings of disillusionment and rejection would prove vital in the formation of the resistant culture of *el pachuco* and complicate the experience of Mexican Americans contributing to the war effort.

Mexican Americans in the WWII Workforce

World War II also brought more Mexicans and Mexican Americans into the workforce, filling jobs which had often previously been worked by Anglo-Americans

⁴⁴ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 264.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 267.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 268-269.

who were now overseas fighting. However greater access to jobs did not happen right away. It was not until President Roosevelt's 1941 Executive Order 8803 which "[banned] discrimination in defense employment" that the wartime industrial sector became forcibly desegregated and thus allowed for more minorities to seek that avenue of employment.⁴⁷ With so many American men fighting abroad, many jobs were left open and many needed filling to keep up with wartime production of necessary materials. Despite the need for increased production, the filling of jobs by Mexicans and Mexican Americans agitated many Anglo-Americans, tapping into the well of nativist feeling once again. This fear that 'foreigners' were taking away American jobs, a fear which ignored the fact that the children of Mexican born in the U.S. were Americans, contributed to a general distrust of minorities and further agitated the relationship between Anglo and other groups.

Not only did the increasing number of Mexicans and Mexican Americans visible in the workforce agitate Anglo-Americans, the increasing number of women in the previously male workforce worried Anglo-Americans and minorities alike. Especially complex was the transition for women of Mexican descent. With such an emphasis on motherhood within Mexican culture, as well as the notions of purity and femininity tied up within the female role, these women were particularly berated by their male counterparts for choosing to enter traditionally male spheres.⁴⁸ Despite the men in their lives wanting them to stay in the home, women were needed in the workforce and stepped up to contribute to the war effort. Young Mexican American women's challenge

⁴⁷ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 259.

⁴⁸ Ramírez, Catherine Sue. *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009; 20.

to current Mexican cultural domestic ideals was reiterated in the fashion of the pachucas. In fact, “since their personal appearance was more strictly supervised by parents, young Mexican women were often the first to conflict with their families over fashion.”⁴⁹ Some Mexican and Mexican American women were unsatisfied with their lives, and challenged the status quo in different ways; employment and fashion were just two ways in which they demonstrated their discontent. These women were testing “the boundaries of tradition and their own personal freedom through experimentation and innovation in dress and image,” like the pachuco subculture as a whole.⁵⁰

Military Service

World War II also contributed to the growth of the Mexican American middle class after military service through the G.I. Bill. Though American society did not always treat Mexicans or Mexican Americans particularly well, many still fought for the United States in the war, whether they were drafted or chose to volunteer for service. At the time, “economic depression among Mexican Americans made the military service seem especially attractive.”⁵¹ In addition to the propensity for Mexican Americans to join the service, they were also more often targeted for recruitment by the military. Even Mexican nationals attempted to join in the fight by serving in the U.S. military; though they were initially turned away, eventually they received clearance to join the fight with Americans and were “later given the opportunity to become citizens by taking the oath while in the

⁴⁹ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 265.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 265.

⁵¹ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 244.

service.”⁵² Not only would these soldiers be fighting for freedom, they would be paid to do so and would be able to become American citizens as a reward. Mexican American families often paid a higher price than other families during the war. Since Mexican Americans families tended to be large, oftentimes upwards of four or more sons could be fighting overseas.⁵³ The greater numbers of servicemen in each Mexican family also meant that their families had greater number of casualties on average than families of other groups.⁵⁴ Due to the large numbers in which they served, Mexican Americans lost their lives fighting for a country that did not allow them equal treatment. According to Zaragosa Vargas’s book *Crucible of Struggle*, “by the final months of the war, Mexican Americans made up a fifth of the overseas casualties from Los Angeles, although they represented only 10 percent of its total population.”⁵⁵ During the war and while soldiers were overseas fighting, “enthusiasm for the struggle against fascism overran arguments for continued pressure on questions of civil rights.”⁵⁶ The nation at large seemed focused on the enemy abroad, rather than the racial discrimination at home. This resulted in “playing down civil rights activity in order to promote wartime unity,” deemed necessary for military success over the Axis powers.⁵⁷ Despite this attempt at temporary unification, Mexican Americans in the service felt let down when they returned from war and found themselves and other Mexican Americans still discriminated against, unable to even live

⁵² Macías, Anthony. *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008, 74.

⁵³ Ibid, 74.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 74.

⁵⁵ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 255.

⁵⁶ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 249.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 249.

where they may have desired due to Anglo-American efforts to maintain racial neighborhood purity. After fighting for the country, and seeing many fellow Mexican Americans die fighting, they expected more from their own society. The veterans' lives were improved through the G.I. Bill, which helped provide a way for Mexican Americans to better their situation by assisting with payment for college tuition and thus contributed to the growth of the Mexican American middle class. However, while this middle class had trouble relating to working-class Mexican American, Anglo discrimination applied to Mexican Americans of all classes in Los Angeles.

Japanese Internment

A factor which contributed to the continued misunderstanding of pachuco culture was hostile press treatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans coupled with the paranoia that spurred the internment of Japanese Americans. Feeling threatened after the attack on Pearl Harbor, the government set up internment camps for Japanese Americans in California to prevent any possible destructive collaboration with the Japanese empire. With that particular racial group's supposed threat held at bay, Mexican Americans became the primary scapegoat of the biased journalism in Southern California. During the unease of the events of the trial and the riots, press "accounts of Mexican juvenile delinquency either replaced or were printed alongside stories of supposed disloyalty among interned Japanese Americans."⁵⁸ As the fighting in World War II raged in other parts of the world, the main way in which Americans could sympathize with the destruction felt by the Europeans was through the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. This

⁵⁸ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 267.

attack and the subsequent reaction to it resulted in a deep mistrust of Japanese American citizens. To battle these anxieties, as well as in an effort to neutralize any threat that Americans were afraid Japanese Americans would commit in the name of Japan, they were forced into encampments and monitored for suspicious activity. With Japanese Americans interned, they were no longer visible targets for the relief of frustration for anxious Anglo-Americans. Instead, the target shifted to the Mexican American population, in addition to the complex suspicion already felt towards the group.

Bracero Program

The bracero program began during WWII, in 1942, and continued until 1964. American citizens had recently forced some Mexican workers back to Mexico, but the economic strain of the war necessitated utilization of outside resources once more. However, these outside workers were still not afforded permanent residency. Reflecting the distrust and dislike of immigrants, the bracero program “brought Mexican men to the United States for temporary work in agricultural fields and then sent them home again.”⁵⁹ Framed as an important way to thwart the Axis powers during the war, the United States and Mexico worked together to entice Mexican citizens into an exploitative system of labor.⁶⁰ What ultimately drew these men to the program, Cohen argues is the promise of modernity, which represented the other method of marketing the labor program.⁶¹ Working in America presented Mexican men with the chance to experience things they

⁵⁹ Cohen, Deborah. *Braceros: Migrant Citizens and Transnational Subjects in the Postwar United States and Mexico*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011; pg 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 9.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 10.

could not have if they had stayed in Mexico. Though their labor was exploited and they did suffer terrible conditions, these men, like many Mexicans living in the United States, were able to take advantage of the opportunities their situation provided. A study conducted by Luis Fernández del Campo in the early 1940s found that among some 300,000 braceros, “roughly 72 percent went for better salaries, 14 percent went for personal reasons, and 12 percent went in search of adventure; just under 2 percent sought the new knowledge that was the program’s public rationale.”⁶²

As one might expect, the bracero program not only inspired Mexican men to work in the United States through the program but to return to the U.S. as undocumented workers. Many former braceros “knew how to maneuver in the United States” and American employers often hired them to avoid the bracero paperwork.⁶³ Not having to work under the guidelines of the program allowed US agricultural employers to treat these undocumented workers even worse, as it would be harder for them to protest without risking their status. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, “more than half a million undocumented workers crossed the border annually.”⁶⁴ Not all of these workers returned to Mexico, leading to the creation of more Mexican American citizens.

The determination to coexist in US society demonstrated by Mexicans and Mexican Americans as a whole despite the discrimination can also be found in the pachuco subculture that this era generated. Facing a society which denied them an American identity yet persecuted them for their Mexican ethnicity, pachucos stood in defiance of such opinions. Protesting working-class conditions and expectations from

⁶² Cohen, *Braceros*, 24.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 29-30.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 30.

both their Mexican parents and from Anglo-American outsiders, pachucos and pachucas would seek an escape from the difficulty of WWII in fancy clothes and dance halls.

However, the history of discrimination these Mexican American youth encountered ensured that their rebellion was not that which would fade with age. Instead, they would go on to inspire later generations to fight even more strongly for better treatment from the dominant society.

CHAPTER 2: STYLE, CONFLICT, AND THE PACHUCO IN WWII LOS ANGELES

During the 1930's and 1940's, a subculture emerged among Southwest Mexican American youths that enabled them to express an identity of their own design, alternate to the conflicting ideas of their parents and Anglo-American society at large. This subculture has many terms and images associated with it, such as "pachuco" and "zoot suiter." Due to the marginalization of people of color during the stressful times of economic depression and world war, these youths developed an identity which allowed them to challenge dominant values and form their own sense of self. Members of the working class, these pachucos and pachucas "negotiated rigid and oppressive conceptions...as they cultivated a distinct style, one that sought to infuse beauty, dignity, and more than a little glamour" into their lives.¹ Developing from a history of conflicting identities, these individuals responded to a lack of place in society by creating a specific subculture incorporating elements of their Mexican heritage and multiethnic American present. Already paranoid from the ongoing war, national anxieties were further agitated by Mexican American youths' efforts to resist marginalization through the pachuco identity, leading to events like the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots. In combination, this resistant culture and the racially charged events surrounding it provided

¹ Ramírez, Catherine Sue. *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009; xx.

the foundation for an inspirational symbol of opposition for later generations of Mexican Americans. To paraphrase Robin Kelley's interpretation of Malcom X's zoot suit era, the pachuco subculture as developed in Los Angeles, was "an essential element of [their] radicalization," rather than a detour.²

El Paso and "Pachuco" Origins

Delving into the origins of the term *pachuco* and the style of the zoot suit can get muddled. Various aspects of *el pachuco* came together from different sources in order to form the distinct culture. El Paso, Texas is often regarded as the "birthplace of *pachuquismo*."³ In her book on women in pachuco culture, Catherine Ramirez credits the work of historian Eduardo Obregón Pagán for providing the "possible etymologies of pachuco."⁴ Proto-pachucos called the Tirli in El Paso, Texas often "referred to their hometown as El Pasuco or El Pachuco."⁵ When many of these individuals migrated from Texas to California, they brought their language as well as the beginnings of the pachuco style. This language, called caló, combined aspects of the Spanish Gypsy language zincalo, archaic New Mexican regional Spanish, southwestern rancho terms, and African American jive.⁶ With this language, pachucos began to draw distinctions between

² Kelley, 163; Although Kelley's book analyzes the zoot suit culture of the East Coast, which was primarily African American, his theory about the impact of the particular subculture can be applied and related to the pachuco subculture of 1940s Los Angeles.

³ Ramírez, *Woman in the Zoot Suit*, xiii.

⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁵ Ibid, 5; Macías, Anthony. *Mexican American Mojo: Popular Music, Dance, and Urban Culture in Los Angeles, 1935-1968*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008; 87.

⁶ Ibid, 87-88.

themselves and others, as even Spanish speaking individuals would not understand the language if they were not a member of the subculture.⁷ By oftentimes relying on plays on words or the sound of words in relation to their meanings in Spanish or English, caló “displayed creativity, improvisation, and linguistic play,” which demonstrated an intelligence which was often overlooked by outsiders judging the pachuco subculture.⁸

Jazz Music and the African American Connection

Like the “pachuco” term, the zoot suit fashion style also originated from outside of California. Beginning on the east coast as a part of the youth culture of African Americans, and some Latinos, the zoot suit was influenced by jazz culture.⁹ Discussing the connections between popular music and minority culture in Los Angeles, Anthony Macías relates that the zoot suit “evolved out of hustler garb of Harlem hep cats and the dapper stage outfits of African American jazz musicians.”¹⁰ One such performer was Cab Calloway. In the image below, Cab Calloway performs while wearing a version of the zoot suit.¹¹ Though Mexican Americans and African Americans each put their own personal style into the specific articulation of the suit, the connections between the subcultures is evident.

⁷ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 84.

⁸ Ibid, 84.

⁹ Ibid, 70.

¹⁰ Ibid, 70.

¹¹“Cab Calloway Zoot Suit”: Free Download & Streaming: Internet Archive.” <https://archive.org/details/CabCallowayZootSuit>. (Accessed March 2014).



Figure 1: Cab Calloway wearing a zoot suit

Both Mexican Americans and African Americans faced racial discrimination in this time period throughout the United States. In the highly Mexican- and Mexican American-populated Los Angeles, the relationship between the two groups differed from areas in the country where the people of color were primarily African American. The jazz scene in particular represented a multiracial space where “tolerance and understanding” could be cultivated.¹² In mid-1944, Jewish American jazz figure Norman Granz “produced the first full-scale jazz concert at the Los Angeles Philharmonic Auditorium.”¹³ This series, called “Jazz at the Philharmonic,” promoted “interethnic

¹² Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 67.

¹³ *Ibid*, 67.

solidarity” by featuring African American and Anglo American performers as well as by donating the proceeds of the series to the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Fund, established to help protect the Mexican American youths accused in the Sleepy Lagoon trial (discussed below).¹⁴ On the other side of the stage, minorities also felt the strain of discrimination. Since “many of the city’s nightclubs and ballrooms excluded African Americans, except as stage performers,” these individuals would occasionally take on other personas and try to pass as Mexican American to get slightly better treatment.¹⁵ African Americans, like Mexican Americans, negotiated their racial identity in order to affect their treatment by dominant society. Growing out of jazz culture, the zoot suit challenged “middle-class ethics and expectations” and helped the youths in “carving out a distinct generational and ethnic identity.”¹⁶ By incorporating outside influences, minority individuals both set themselves apart from other groups and derived strength from the experiences of other minority groups to fight the discrimination they felt from society at large.

In conjunction, the dance culture associated with jazz also demonstrated the connection between some minority groups, as well as the difference from dominant society which these groups cultivated. The prominence of the jitterbug shaped the zoot suit and the dancing done when wearing such a style. Rather than “flamboyant,” as the zoot suit was labeled by the dominant culture, it was “functional;” the style “allowed jitterbug dancers to execute strenuous arm movements...and to improvise quick swing

¹⁴ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 67.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 69.

¹⁶ Kelley, Robin D. G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. 1st Free Press paperback ed. New York: Free Press, 1996; 163.

steps without tripping on their trouser cuffs.”¹⁷ Though the extreme nature of the suit was a protesting statement, the reality of its origin related to nightlife lifestyle its wearers embraced. Macías states that “pachucos and hep cats shared a love of dance and a mentality of working to live on the weekend.”¹⁸ At the dance hall, the pachuco continued to cultivate a particular image. Numerous examples in Macias’s book describe a distinctly pachuco type of dancing, where the female partner did most of the work and the male partner remained more stationary, to preserve the look of the suit.¹⁹ These efforts reflected the pachuco’s desire to be seen in a context other than ignorant foreigner or manual laborer. By dressing up and enjoying themselves, these youths declared that they were worthy of a life better than the dominant culture allotted for them.

The Luxury of Style

Though not all pachucos wore zoot suits, the fashion came to be synonymous with the culture and often functioned as a target on the backs of those that wore them. The zoot suit incorporated a number of aspects. Each pachuco’s style had variations, as not every youth who may have enjoyed the look of the style was able to afford to buy a full zoot suit or any aspect of the suit at all. Below is a visual illustration of the various aspects of the traditional zoot suit, as represented on the ultimate Pachuco of Luis Valdez’s play, *Zoot Suit*.²⁰

¹⁷ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 71.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 83.

²⁰ “L.A. in the Zoot Suit Era,” Zoot Suit Discovery Guide, accessed December 2013, <http://research.pomona.edu/zootsuit/en/zoot-suit-la/>

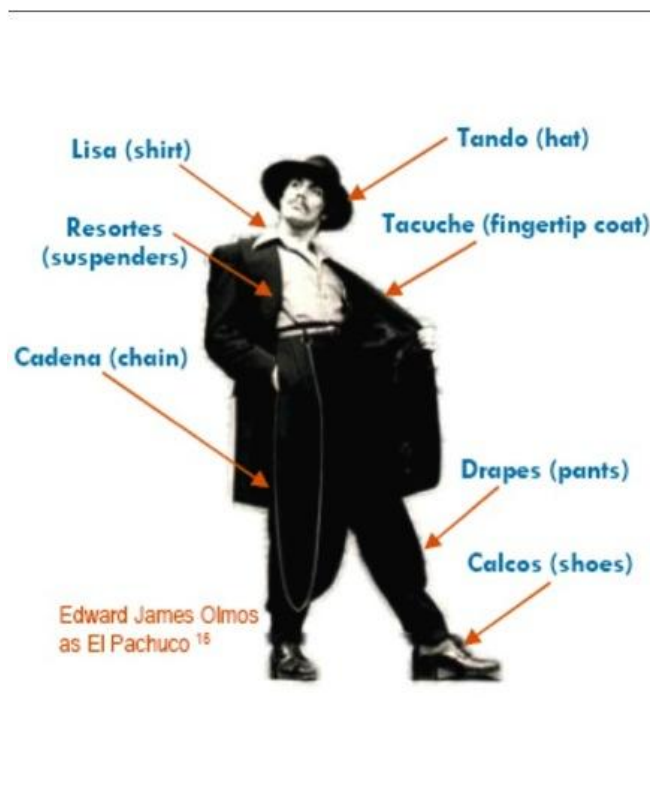


Figure 2: Deconstruction of the elements of the zoot suit

Though the zoot suit image above is helpful in explaining and visually demonstrating the aspects of the suit, it also presents problems. As a costume of the ultimate symbolic pachuco from the 1979 play *Zoot Suit*, certain aspects may be exaggerated in order to present an idealized character. What we can certainly take away from the image, other than the base knowledge of the components of the style, is that this image is what later generations pictured as the ultimate pachuco individual. However, the zoot suit only represented one aspect of the pachuco style. Pachucos who had zoot suits did not wear them daily but when out on the town on the weekends. With the emphasis on zoot suits, the weekday wear of the pachuco goes overlooked: “denim blue jeans with sweaters, varsity letterman sweaters, or leather jackets.”²¹ This casual weekday style set

²¹ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 84.

them apart from other groups at the time but it would later be embraced by the dominant culture, symbolic of the James Dean “rebel without a cause,” an all-American individual.²² Moreover, this weekday denim fashion reflected their humble, working-class background. Whereas American society would later value that image when worn upon white bodies, the Mexican American body was seen as foreign and thus not as readily accepted. From head to toe, zoot suit wearers cultivated an image and persona of their own, which went against the accepted behavior of their time.

As a result of persistent racial discrimination during WWII, many working class Mexican Americans youths were left an identity in flux. Born in America, they were not Mexican, yet they were not truly treated as Americans either. Instead of trying to fit any one established mode of being, pachucos and zoot suiters created their own “culture that celebrated a specific racial, class, spatial, gender, and generational identity.”²³ Coming out of the jazz scene, the pachuco subculture and zoot suit style reflected a lifestyle that stressed pleasure and the enjoyment of life in response to continued discrimination. However, once rationing for World War II began, the zoot suit, and the pachuco subculture associated with it, became a signifier of resistance to those who believed that these individuals should be more patriotic and selfless in their clothing.

Many who study the pachucos of 1940’s Los Angeles believed that these youths wanted to draw attention to themselves, despite not being a huge focus of Anglo-American society until events such as the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots, to be discussed later. Pachucos and pachucas sought out “social spaces of pleasure” without

²² Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 84.

²³ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 166.

expectation, in which they could feel comfortable enough to enjoy themselves.²⁴ Rather than fade into a background of racial discrimination, pachucos took a bold stance and challenged others to notice them and judge them. Pachucos created an identity for themselves which allowed them to feel pride in themselves and their appearance, rather than shame at the ‘otherness’ by which Anglo-American society labeled them. Moreover, pachuco culture revealed a difference in class ideology. Whereas middle- and upper-class Mexican Americans more often embraced the idea of assimilation into Anglo society, Macías argues that working-class Mexican Americans felt the discrimination more strongly and thus responded more firmly against assimilation.

Emerging from the Great Depression, pachucos and their style were affected by that period of struggle. Unlike middle-class children, these working class youths often worked all day, sometimes at multiples jobs. Thus the pachuco style was a method of escape from these responsibilities as well as a statement of rebellion. Young Mexican American men often “saved a large portion of their wages from their often-menial jobs to buy the latest fashions.”²⁵ Rewarding themselves with expensive suits and weekend trips to dance halls allowed Mexican American youths a form of escape from racial discrimination; as Macías states, “this new purchasing power and minority consumer ethic privileged immediate gratification over bourgeois notions of respectability and frugality.”²⁶ Coming out of a difficult period in which many of their people were deported or refused jobs, pachucos enjoyed the ability to purchase these items and demonstrate an improved economic status. This very success also drew attention, and

²⁴ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 168.

²⁵ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 72.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 93-94.

thus more racial discrimination, to these individuals. Mexican Americans with “smart clothes and new cars... angered white people because these status commodities signified that racial minorities were no longer beneath whites at the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder.”²⁷ The change in status was perceived by the dominant culture as a threat to the established hierarchy and was targeted according to that perception of threat. Kelley states that in a system where “clothes constituted signifiers of identity and status,” the zoot suit style was a “way of escaping the degradation of work and collapsing status distinctions” between the oppressed and the oppressor.²⁸ Though Kelley writes about the “hep cats” of the East Coast, the influence of that culture on working class Mexican American youths and the connections between hep cats and pachucos illustrates the inherent political significance of cultivating one’s own style.

The War on the Zoot

When World War II erupted in the 1940’s the change in national consciousness contributed to and affected pachuco identity in a number of ways. Though not all pachucos wore zoot suits and not all zoot suit wearers considered themselves pachucos, the two groups did overlap and were conflated into one by outsiders to the culture as well as later generations of Mexican Americans. Racial tension, often involving such misconceptions, festered during the 1940s due to U.S. involvement in World War II; the restrictions and rations that came with military involvement only further agitated the relationships between racial groups. In 1942, the War Production Board issued

²⁷ Macías, *Mexican American Mojo*, 74.

²⁸ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 169.

Regulation L-85, which “rationed natural fibers and forbade drastic style changes that might tempt buyers.”²⁹ Additionally it “limited color choices and restricted the length of skirts and the fullness of pants and jackets.”³⁰ These regulations challenged cultural clothing styles for those who enjoyed wearing zoot suits. Despite the regulations, zoot suits were still produced and sold; however, the suit developed a more negative image in the eyes of the American public as they appeared to deliberately flaunt wartime edicts. By refusing to abide by wartime rationing, the suit became a symbol of flagrant disregard for the war effort and developed the perception that those who wore it were unpatriotic. While the pachucos and other who continued to wear the style did so as a personal choice more than a premeditated act of defiance, its existence served as just another way in which racial groups clashed during this period.

With World War II came an increased “concern with conformity,” as propaganda urged the American public to join together in support of the troops abroad, though much of the media actually targeted minorities.³¹ Articles discussing the pachuco subculture, zoot suits, and the turbulent racial events of the 1940s such as the Sleepy Lagoon trial and Zoot Suit Riots often disparaged the fashion style. In 1943, *Newsweek* described the zoot suit as “distinctly something from the bottom drawer,” alluding to the style’s connection with minority groups, such as Mexican Americans and African Americans, whom already regarded as inherently inferior to Anglo-Americans at the top of the social

²⁹ “The Price of Freedom: Printable Exhibition,” Mobilizing for War, accessed December 2013, <http://amhistory.si.edu/militaryhistory/printable/section.asp?id=9&sub=3>

³⁰ Smithsonian, “The Price of Freedom.”

³¹ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 265.

hierarchy.³² Articles describing the delinquency of Mexican American youths often included the terms “zoot,” “zoot suit,” or “pachuco” within titles, further solidifying the alleged connections between the pachuco subculture, zoot suits, and crime within the minds of American society.

In early 1943, Walt Disney Studios released a propaganda cartoon drawing specific attention to the zoot suit. Advocating the payment of taxes, and saving up money to do so, the cartoon features Donald Duck being influenced by a “thrifty” character, as well as a “spendthrift.”³³ Whereas the thrifty character speaks with a Scottish accent and wears a kilt, coding him as white, the spendthrift wears a zoot suit and advises Donald Duck to forget about his taxes and spend his money on fun. While the spendthrift character does not look any darker than the other characters, he does speak with a stereotypical New York type accent associated with the working class. He directs Donald to a club called the Idle Hour Club that has swastika doors; eventually the spendthrift character himself sports a swastika bow-tie and has a Hitler-style hairdo and moustache. Not only does this cartoon clearly associate the zoot suit with a lack of patriotism, it goes so far as to code the zoot suit as evil and synonymous with Hitler and the Axis powers. Reflecting the latent aggression in American society, the cartoon foreshadows the racially tense Zoot Suit Riots when Donald chooses to beat the spendthrift character to defeat him

³² “Primary Source: Newsweek June 21, 1943,” American Experience: Zoot Suit Riots, Accessed November 2013, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_filmmore/ps_suit.html

³³ “Donald Duck-The Spirit of ‘43” Youtube video, 6:41. Posted by “FreeTV35,” Sept.15, 2008 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xphiYdfd-Tg>

Below is an image of the zoot suit wearing spendthrift character from the propaganda cartoon.³⁴



Figure 3: An example of the zoot suit's negative coding in a Disney propaganda short

Rather than agree to conform to the rest of society, *el pachuco* decided to stand out from it, to call attention to individual preference. Unsatisfied with the world they inhabited and the way they were treated, pachucos “flaunted their difference”, and in the eyes of the ignorant, “the zoot suit became the means by which that difference was announced.”³⁵ Rather than a cohesive political statement, the wearing of the zoot suit and pachuco culture constituted an early search for identity. It is in the eyes of the later generation of Chicanos that zoot suits would come to stand for much more than a nighttime lifestyle.

³⁴ Zoot Suit wearing spendthrift, The Spirit of '43, <http://animationreview.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/the-spirit-of-43-c2a9-walt-disney.jpg>

³⁵ Cosgrove, Stuart. “The Zoot-Suit and Style Warfare.” History Workshop no. 18 (October 1, 1984): 77–91. doi:10.2307/4288588; 79.

Pachucos vs. Pachucas

Whereas the male pachuco posed a threat to society in the minds of Anglo-Americans, the female pachuca was considered an even greater threat. While some young women wore a version of the zoot suit that incorporated skirts, others chose a more masculine style or even the exact male version of the zoot suit. During the war period, women were already entering the workforce out of necessity, invading traditionally male spheres. Pachucas inhabited these male spheres even more by wearing traditionally male clothing and refusing to easily submit to traditional gender roles, both Mexican and Anglo-American. Interestingly, when Mexican American men wore the zoot suit, they were criticized as appearing feminine, with the jacket being compared to women's skirts and the pants being compared to women's girdles.³⁶ However, when women wore the suit, it was a dangerous appropriation of masculinity.

Straddling the line between Anglo and minority, Mexican Americans "represented a threatening, alien ambiguity during a period of heightened xenophobia and paranoia."³⁷ Anglo-American society left many Mexican Americans working class youths struggling to define themselves. Yet once pachucos created an identity for themselves, Anglo society continued to deny the validity of or need for the pachuco subculture. Rather than a more organized opposition and protestation against discrimination like the later Chicano movement, pachucos represented an initial desire for distinction from others and an incipient political consciousness in their resistance to the established Anglo-American

³⁶ Ramírez, *Woman in the Zoot Suit*, 75.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 72.

hierarchy. It is through later struggles relating to persistent inequities that the pachuco identity became a symbol of opposition for later generations through the ideology of the Chicano Movement.

The Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots

It was out of the racial tension and negative attitudes towards Mexicans and Mexican Americans during the war that the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots emerged. These events occurred when continued antagonism towards minorities expanded into greater action. During this time, the press was perpetuating the myth of a 'Mexican crime wave' for increased paper sales, and Anglo police took action against Mexican American youths. On August 2, 1942, the body of Jose Diaz was found near the swimming-hole and gathering spot referred to as Sleepy Lagoon. Soon nearly two dozen Mexican American youths were arrested for suspicion of murder and a long battle for justice ensued. Nearly a year later, tensions boiled over again when U.S. servicemen took to the streets of Los Angeles and attacked those youths they associated with delinquency. Called the Zoot Suit riots, the signifiers used to direct these attacks were supposed Mexican American heritage, the wearing of zoot suits, and a general gang-like look. However, as these signifiers were generated by the Anglo-American servicemen's limited cultural knowledge of the Mexican American working class, their actual targets varied. As Anglo society conflated zoot suits with the pachuco subculture, pachucos and pachucas found themselves a popular target of the attacks. Not only did these events contribute to the displacement pachucos felt within society, they also became an important part of how the symbolic identity of *el pachuco* was developed to help later

generations oppose corrupt systems. In fact, some Chicanos would later come to consider the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots as the inception of the Chicano movement.³⁸

The Anglo-American antagonism toward Mexican American youth coalesced in the Sleepy Lagoon incident. In the summer of 1942, a murder trial and a prolonged quest for justice occurred which would become infamous within the Mexican American community. The events took place at the Sleepy Lagoon reservoir; it was a popular hang-out for Mexican American working class youth as they were denied entry to the city's public pools based on racial segregation.³⁹ Mexican American youths were gathered there for the evening and crashed a nearby party, causing a fight to break out. A man named Jose Diaz allegedly died as a result of this fight, and Mexican American youths were immediately suspected of blame. Initially, the police searched Spanish-speaking areas of Los Angeles and sent some 600 men to be held in jail. Later, two dozen of those youths were indicted for "conspiracy to commit murder and assault with a deadly weapon."⁴⁰ After a hugely biased trial, the jury found three men guilty of first-degree murder, nine men guilty of second-degree murder, and five men guilty of assault.⁴¹

Though these convictions would be overturned in 1944, the trial became infamous for evidence of bias and symbolic of the first important instance of a Mexican American legal victory in what would become a long history of legal struggle for equal rights.

³⁸ Mazón, , Mauricio. *The Zoot-suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation*. Mexican American Monograph no. 8. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984; 25.

³⁹ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 250.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 251.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 251.

Despite lasting for months, the defendants were not allowed to change their clothes or cut their hair, in an attempt to manipulate their image and make them appear as delinquents or criminals. Whereas pachucos and zoot suiters alike were concerned with looking sharp, the image of the accused youths was one which perpetuated the stereotype of Mexicans as dirty, lazy degenerates. Mazón posits that the trial “provided a substitute hate object for a home front where the real enemy was too distant and beginning to retreat.”⁴² By focusing on individuals at home, the Anglo-American society in Los Angeles could pretend they had more control over their fear of ‘foreigners’ than they actually did. Through the Sleepy Lagoon trial, Mexican American youths became the focus of a paranoid war torn society, and would serve as the beginning of a targeting of this particular demographic.

Similarly, occurring in the midst of much racial tension, the Zoot Suit Riots were an interesting series of events, which would have long term repercussions for the Mexican American community. Though sources have accepted the label ‘Zoot Suit Riots,’ this name implies that zoot suit wearers were the ones rioting, rather than immediately indicating that it was the Anglo servicemen and civilians that took violent action against Mexican Americans. Anglo servicemen left their bases to come in to Los Angeles and seek out youths they deemed a threat to patriotic Anglo society. Due to the complex relationships between Anglo-Americans, Mexicans, and Mexican Americans at this time, servicemen targeted youths who appeared Mexican, or wore zoot suits, or who simply looked “suspicious” to the servicemen. No one died as a result of the attacks and no

⁴² Mazón, *Zoot-Suit Riots*, 26.

specific rallying figures emerged out of the riots.⁴³ The death of individuals or the rise of otherwise important figures from events such as riots often contribute to subsequent social and political effects. Despite the absence of such figures, the riots certainly still had a lasting effect on the Mexican American population of Los Angeles. Though they did not spur any immediate political action from the Mexican American community, the Zoot Suit Riots would “assume political significance for a different generation;” these attacks would serve as a power past instance of discrimination and inspiration for Luis Valdez’s play, *Zoot Suit*.⁴⁴

During the spring of 1943, servicemen and sailors let their aggression loose, and took it out on Mexican American youths, under the guise of retaliation for a lack of patriotism. The targeted youths were attacked in public spaces where audiences watched and cheered instead of defending or lending assistance. Many Mexican American youths fought back in self-defense, which unfortunately only served to justify the attacks in the minds of many Anglo-Americans by contributing to the already established image of the pachuco as a threat to Anglo society. Even the police refused to take immediate action and allowed the attacks to continue for a number of days. The picture below depicts the chaos of the attacks, angry servicemen and civilians having stopped a trolley with a zoot suit wearing passenger.⁴⁵

⁴³ Manzón, *Zoot-Suit Riots*, 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

⁴⁵ “‘Zoot Suit’ and History,” *The Daily Mirror*, accessed November 2013, <http://ladailymirror.com/2011/10/20/zoot-suit-and-history-part-14/>.



Figure 4: Headline and picture from article covering the zoot suit riots

This picture demonstrates the way in which the press manipulated the image of Mexican American youths during the ‘riots.’ Underneath the picture, the captain mentioned that “the rebellion was caused by zoot gangs molesting citizens.” Certainly there were Mexican Americans who committed crimes, just as there were criminals in any other racial group, including Anglo-Americans. However, the servicemen chose to take action against Mexican American youths without question, complacent to assume that any youth who appeared Mexican American, wore a zoot suit, or both, was a delinquent and deserving of a beating. Additionally, it was not the servicemen who were being punished for their physical attacks. Instead, Mexican Americans associated with pachuco culture were the ones being taken into custody, and thus appearing to prove Anglo-American society’s worries about their supposed delinquent nature true.⁴⁶

In an effort to negate the perceived power this subculture of a minority group presented to Anglo-American society, as well as in an effort to capitalize on wartime anxiety, the Zoot Suit Riots functioned as a means of emasculating pachucos. Rather than simply physically beat their targets, the servicemen attempted to remove the offending

⁴⁶ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 265.

garments, in a “ritualistic stripping of the zoot-suiters.”⁴⁷ Not only were individuals forcibly stripped, it also occurred in public, in front of crowds which did not attempt to help them. Mazón theorizes that the servicemen were simultaneously reverting to their earlier status of “adolescents and civilians” and elevating themselves to the greater status of their drill instructors.⁴⁸ Through basic training, “these recruits had lost their identities as civilians and individuals” to become a part of a community of harden warriors set to risk their lives overseas.⁴⁹ By participating in the riots, these same servicemen were treating the zoot suiters and pachucos as the recruits by “taking on many of the behavioral traits of their drill instructors” in an effort to deal with the changes in their own lives.⁵⁰ While these events may have provided an outlet of aggressive anxieties for the Anglo servicemen, it certainly had negative long term effects for the Mexican American community. Not only did the attacked Mexican Americans have to cope with physical displays of discrimination and public beatings, Mexican American servicemen were blamed by their Anglo counterparts for the alleged actions of Mexican American youths that the press described in the “Mexican Crime Wave” stories.⁵¹ The events continued to effect later generations of Mexican Americans, serving as an important instance of racial intolerance and misunderstanding. Though Mazón claims that the physical act of fighting relieved tension for both the Anglo-Americans committing the attacks and the Mexican Americans who were the targets, he presents little evidence for

⁴⁷ Cosgrove, *Style Warfare*, 81.

⁴⁸ Mazón, *Zoot-Suit Riots*, 85.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 87.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 86.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 86.

the existence of such feelings on behalf of the Mexican American community. Surely public stripping was not so easily forgotten or forgiven, even in the context of wartime anxiety and paranoia. In the picture below, the degree to which zoot suiters were physically and emotionally torn down is demonstrated.⁵²



Figure 5: Photo of zoot suiters with an audience after being stripped and beaten

Furthermore, the working-class Mexican Americans involved were relegated outside American society, foreign and thus a threat. Within the press, “the ‘zoot suiters’ were depicted as without parental guidance or control, almost ‘orphans’ in the history of Mexican immigration to Los Angeles.”⁵³ Within the imaginations of Anglo-Americans in Los Angeles at the time, these youths were running wild, with no familial or societal restraints to temper their behavior. While the pachuco subculture emerged out of a disconnection from a Mexican past and an American present, that disconnection was

⁵² “3rd June 1943 – the Zoot Suit Riots,” accessed December 2013, <http://www.onthisdeity.com/3rd-june-1943-%E2%80%93-the-zoot-suit-riots/>.

⁵³ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 268.

dealt with by creating an identity to which working class Mexican American youths could relate. Though these youths did form their own identities, the subculture did not necessarily encourage delinquency, as the yellow journalist press tried to assert.

Ultimately, the Anglo press provided biased coverage of the Zoot Suit Riots which continued to discriminate against Mexican Americans. The war caused emotional instability within the national psyche. Families were separated, not knowing if they would ever be reunited again. Because of the uncertainties that accompany war, “life lacked the promise of future fulfillment.”⁵⁴ Though Anglo servicemen and civilians released their anxieties through events like the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots, that release came at the expense of minorities. The Zoot Suit Riots “made clear to many second –generation Chicanos that much of their optimism about the future has been misguided.”⁵⁵ Whereas many Mexican Americans thought that participation in the wartime economy and service in the military would earn them respect and gain them status as “true” Americans, they would be disappointed when the discrimination continued.

The impact and importance of pachuco identity in Los Angeles is perhaps best stated in Kelley’s assertion in relation to the zoot suit culture of African Americans on the east coast, that “this unique subculture enabled [them] to negotiate an identity that resisted the hegemonic culture and its attendant racism and patriotism, the rural folkways...and the class-conscious, integrationist attitudes” of their middle-class

⁵⁴ Mazón, *Zoot Suit Riots*, 91.

⁵⁵ Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American*, 267.

brethren.⁵⁶ Like a teenager in a hugely dysfunctional household, pachucos carved out an identity and a space for themselves to feel pride, comfort, and fun. Where the pachuco identity may have started out as more rebellious, due to its relation to racial discrimination it became politicized later. By setting a precedent of resistance, pachucos inspired later generations to oppose the continued discrimination present in Anglo-American dominated society.

⁵⁶ Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 165.

CHAPTER 3: THE PACHUCO SYMBOL IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

Though the pachucos of the 1940s were using their unique subculture to assert an identity distinct from portrayals of the dominant society and the expectations of their Mexican parents, they did not necessarily realize they would become a symbol in a widespread movement for civil rights. It was the generation of Mexican Americans that dubbed themselves “Chicano” and fought for equal rights in the 1960’s and 1970’s that took the image of pachucos and zoot suits, and developed them into an inspirational symbol of resistance. Not only did the Chicano movement reconfigure the image of the pachuco, some members of the movement recast history to portray pachucos as the political precursors to the Chicanos of the civil rights movement era. For instance, Luis Valdez’s play *Zoot Suit* used the pachuco as an icon of resistance and individual pachuco characters to illustrate a proto-Chicano identity. Valdez’s social protest theater of the time reflected and supported the ideology developed within the Chicano movement. This identity would incorporate indigenous aspects into Mexican and American culture. Moreover, Valdez’s theater work would go on to imbue the pachuco with emphasized indigenous meaning, in an effort to synthesize past events with new Chicano values.

After returning from fighting abroad in World War II and before becoming Chicanos, Mexican American veterans returned to the United States to find their position in society distressingly unchanged. Though they had been promised change and better

lives, achieving that change proved difficult for many. The bracero program, first implemented in 1942 to bring Mexican workers to the U.S. temporarily, continued past its 1947 expiration date. Due to the cheap cost of workers through the bracero program, as well as the even larger numbers of undocumented workers in the U.S., quality of life for migrant farm workers was not particularly good. In the late 1940s, Ernesto Galarza came on the agricultural scene pushing for reform, a precursor to the farmworkers struggle associated with César Chávez and Dolores Huerta. However, the fight for better conditions was further complicated by the bracero program as the “infinite supply of Mexican braceros and *mojados* (undocumented Mexican workers)... provided growers with both cheap labor and an effective strikebreaking weapon.”¹ This initial fight for justice provided the base for later activists take the struggle for equal rights further and beyond the fields.

Another result of the bracero program instance of discrimination against Mexican Americans was so-called ‘Operation Wetback.’ While the intention of the bracero program was to employ workers temporarily, many of the braceros chose to illegally stay in the country. In the mid-1950s, the U.S. government attempted to reduce on the flow of illegal immigration. Instead of stopping the bracero program, however, they chose to conduct a “large-scale deportation raid.”² With anti-Communist fervor setting in during the 1950s, Anglo society continued the wartime trend of hostility towards and skepticism of those individuals who appeared foreign. In combination with a long-established pattern of discrimination towards Mexican Americans, “the raids fed racism by the deliberate

¹ Vargas, Zaragosa. *Crucible of Struggle: a History of Mexican Americans from Colonial Times to the Present Era*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 2010; 272.

² *Ibid*, 273.

targeting of all those considered ‘Mexican’ regardless of their citizenship.”³ Like the origins of the zoot suit riots of a decade earlier, Anglo society refused to treat Mexicans and Mexican Americans like individuals, and combined them into one categorical threat. In relation to the raids, the term ‘wetback’ became a popular slur for any person of Mexican descent. Even those whose families had resided in the California area since the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo reestablished the border of the US and Mexico to be identified “with undocumented Mexicans as ‘wetbacks.’”⁴ Though Mexican Americans had been enticed into serving their country with the promise of a better life, this promise was not kept. Instead, the Mexican American community had a long fight for equality ahead.

Chicano Nationalism

Throughout this turbulent time, Mexican Americans still struggled with individual and collective identity, much the like pachucos and pachucas of the 1940s. Not only did the dominant society’s influence provide confusion, there were also divisions within the Mexican American community itself as to how to go about living as a Mexican American in a predominantly Anglo-American society. Once again, class would prove a defining factor in the decision to continue to assimilate or to fight for an equal spot in society as non-white. Rather than continue along this assimilatory path, many working-class Mexican Americans strove for an alternative which would grant them equal rights within Anglo-American society. During the 1960s, “Mexican American activists developed a

³ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 273.

⁴ *Ibid*, 273.

complex critique of traditional assimilation and melting-pot discourses in order to transform themselves into Chicanas and Chicanos.”⁵ This critique would celebrate a mixed background, emphasizing indigenous roots over European heritage. Valdez would go on to demonstrate the combination of this critique with the pachuco subculture in his play, *Zoot Suit*.

Like their 1940s pachuco precursors, Chicanos and Chicanas fought back against Anglo societal expectations as well as traditional assimilatory Mexican and Mexican American traditions. The term “Chicano” and the identity that went along with it “assumed a third space between dominant U.S. and Mexican identifications.”⁶ Whereas the pachuco subculture featured a combination of American and Mexican qualities which served to subvert expectation, Chicanos and Chicanas also chose to develop a third type of identity which not only continued to subvert expectations but also attempted to affect change within the structure of Anglo society. Within the Mexican American community, “ethnic pride” was often the most obvious common denominator and “working-class origins” was the most important.⁷ While middle class Mexican American could and indeed had been passing and assimilating into Anglo society, this feat was not an option for working-class Mexican Americans who often looked like the dark-skinned Mexican stereotype. This critical difference influenced the direction in which Chicanos and Chicanas formed their new conception of self. Mariscal comments that “the appeal of Chicano cultural nationalism was always greatest for working-class people living in

⁵ Mariscal, George. *Brown-eyed Children of the Sun: Lessons from the Chicano Movement, 1965-1975*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005; 3.

⁶ Ibid, 28.

⁷ Ibid, 22.

tightly knit urban or rural Mexican communities in the United States.”⁸ This working-class community would come together to form the many activist groups which waged the fight for equality. While middle-class Mexican Americans had a history of attempting to assimilate into Anglo society, their working-class counterparts had been unable or unwilling to do so and thus were motivated to create a way to fight back against discrimination. With this greater understanding of life experienced with racial discrimination came a greater passion for the elimination of it.

In order to facilitate this new resistive identity, these emerging activists engaged in cultural nationalism. This term in the context of the Chicano movement refers to the “strategic deployment of key features of Mexican and Mexican American history and culture in order to fashion individual and collective subjects capable of asserting agency and demanding self-determination.”⁹ While pachucos and pachucas created a subcultural identity using aspects of American and Mexican culture, this new Chicano identity had greater organization behind it, and most importantly a more political intention. By developing a common political identity, Chicano and Chicana activists also “constructed individual and collective sites from which a sustained attack against racialized oppression could be launched.”¹⁰ Since the Chicano movement was widespread and involved Latino groups other than Mexicans and Mexican Americans, it needed to create and develop a sense of self which could apply to and resonate with a large group of people from different, though relatable, backgrounds.

⁸ Mariscal, *Children of the Sun*, 13.

⁹ Ibid, 45.

¹⁰ Ibid, 28.

An Indigenous Past

A key aspect of nationalism within Chicano ideology was the historical past that was emphasized to provide a more strongly unified foundation. Utilizing both real and imagined pasts and spaces, Chicanos engaged in a “rewriting of history” which served to strengthen Chicano nationalism and the Chicano case for equal civil right. Rather than rely on the dominant society to be convinced to provide a space for them, Chicanos decided to form one for themselves. In this recreation of history, Chicanos chose to celebrate indigenous roots and Mexican American status as mixed or *mestizo*. Whereas other nationalist movements were concerned with racial purity, Chicano ideology had its origin in miscegenation and chose to emphasize that rather than hide it.¹¹ This challenging of racial expectations thus mirrored the subversion of expectation that the pachuco subculture exhibited.

Racial mixing, or *mestizaje*, had long been a part of Mexican culture. After the Mexican Revolution in the early 1900s, *mestizaje* “form[ed] the core of nationalist discourse,” wherein Mexican culture praised “the working classes, the campesino, and the indio-- the mixed heritages of race and class that form[ed] Mexican identity.”¹² Even before moving to the U.S., Mexicans thus had a basic relationship with their indigenous past from which the Chicano movement would later draw. Whereas Mexican American youths felt adrift between identities, they came from a background with a “complex history involving a sense both of dispossession and empowerment, a simultaneous

¹¹ Mariscal, *Children of the Sun*, 72.

¹² Pérez-Torres, Rafael. “*Chicano Ethnicity, Cultural Hybridity, and the Mestizo Voice.*” *American Literature* 70, no. 1 (March 1, 1998): 153–176. doi:10.2307/2902459; 153.

devaluing and honoring of indigenous ancestry.”¹³ Any pride found in indigenous roots was complicated by years of Spanish colonial thought which conceived of the native population as a class below that of the Spaniard. Every important point for the formulation of Chicano *mestizaje*, Rafael Pérez-Torres argues, revolves around this colonially devalued indigenous past: the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire, the U.S. takeover of Mexican lands, and the continuing issues in the US in relation to “immigration, employment, and border control in the Southwest.”¹⁴ Despite the attempts of dominant white society throughout the ages to assert their own European backgrounds, Mexican culture never lost its connection to its indigenous past and often mixed influences to create a hybrid identity.

Within the Chicano movement, the appearance of *mestizaje* often took a place of importance within the creation of identity. The historical moments mentioned above “seem to value connection to the indigenous as the basis for *mestizaje*,” and the Chicano movement valued “the somatic manifestation of ‘Indianness’” becomes the marker of one’s identity.¹⁵ By increasing the value put on the non-white Mexican past, Chicanos sought to deemphasize the lingering impact of Spanish colonialist thought within their present. Unfortunately, the focus on physical appearance was that “Chicano ethnic identity [became] essentialized, premised on meeting specific physical or social criteria.”¹⁶ Effective in combating aspects of colonization, this kind of strategy might alienate those Mexican Americans who would be able to pass as Anglo but still felt

¹³ Pérez-Torres, *Chicano Ethnicity*, 154.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 154.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 155.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 155.

allegiance to the aims of the Chicano movement. The emergence of minority groups in opposition to discrimination fostered organized political opposition to the racist structure of the dominant society, and resulted in the usage of the pachuco as an idealized Chicano since they represented a past which had engaged in such opposition.

UFW and the Birth of El Teatro Campesino

Long discriminated against, the Mexican American community became increasingly politically active in making their voices heard. When unemployment for Mexican Americans was twice that of whites and “a third of all families subsisted on less than \$3,000 a year,” life quality for the community was particularly dismal.¹⁷ Beginning the Chicano movement by forming the United Farm Workers union in 1962, Cesar Chavez and Dolores Huerta began fighting to improve the lives of Mexican Americans and other minority workers. A child of Mexican immigrants, Chavez first became involved in community organizer when he was recruited into the Community Service Organization, where he became a “local organizer, establishing CSO chapters throughout California.”¹⁸ Eventually leaving the organization to form the union for farmworkers, this would give Chavez experience in the fight for civil rights. Similarly, Huerta was first involved with the CSO before leaving to form the UFW with Chavez. Coming from a background with a “union activist” father, Huerta also worked as a teacher in a largely migrant worker populated area where she saw the conditions with which the children of

¹⁷ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 306.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 309.

farmworkers dealt, leading her to become dedicated to improving their lives.¹⁹

In 1965, the UFW led their first strike in Delano, California, where it joined “a walkout of grape pickers...over low wages.”²⁰ Beginning a long fight for rights for agricultural workers, the strike turned into a boycott of over eighty wine growers.²¹ With interest in the cause growing among the Mexican American community, many became involved over the years. One of these individuals was “Mexican American playwright and actor” Luis Valdez.²² Having worked with the San Francisco Mime Troupe, Valdez and his brother Daniel joined the new Chicano cause. Forming El Teatro Campesino, they “wrote and performed in dynamic short skits...to popularize and raise funds for the grape boycott and farmworker strike.”²³ In March of 1966, a march to Sacramento was organized. Along the way, supporters joined in and “the march strengthened farmworker solidarity and gained media attention and public support.”²⁴ Importantly, Valdez wrote a document called the Plan of Delano to express the aims of the strike and of the community.

The Plan of Delano functions as an early example of the cultural nationalism the Chicano movement would continue to employ and to develop, as well as exhibiting some of the religious symbolism of which the movement also made use. Calling it a “Pilgrimage” to Sacramento, Valdez positioned the march as religiously ordained and

¹⁹ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 309.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 310.

²¹ *Ibid*, 311.

²² *Ibid*, 311.

²³ *Ibid*, 311.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 311.

thus important.²⁵ However, Valdez did not intend to leave out other faiths. He stated that at the head of the march the Virgin is carried as she is “patroness of the Mexican people,” but added that they also “carry the Sacred Cross and the Star of David” because they were “not sectarians” and asked “the help and prayers of all religions.”²⁶ Furthermore, Valdez situated the Mexican American community within a history, which is useful for formulating an identity. The plan stated that “the Mexican race has sacrificed itself for the last hundred years...to make other men rich,” and they “are the sons of the Mexican Revolution.”²⁷ Without knowledge of where one has been, it can be hard to decipher where one is or will be heading. Thus, Valdez’s emphasis on the discrimination and strife within the Mexican American community not only made sense within the context of the march, it also set up a context from which the Mexican American community could build a common identity and a resistive attitude.

Valdez also clearly demonstrated self-awareness about the future path of the fight for civil rights. Within the plan, he wrote of the “historical significance” of their fight as the result of years of mistreatment.²⁸ Valdez explicitly stated that the Delano grape strike was “the beginning of a social movement in fact and not pronouncements.”²⁹ Whereas perhaps in the past there was much talk and not enough action, Valdez seemed determined that the quest for civil rights within the Mexican American community would

²⁵ United Farm Workers. “The Plan of Delano.” http://chavez.cde.ca.gov/ModelCurriculum/Teachers/Lessons/Resources/Documents/plan_of_delano.pdf (Accessed: Feb 2014); 1.

²⁶ Ibid, 3.

²⁷Ibid, 5.

²⁸ Ibid, 1.

²⁹Ibid, 2.

not be stopped, and that they were ready to make real change happen. However, Valdez also realized the importance of unity, not just within the Mexican American community but in conjunction with other groups as well. He stated within the plan that though “the majority of the people on [the Pilgrimage are of Mexican descent,” the success of the Mexican American people “depend[ed] on a national association of all farm workers.”³⁰ They had “learned the meaning of unity,” which Valdez would go on to develop further in his later career.³¹ Exhibiting vigor for redefinition like that of the pachuco, Valdez claimed that they wanted a “new social order” and would fight for it until death or success.³² Confident within the abilities of the UFW, Valdez wrote with a belief and message which would show up in all his works. Even in this early document, he demonstrated a form of identity building intended to unify a community towards action.

As an integral force within the Chicano movement, Valdez’s creative works embody much of what he considered the important messages for the public. Though his point of view is not indicative of the entirety of the movement, it is worth focusing on as Valdez brought the movement to the mainstream and influenced other Chicano activists from the 1960s on. Not content to continue working only on the farmworker’s struggle, Valdez and the Teatro separated from the UFW in order to “develop a core of actors no longer committed to one cause and one style alone.”³³ Many of his plays brought

³⁰ UFW, “Plan of Delano,” 4.

³¹ Ibid, 4.

³² Ibid, 5.

³³ Jorge Huerta, introduction to *Zoot Suit and Other Plays*, by Luis Valdez, Houston, TX: Arte Publico Press, 1992; 8.

“together myth and history”³⁴ in the tradition of the concept of Aztlán and took shape “within the context of cultural nationalism.”³⁵ Most important to this study, Valdez also often incorporated the figure of the pachuco within his works, and to Chicano nationalism and indigenous imagery.

Unsurprisingly, Valdez placed great faith in the power of theater to create change in society. He claimed that “at its high point Chicano theatre is religion” and “a reaffirmation of LIFE.”³⁶ Aware of the effect the arts can have on people, Valdez endeavored to “educate the pueblo toward an appreciation of *social change*” with his theater works.³⁷ By taking the Chicano message to the community through the more entertaining method of theater, Chicanos could more effectively encourage the aims of the movement. Early in Valdez’s career the plays he created with the Teatro for the UFW were called *actos*. Short and simple, they did not require extensive sets which allowed them to move around easily in order to reach the maximum amount of farmworkers. “Social vision” was the main emphasis for the *actos*, as they were pandering directly to the workers affected by the inequalities within the agricultural sector.³⁸ Valdez argues that Chicano theater is like a Chicano’s car: underneath all the “trimmings” of the decoration “is an unmistakable product of Detroit.”³⁹ Acknowledging their mestizo past,

³⁴ Huerta, introduction, 8.

³⁵ Fregoso, , Rosa Linda. “*The Representation of Cultural Identity in ‘Zoot Suit’ (1981).*” *Theory and Society* 22, no. 5 (October 1, 1993): 659–674; 665.

³⁶ Valdez, Luis, and Teatro Campesino. *Luis Valdez--early Works: Actos, Bernabé, and Pensamiento Serpentino*. Houston, Tex: Arte Publico Press, 1990,; 6.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 8.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 13.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

Valdez offers a way to subvert the indelible European influence. He instead states that “rejection of white western European (gabacho) proscenium theatre makes the birth of new Chicano forms necessary.”⁴⁰ By making theater uniquely Chicano, the influence of colonialism could be resisted in yet another manner.

Aztlán and the Plan Espiritual

Drawing inspiration from Aztec roots, the Chicano community created imaginary spaces and revised histories for individuals of Mexican American descent from which to find strength. One of the most well-known concepts was that of “Aztlán”. In Aztec philosophy, Aztlán was the legendary home of the Aztecs; the translation of the Nahuatl “Azteca” in fact meant “people from Aztlán.” Within the Chicano movement, Aztlán referred to a theoretical homeland within North America which Chicanos strived to reclaim, associated with the land taken by the U.S. as a result of the Mexican-American War. This idea “had less to do with an organic territory founded on racial, linguistic, or cultural purity...than with a ‘translocal’ field in motion produced by migration, multilingualism, and mestizaje.”⁴¹

At the first National Chicano Youth Liberation Conference in Denver, Colorado in 1969, Chicanos gathered and discussed the concept of Aztlán. This gathering “was significant because its participants included student activists, ex-convicts, and street youth in discussions of grass-roots politics and nationalist ideology,” providing a varied

⁴⁰ Valdez, *Early Works*, 11.

⁴¹ Mariscal, *Children of the Sun*, 72.

basis for identities which could resonate with more than just Mexican Americans.⁴² A manifesto entitled *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán* was laid out, advocating Chicano control of their own community, rather than letting Anglo-Americans continue to define their existence. Embracing a mixed identity, the plan “declare[d] the independence of [the] mestizo nation” and described Mexican Americans as a “bronze people with a bronze culture.”⁴³ It also explicitly encouraged Chicanos to use “nationalism as the key or common denominator for mass mobilization and organization.”⁴⁴ In effort to negate the impact of white society, the plan inspired Chicanos by telling them that they had the power to change their place in society. After generations of being denied fair and equal treatment, of being herded into designated living spaces, of feeling lost within their own identities, Mexican Americans were suddenly speaking out and declaring sovereignty over their own lives and pasts. As the land taken by the United States from their Mexican forefathers years ago, Aztlán was stated to belong to “those who plant the seeds, water the fields, and gather the crops and not to the foreign Europeans.”⁴⁵ Connecting Aztlán to farmworkers, the Chicano creators of the manifesto drew from established connections between the Mexican American working class and manual labor, often agriculture, as well as the fight being waged by the United Farm Workers. This connection also allowed other minorities, such as those also colonized by the Spanish, to relate to the empowering sentiment being put forth, as minority groups often found themselves in more physically

⁴² Fregoso, *Cultural Identity in Zoot Suit*, 662.

⁴³ Mecha, “El Plan de Aztlán.”
<http://clubs.asua.arizona.edu/~mecha/pages/PDFs/ElPlanDeAtzlan.pdf> (Accessed: Dec 2013); 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 1.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 1.

demanding jobs. What defined the creation of the concept of Aztlán was “racial solidarity, cultural pride, and the desire for autonomy,” and what bound the movement together was the “ideology of dissent guided by nationalism.”⁴⁶ In conjunction with the celebration of indigenous rather than Spanish heritage, Chicano activists employed Aztec mythological imagery as well as made connection to anti-colonialism. Within the rhetoric of the movement, “the revolutionary example of anticolonial struggles served as a model to be imitated.”⁴⁷ Connections to colonialism also served as an important relation between Mexican American and other Latino groups looking to combine civil rights efforts. Designed to create a space for unification, “the concepts of Aztlán, la Raza, and *chicanismo* were useful” though not always entirely successful in their aims to unify the Chicano community.⁴⁸

Valdez asserts the power of the Chicano male in a number of his plays. In *Bernabé*, Valdez paints the story of a man regarded as mentally challenged by human society yet intimately involved with the mystical. Much like Chicanos, Bernabé is underestimated by his society and discriminated against. When talking with El Sol, the sun god claims that Bernabé is “the last of a great noble lineage of men” the sun “once knew in ancient times,” and the “first of a new raza cósmica that shall inherit the earth.”⁴⁹ Situating Bernabé as a metaphor for Chicanos at large, Valdez creates a great destiny for Chicanos to strive for and struggle towards. He also draws attention to the connection between Chicanos and the land. While trying to convince La Tierra of his love for her, La

⁴⁶ Vargas, *Crucible of Struggle*, 320, 336.

⁴⁷ Mariscal, *Children of the Sun*, 34.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 30.

⁴⁹ Valdez, *Early Works*, 164.

Tierra counters Bernabé by claiming that he's always "worked in the fields like a dog — and for what? So others can get rich on [his] sweat, while other men lay claim to [her]?"⁵⁰ With this comment, Valdez alludes to the concept of Aztlán. Though white society has a hold of the land, Mexicans and Mexican Americans should reclaim that land as its rightful inheritors. Moreover, at the end of the play Bernabé is reborn as greater than human. Through his love for the earth, he dies and is reborn, dressed in a loincloth like an indigenous figure.⁵¹ Not only does Bernabé demonstrate more potential than his peers give him credit for, but through a belief in and respect for the indigenous figures he transcends simple humanity and is elevated to a godly level. Subtly incorporating Chicano nationalism and an embrace of the indigenous, Valdez demonstrates the scope of potentiality within the Chicano community.

In addition to the Chicano male, great emphasis is put on indigenous imagery and mythology. *Zoot Suit*, Valdez's play based on the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit riots, featured "El Pachuco", a powerful symbol of pachuco culture as a whole. This character also interacts with indigenous imagery throughout the play. At the simplest level of costuming, the Pachuco is "imbue[d]... with pre-Columbian significance by choosing for the Pachuco's zoot suit the colors black and red, thereby imputing the association with the Aztec deity, Tezcatlipoca."⁵² A god associated with mirrors, this quality reflected the Pachuco's role within the play. The Pachuco acts as Hank's id. He is a reflection of Hank's desires, especially as he is only seen by Hank's character. Similar to a mirror image, the Pachuco "represents the Aztec concept of the 'nahual' or other

⁵⁰ Valdez, *Early Works*, 160.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 167.

⁵² Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 669.

self...the strength he receives from his other self is determined by his ability to get in touch with his nahual.”⁵³ As much as the Pachuco is his own character, he is also a part of Hank and a part of the Chicano past. This continuity of the Pachuco in history reflects the “notion of identity as archaeology.”⁵⁴ The Chicano is able to form a sense of self by drawing inspiration from the past; in *Zoot Suit*, this process manifests in the representation of the Pachuco as the 20th century Aztec. Like Bernabé, the Pachuco dies and is reborn, having fallen victim to the violence of the Zoot Suit riots. While this death and rebirth obviously references the life of Jesus within the Catholic tradition, the full effect of colonialism is deterred as the Pachuco is stripped to a loincloth. Revealing his indigenous roots, “this image suggests the sacrificial ‘god’ of the Aztecs.”⁵⁵ Combining the indigenous with the European, Valdez creates a uniquely Chicano Christ-like figure in the Pachuco. As the Pachuco emerges in the Aztec regalia, he is superimposed against Hank’s zoot suited brother, signifying “the symbolic convergence of two historical events; the Marines’ attack on Pachucos (1943) and the Spanish conquest of the Aztec nation (1519).”⁵⁶ Establishing the events of the 1940s as only the latest in a long line of colonial efforts, Valdez also asserts the dominance of the Chicano through the symbolic Pachuco. Through Chicanismo, Valdez demonstrates that the indigenous Chicano can prevail.

⁵³ Valdez, *Zoot Suit*, 14.

⁵⁴ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 669.

⁵⁵ Valdez, *Early Works*, 14.

⁵⁶ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 669.

The Pachuco and Inspirational Rebellion

Not a completely new persona, many Chicanos saw themselves as “an upgraded and politicized version of the pachuco.”⁵⁷ Many similarities and connections can be found between the two groups. While advocating the defense of the community, the Plan Espiritual de Aztlán stated that “for the very young there will no longer be acts of juvenile delinquency, by revolutionary acts.”⁵⁸ Often seen as delinquents rather than simply youth trying to define themselves, pachucos had also fallen victim to the discriminatory perceptions of the dominant society. Instead of continuing this pattern, Chicano cultural nationalism “produced new Chicano subjects, reversing their previously negative position in dominant discourse.”⁵⁹ Drawing on established tropes of Mexican American identity, “cultural nationalists reclaimed as the revolutionary role models for the new Chicano identity precisely those subjects previously devalorized in relation to U.S. dominant culture.”⁶⁰ Most often the *pinto* (ex-convict), the pachuco, and the indigenous warrior were used as the subjects of Chicano nationalist production. Through various works such as theater, Chicanos “affirmed repressed identities, located in working-class and non-European origins” and “elevated as positive the identity of those subject-ed by the dominant culture and Mexican American middle-class intellectuals to the realm of the ‘inferior.’”⁶¹ By utilizing old characters and stereotypes and painting

⁵⁷ Mariscal, *Children of the Sun*, 39.

⁵⁸ Mecha, *El Plan Espiritual de Aztlán*, 3.

⁵⁹ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 662.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 662.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 663; Fregoso specifically reinterprets the meaning of the word “subjected,” drawing attention to the process by which non-white groups are seen as the “Other” by white society. Rather than simply being, these groups are given an identity by white society.

them in a positive light, Chicanos rewrote their own history as it had been interpreted by the dominant white society.

In Valdez's play, *Zoot Suit*, the ex-convict and Aztec warrior figures are touched upon but the main focus is on the Pachuco and a specific Chicano interpretation of that character and culture. Throughout the play the expectations of white society contrast with the realities of the Mexican American experience. Drawing upon the discrimination present during the actual trial, the accused pachuco characters of the play are prevented from presenting themselves as they desired, instead left to look dirty and disheveled to emphasize racial stereotypes and alleged delinquent qualities. However, the symbolic Pachuco character challenges that stereotype. He claims that "the Press distorted the very meaning of the word 'zoot suit,'" that is became simply "another way to say Mexican" for white society.⁶² Calling out the press, the character allows Valdez to draw attention to the way the press did, and continued to, distort the pachuco subculture in favor of their personal desires. Rather than any sort of malicious delinquency, *Zoot Suit* asserts the belief that the pachuco subculture was "a style of urban survival."⁶³

Centering on the events of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit riots through the experiences of protagonist Hank Reyes, a character version of real-life accused pachuco Henry Leyvas, the Pachuco identity is personified as Hank's powerful sub-consciousness. Representing "the wisdom of an older street-wise warrior," the Pachuco serves as a guide for Hank, offering "counsel and explanation."⁶⁴ Just as Chicanos during the movement were gaining knowledge from their past experiences, Hank was learning

⁶² Valdez, *Zoot Suit*, 80.

⁶³ Ibid, 80.

⁶⁴ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 668.

from a more experienced individual with a shared history. Though the play's setting occupies the 1940's, both the topic and the Pachuco's experience seem to suggest an understanding of the time in which the play was created, drawing the audience to make connections between the past and present events. Not just a passive character, the Pachuco systematically intervenes to halt violence among other Chicano 'gang' members," in an effort to subvert the hyper-aggressive expectations of Mexican Americans by the dominant society.⁶⁵ Conscious of the stereotypical view of Mexican Americans yet distanced from the heated emotions of the other characters, the Pachuco retains his cool and more effectively thinks about the consequences of actions, pointing out that "everybody's looking".⁶⁶ Often the Pachuco "represents the literal embodiment of Hank's unconscious."⁶⁷ Constantly skeptical of the white defense committee as well as the pachucos' chances of being found innocent, the Pachuco even goes so far as to disobey the judge's orders to stand at the beginning of the trial.⁶⁸ As a symbol of the rebellious pachuco subculture as a whole, the Pachuco retains that resistive nature, even when it would be conventionally inappropriate. While Hank Reyna might not be able to publicly undermine the judge, through the manifestation of his subconscious, he can protest.

Reactions to *Zoot Suit*

⁶⁵ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit* , 667.

⁶⁶ Valdez, *Zoot Suit*, 46.

⁶⁷ Fregoso, *Cultural Representation in Zoot Suit*, 667.

⁶⁸ Valdez, *Zoot Suit*, 52.

In a TV spot about *Zoot Suit*, many Chicanos, both involved in the play and not, commented on the legacy of the pachuco. Even the creator of the play himself claims that in his youth, he found pachucos “tremendously fearful and yet fascinating.”⁶⁹ A respectful curiosity is present in Valdez’s words, and clearly the impression stuck with him even years later. Louis R. Torres commented that the pachuco was “fiercely independent” and that he “created his own way of being,” a process which was familiar to Chicanos, as it was integral to the reformation of Chicano identity.⁷⁰ Bert Corona expressed the belief that Chicanos needed characters like El Pachuco to inspire them to make their voices heard.⁷¹ Drawing on the discrimination of the past and illustrating its continuation into the present, *Zoot Suit*’s Pachuco urged his audience to remember the discrimination still present in their society and take action against it. Reminding them that not all stories were ended or wrapped up nicely in the theatrical tradition, Chicanos would then hopefully take the message and active suggestions from *Zoot Suit* into their lives and continue the fight for equal rights beyond the theater.

Furthermore, the interviewed Chicanos of the TV spot commented on the preconceptions of pachucos. Mauricio Manzón commented on the irony of 1940s mindset of Mexican parents and Anglo society. Whereas “the Anglo community perceived the zoot suiters as being a by-product of the lowest kind of Mexican...the Mexican community perceived the zoot suiter as a by-product of assimilation.”⁷² Without the

⁶⁹ “Zoot Suit: The Play, The Promise ” (video). Accessed February, 2014. <http://stream.library.ucsb.edu/visual/1000/1154/cusb-v1154b.mov>

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

proper correction, these assumptions would survive in the subconscious and could contribute to the complex racial situations which continue in the United States. By reimagining the pachuco in a specific way, Valdez hoped to change perceptions and establish the pachuco as a prominent figure of resistive force. Juan Gomez-Quijiones espoused that the pachuco related a “sense of courage and nobility,” especially in his new *Zoot Suit* context. The Chicano Movement and *Zoot Suit* specifically, cultivated a greater depth to the pachuco figure. Connecting El Pachuco to an Aztec past amplified the air of nobility from the romanticized pachuco past to the reinterpretation of the rebellious Pachuco.

Other aspects of the play’s debut and the subsequent film’s release reveal lingering connections within the Chicano community to a pachuco-influenced past. Introducing an interview with Luis Valdez, Greg Barrios mentions that *Zoot Suit* was “initially performed in the downtown area of Los Angeles...in a theater that now occupies what was once a barrio where the pachuco roamed free.”⁷³ Echoing and celebrating this past, L.A. residents attending the play came out in zoot suits and lowrider cars, and had dance contests in celebration of the play and its message for Chicanos to take pride in themselves and their history.⁷⁴ In the interview with Barrios, Valdez commented that white greaser culture, like that portrayed in the film *Grease*, owes its existence to that of pachucos in the 1940s.⁷⁵ Functioning as inspiration as well as a reminder, *Zoot Suit*’s debut served to make visible a racial history of Los Angeles which many allowed to be

⁷³ Barrios Gregg, and Luis Valdez. “ZOOT SUIT: THE MAN, THE MYTH, STILL LIVES (A Conversation With Luis Valdez).” *Bilingual Review / La Revista Bilingüe* 10, no. 2/3 (May 1, 1983): 159–164;159.

⁷⁴ *Zoot Suit: The Play, The Promise*.

⁷⁵ Barrios, *Zoot Suit*, 162.

forgotten.

After the initial success of the play format, Valdez endeavored to translate the material to a film version. Building on his success with the theater work of El Teatro Campesino, Valdez wanted to bring his vision and message to a more mainstream platform in order to reach a wider audience. The success of the play allowed Valdez to have the freedom to “complete artistic control over the ultimate film production of his play.”⁷⁶ The logical next step after a touring theater production was a film interpretation of *Zoot Suit*. Despite the move to the mainstream, Valdez remained dedicated to the Chicano cause. In an interview he stated: “I did in fact go to Broadway and I’ve been to Hollywood but I’ve also come back.”⁷⁷ Encouraging other Chicanos to go out of the community, gain knowledge, and then return, Valdez’s varied attempts to spread the story of *Zoot Suit* demonstrated a way to generate new ways of thinking as well as continue to evolve the nature of the Chicano community. In support of the film medium, Valdez stated that because people are “image-oriented” they respond to symbols, meaning that film is a very natural medium for people.⁷⁸ Even had Valdez been set on spreading the play via publishing, he could not have. No one wanted to publish *Zoot Suit*, at least not in English. Valdez said that the companies claimed there “wasn’t a large enough market for it,” despite the fact that it was marketable enough to make a film version after the fact.⁷⁹ The idea that Mexican American stories were only for themselves and not for Americans at large still persisted, as this demonstrated. However, by creating

⁷⁶ Barrios, *Zoot Suit*, 159.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 161.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 164.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 164.

a more widely available film version, Valdez could hope to attract even more people, Chicano or otherwise.

As the Chicano movement developed its ideology, it relied on a cultural nationalism based on a past both real and imagined. By taking figures and stereotypes long derided by the dominant society, they were able to subvert the expectations thrust upon them by Anglo-Americans. Moreover, Chicanos were able to use a shared history to inspire their community into political action necessary to further equal rights for all. As pachucos were already associated with subversive actions, it was not a stretch for the Chicano movement to situate that subculture within a more political mindset. Connecting the pachuco with an indigenous past only strengthened him as a rallying symbol for resistive action against the dominant hierarchy. When Valdez wrote about the discrimination of Mexican Americans and pachucos during World War II, he not only situated the specific subculture of survival that these individuals developed within an indigenous past meant to unify their past experience with that of the Chicanos of Valdez's present, he also used the play to inspire current and future generations to action. Celebrating their difference as not-entirely Mexican yet not-entirely American, Chicanos turned a complex and confusing societal position into an identity of power and inspiration. Moreover, by giving the Chicano community symbolic archetypes to look up to, Chicano activists fostered unity through individual and collective identification.

CONCLUSION

Over the course of this project I have come to sympathize with both the pachucos of World War II and the later Chicanos taking inspiration from that earlier generation. The dominant culture of the United States leaves individuals of Mexican descent, as well as other minority groups, little choice but to attempt to assimilate into American society. However, that same dominant culture dislikes when such minority groups try to keep bits of their ethnic culture and dismisses assimilation efforts as not enough. On the other hand, while Mexican American families understand the need to assimilate into American society, the desire to maintain some aspects of Mexican culture remains. In effect, Mexican Americans are simultaneously too American and not American enough, too Mexican and not Mexican enough.

Rather than attempt to fit into two different identities, both pachucos and Chicanos chose to form their identities as they saw fit. Pachuco culture embraced aspects of Anglo-American culture, Mexican culture, and African American culture. Similarly, Chicanos turned to indigenous Aztec roots for spiritual and political inspiration. Combining the American experience of the pachucos with the indigenous past allowed Chicanos to infuse the pachuco with even greater meaning for the Mexican American working class, and elevated the pachuco to a symbolic status from which Chicanos would derive the inspiration to affect change in the community.

In an essay examining early 1980s Chicano art group ASCO, Michelle Habell-Pallán links the group's artistic commentary as expressed through style to the pachucos and pachucas of the 1940s. ASCO were inspired by the remaining effect of the pachuco subculture as it functioned as a "critique of social reality" and battle the marginality of youth of color.¹ Pachuco subculture and its affinity for zoot suits established a precedent of visual protestation of established hierarches and structures. Habell-Pallán argues that the "distortion...of proper middle-class attire and racialized codes of respectability" that the zoot suit embodied was the primary way for Mexican American youth to express their discontent in a society which denied their community a space to speak out against the dominant culture.² The continued effect of the pachuco subculture on multiple generations of Mexican Americans demonstrates the importance of their struggle and the significance of the symbolism imparted upon the pachuco figure by the Chicano movement.

¹ Habell-Pallán, Michelle, "The Style Council: Asco, Music, and 'Punk Chola' Aesthetics, 1980-84," in *ASCO: Elite of the Obscure: A Retrospective 1972-1987*, Chavoya, C. Ondine, Rita Gonzalez, David E. James, Amelia Jones, Chon A. Noriega, Jesse Lerner, Deborah Cullen, Maris Bustamante, Colin Gunckel, and David Roman (Hatje Cantz, 2011), 339.

² Ibid, 340.

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