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Crimes of Fashion The Pachuca and Chicana Style Politics

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In Mario Suárez's 1947 short story "Kid Zopilote," Pepe García, the protagonist, spends a summer in Los Angeles and returns to his hometown, Tucson, Arizona, speaking *caló*, the so-called pachuco patois, and wearing a zoot suit.¹ Pepe's flamboyant ensemble consists of a "long finger-tip coat," "plumed hat," pair of "thick-soled shoes," and "thick watch chain," from which a knife dangles. To his mother's chagrin, Pepe has become "a cursed pachuco," whom the people of Tucson mock and nickname "Kid Zopilote." Meanwhile, the young women whom Pepe dates are dubbed "Kiddas Zopilotas." Their attire is as spectacular as Pepe's: one wears "dresses so short they almost bared her garters"; another sports "shiny red slacks and a very high pompadour" (Suárez 1947, 131-32).

"Kid Zopilote" reveals an important generational difference in Mexican Americans' perceptions of the pachuco and zoot subculture.² Some Mexicans (most notably Octavio Paz) and Mexican Americans of Suárez's generation disparaged pachucos and the zoot subculture.³ Yet, beginning in the late 1960s, many Chicano writers and artists began to point to the zoot subculture of the early 1940s and, more specifically, to the Sleepy Lagoon incident of 1942 and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943 as crucial moments in the politicization of Mexican Americans and in the creation of an oppositional, rather than assimilationist, Chicano cultural identity.⁴ Furthermore, some valorized the pachuco as a hero, as the embodiment of Chicano resistance and style, and as a harbinger of the Chicano movement. Octavio Romano-V. (1969), for example, placed the pachuco within a pantheon of Mexican and Mexican-American champions, which included the nineteenth-century Californio bandit Joaquín



Figure 1. A YOUNG MEXICAN-AMERICAN MAN POSES IN HIS ZOOT SUIT (CIRCA 1942).

COURTESY LOWRIDER MAGAZINE (119) [1978]: 38

Murrieta and the Mexican revolutionary Pancho Villa. Tino Villanueva admired the stylish manner in which the pachuco “saunter[s],” “sway[s],” and “leans the wrong way/in assertion” in his 1974 poem “Pachuco Remembered” (40). And, on the eve of the premier of *Zoot Suit*, a play that features the pachuco as its protagonist, Luis Valdez declared the pachuco a “Chicano folk hero” and credited him with giving “impetus to the Chicano Movement of the 1960s” (1978, 3). In lauding the pachuco as a rebel and hero, these writers stressed that the zoot suit was more than a mere sartorial fad. Instead, they argued that the zoot suit functioned as a sign of defiance and difference—hence the violence to which its wearers were subjected during the early war years.⁵

Additionally, “Kid Zopilote” is valuable because it offers a contemporary glimpse (however brief) of pachucas, as represented by the “Kiddas Zopilotas.” The pachuca was the female counterpart to (and often the companion of) the pachuco. Like pachucos, pachucas had a distinctive look. Many teased their hair into high bouffants (called “rats”) and wore what was considered excessive makeup. They usually donned short skirts and long coats (Figure 2), and some wore the masculine version of the zoot suit (complete with “punjab” pants and “finger-tip” coats).

Angela McRobbie has charged that, within cultural studies, studies of “youth culture” have, by and large, emphasized “male youth cultural

forms” (McRobbie 1980, 37). She argues that prominent British subcultural theorists have defined “style” “as a male [and] never unambiguously masculine prerogative” (ibid., 43). Within Chicano studies, the style and subculture of pachucos have received much attention. As Vicki L. Ruiz observes, “Among Chicano historians and writers, there appears a fascination with the sons of immigrants, especially as pachucos” (Ruiz 1998, 53). Few scholars have examined, much less acknowledged, the participation of pachucas in the zoot subculture.⁶

This essay seeks to reinsert Mexican-American women—namely, pachucas—into narratives of the wartime zoot subculture. Moreover, it offers a narrative of Chicana style and Chicana style politics. By style, I refer to a signifying practice (in this case, the display of the zoot subculture’s codes via clothing, hair, and makeup). By style politics, I refer to an expression of difference via style. This expression of difference often relies upon and derives from conspicuous consumption. However, commodities, such as coats, lipstick, and trousers, are not used in the ways that they are used in “more orthodox cultural formations” (Hebdige 1989, 103). In fact, they may be used “in ways that alter or subvert their intended use-values” (Gaines 1985, 46).



Figure 2. A YOUNG WOMAN AND HER COMPANION (CIRCA 1942). SHE WEARS THE FEMININE VERSION OF THE ZOOT SUIT.

COURTESY LOWRIDER MAGAZINE (211) [1978]: 43

In addition, this essay negotiates the link between style, agency, and representation. Some scholarly discussions of style politics and subcultures have ascribed agency and intention to subjects without providing adequate historical evidence of either. At the same time, others have denied real men and women agency and intention by emphasizing perception and representation (specifically, by the dominant culture). Interviews that I conducted with Mexican-American women have shown me that those who wore zoot suits in Los Angeles during the early 1940s claimed to have done so for a number of reasons, ranging from the purely sartorial to the self-consciously political. Therefore, I am unable to ascribe a single meaning or intention to the zoot suit, its use, and its user. Still, I maintain that in the social context in which Mexican-American women wore zoot suits the collective donning of drapes and rats had meanings—and multiple, very complex ones at that. By locating the figure of the pachuca against the backdrop of wartime fears over the instability of class, gender, and race categories, and by comparing it to three other feminine archetypes in the wartime Angeleno press (the v-girl, the “feminine patriot,” and the female laborer), I show that the context in which the zoot suit was worn rendered it a political statement (Kelley 1994). Taking my lead from Robin D. G. Kelley (1994) and Curtis Márez (1996), I assert that pachucas, like their male counterparts, carved out a distinct generational and ethnic identity, defied middle-class ethics, aesthetics, and expectations, and affirmed the qualities of Chicana difference.⁷ Via style, they also challenged gender norms and redefined citizenship for working-class Mexican-American women in the United States.

I begin my analysis of the zoot suit and style politics with a discussion of pachucos and the masculine version of the zoot suit. Then, I examine representations of the pachuca and the feminine version of the zoot suit in World War II-era texts, including short fiction, scholarly essays, newspaper articles, and photographs. Like Inge Blackman and Kathryn Perry, I maintain that “[s]tyle may be subversive, but it can never become a substitute for direct political campaigning” (Blackman and Perry 1990, 78). However, I demonstrate that, in World War II-era Los Angeles, a time when and place where Mexican Americans were denied full citizenship, the zoot suit articulated (i.e., expressed and linked) the shared experiences of and a sense of collectivity among working-class Mexican-American youth.⁸

Class Anxieties, Class Aspirations, and “Fashionable Ghetto Adornments”

“Kid Zopilote” is about the making and breaking of a pachuco. The story portrays the pachuco, as represented by Pepe García, as slothful, aimless, and parasitical. Rather than work, Pepe spends his days listening to “the boogie woogie music of the juke box” at Kaiser’s Shoeshine Parlor and playing pinball at the Pastime Penny Arcade (Suárez 1947, 132). When he needs to pay for a marijuana fix, he sells “kick smokes” and “hustl[es] trade” for a prostitute (ibid., 135). Finally, Pepe is caught in a riot involving pachucos and “Mexicans from the high school whose dignities were being insulted by the fact that a few illogical people were beginning to see a zoot suit on every Mexican and every Mexican in a zoot suit” (ibid., 136). Along with several other pachucos, he is thrown in jail, where his zoot suit is ripped to shreds and his hair is shorn. Embarrassed by his “square” appearance, Pepe remains cloistered at home until his hair grows and he is able to comb it into a ducktail again.

Suárez depicts his protagonist as a scourge to upstanding Mexican Americans. Arturo Madrid-Barela asserts that for many Mexican-American servicemen who returned to the United States after World War II, the pachucos “on the street corners and in the billiard halls were not only an anachronism, but a menace to their quest for a slice of the American pie” (Madrid-Barela 1974, 48). In other words, pachucos like Pepe García were a menace to middle-class Mexican Americans and Mexican Americans with middle-class aspirations because pachucos occupied public space and appeared to embody the notion that Mexican Americans fulfilled (or could fulfill) racist stereotypes of the lazy Mexican. Indeed, the Mexican-American high-school students who beat Pepe, and the police officers who destroy his zoot suit and cut his hair, succeed in removing at least one pachuco from public view and confining him to his mother’s home (for a short while at least).

As “Kid Zopilote” illustrates, the zoot suit became a signifier of conspicuous leisure in the 1940s. During World War II, young, able-bodied men in drapes were visible hanging out and goofing off in places like the Pastime Penny Arcade in Suárez’s Tucson. Meanwhile, newspapers, magazines, and newsreels proclaimed that both brave servicemen overseas and patriotic citizens at home sacrificed much on behalf of the Allied war

effort. Thorstein Veblen has defined leisure as “non-productive consumption of time.” He explains that, in leisure, “[t]ime is consumed non-productively (1) from a sense of the unworthiness of productive work, and (2) as an evidence of pecuniary ability to afford a life of idleness” (Veblen 1992, 46). In addition to appearing as if they deemed “productive work” unworthy (i.e., appearing to be lazy), Mexican-American zoot-suiters demonstrated that they had the ability “to afford a life of idleness.” Like upper-class Americans, they could give the impression that they did not (or did not have to) work.

Of course, many zoot-suiters probably toiled long hours in order to purchase their drapes and to enjoy a few hours on a Saturday night playing pinball or dancing the jitterbug. After all, zoot suits were far from inexpensive and could have been read as “a symbol of the work ethic and pride” (Cummings 1994, 101). In his autobiography, Malcolm X remembers that he carefully saved his earnings in order to purchase his first zoot suit. He recalls that his second zoot suit, a sharkskin gray ensemble, cost “seventy or eighty dollars”—a remarkable sum of money for a hat, shirt, coat, pair of trousers, and pair of shoes for a working-class youth during the early 1940s (Malcolm X 1964, 58).

Still, regardless of how hard or how long a young man worked, the moment he shed his military uniform or factory coveralls for a zoot suit, he appeared to embody not only indolence, but profligacy. Thus, the zoot suit—a distortion of the sober business suit (a hallmark of middle-class masculinity and efficiency)—became a signifier of both conspicuous leisure and conspicuous consumption during World War II. By donning a costly zoot suit, the black or brown zoot-suiter “put his opulence in evidence” (Veblen 1992, 64), and announced to the world that he had the power to spend time and money alike. Indeed, a young, well-coifed, lavishly dressed Mexican American was an especially subversive sight to behold in wartime Los Angeles, a segregated city. In June 1943, while reporting the Zoot Suit Riots, the *New York Times* featured a photograph of one Frank H. Tellez, a twenty-two-year-old Hispanic male dressed in a zoot suit. In the caption beneath the photo, the *Times* disdainfully noted that Tellez’s coat was “part of a \$75 suit” and that his “trousers... [were] part of a \$45 suit.”⁹

By flaunting their “wealth,” working-class Mexican-American zoot-suiters underscored the instability of class and race categories. Via their clothing, they demonstrated that Mexican Americans could and would climb the social ladder. In fact, World War II saw increasing urbanization

and proletarianization of people of color in the United States.¹⁰ As Kelley (1994) and Pagán (1996) have noted, the zoot suit was instrumental in young Malcolm Little’s self-transformation from country bumpkin to urban hipster. Malcolm X recalls that when he arrived in Boston, he was “countrified” (Malcolm X 1964, 39), so he quickly acquired “fashionable ghetto adornments,” such as the zoot suit (ibid., 56). Likewise, Pepe García returns to Tucson proudly sporting “the *styleacho* in Los Angeles, Califo” (Suárez 1947, 131).¹¹

According to Veblen, clothing may function as a “method of advertisement” of the wearer’s class. “‘Loud’ dress becomes offensive to people of taste, as evincing an undue desire to reach and impress the untrained sensibilities of the vulgar” (Veblen 1992, 130). To wartime working-class youths, especially recent transplants from rural areas to urban centers, the zoot suit may have functioned as a status symbol because its wearers were working-class and urban, rather than poor and *del rancho*. However, to “people of taste”—in particular, middle- and upper-class Anglo-Americans and Mexican Americans—the zoot suit may have appeared “loud” (i.e., excessive) and pretentious precisely because many of its wearers were working-class and “ghetto.” What the “loud” zoot suit announced was that Mexican Americans—especially young, second-generation, bilingual Mexican Americans—would not stay in their place—whether that place was social (e.g., lower-class or subservient) or physical. By loitering at street corners and outside billiard halls, pachucos made themselves visible. They claimed public space for themselves and “challenged the boundaries of segregation” (Pagán 1996, 202).

If Looks Could Kill

In addition to reporting the alleged cost of Frank Tellez’s zoot suit, the *New York Times* added that Tellez was not fighting for his country because, like Malcolm Little, he “[held] a medical discharge from the army.” Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Daily News* announced that, even though numerous pachucos were physically capable of joining the military, they did not serve their country because of their reputation for being unruly. “Scores of husky 18, 19 and 20-year-old zooters are escaping from military service because army officials are admittedly against accepting them for fear they will ‘be too much trouble,’” the paper reported on June 8, 1943.¹²

During World War II, Los Angeles' four dominant newspapers played an important role in portraying young Mexican Americans as unpatriotic.¹³ Immediately following the Sleepy Lagoon incident, the *Los Angeles Times*, for example, reported that a juvenile court judge declared that Mexican-American delinquents shamed and, therefore, betrayed the United States. The judge claimed that the young men were a "disgrace to America," adding, "he who shames America in wartime is a traitor to the democracy that shelters him." Less than one year later (during the Zoot Suit Riots), the *Los Angeles Daily News* proclaimed that the second-generation, Mexican-American boy "was not ready yet to accept the responsibilities of democracy."¹⁴

In particular, wartime Angeleno newspapers emphasized that Mexican Americans were foreign and, therefore, subversive. For instance, during the riots, they effectively declared Mexican Americans an internal enemy as they juxtaposed stories about "youthful 'pachuco' gangs" with stories about alleged disloyalty among Japanese Americans and disgruntled American laborers.¹⁵ At the same time, rumors circulated that communists and Nazi agents had infiltrated the *barrio* and were attempting to impress alienated, second-generation, Mexican-American youth in an effort to foment social unrest on the home front and to strain the United States' relationship with its Latin American allies (Mazón 1984). As Captain Edward Duran Ayres of the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department had argued nearly one year earlier (during the Sleepy Lagoon investigation and trial), Mexicans appeared to be more akin to "Orientals" and, thus, the Japanese enemy, than to Americans of European descent.¹⁶ Like Japanese Americans, Mexican Americans exceeded the putative black-white binary of American racial identity. One contemporary sociologist remarked that they "straddle[d] our differentiation between white and colored minorities" (Frazier 1942, 371). As racial and cultural hybrids, they represented a threatening, alien ambiguity during a period of heightened xenophobia, jingoism, and paranoia.

The zoot suit itself appeared to accentuate a Mexican-American boy's allegedly inherent disloyalty. With its exaggerated shoulders, long coat, and ballooning trousers (that sometimes stretched from the armpits to the ankles), the masculine version of the zoot suit was considered un-American and an affront to the war effort. In March 1942, the War Production Board (WPB) issued Order L-224, which mandated a reduction in the use of fabric in the manufacture of men's suits and all clothing containing wool (Walton 1945; Cosgrove 1984). The regulation effectively

prohibited the production of zoot suits and rendered them symbols of individual extravagance during a period of collective austerity. During the Zoot Suit Riots, the *Los Angeles Daily News* quoted a WPB spokesperson who warned, "Every boy who buys such a garment [i.e., a zoot suit] and every person who sells it is really doing an unpatriotic deed."¹⁷

In his essay on Malcolm X's participation in the zoot subculture, Kelley asserts that "most zoot suiters were able-bodied men who refused to enlist or found ways to dodge the draft" (Kelley 1994, 166). In fact, in his autobiography, Malcolm X describes how he avoided the draft during World War II by wearing "the wildest zoot suit in New York" to the induction center and "talk[ing] and act[ing] high and crazy" in front of military officials (Malcolm X 1964, 104-5). Nonetheless, some zoot-suiters may have been off-duty servicemen or young men who had not yet reached draft age. Furthermore, it is important to keep in mind that many youths who donned zoot suits may not have considered themselves unpatriotic. However, as Kelley points out, "While the suit itself was not meant as a direct political statement, the social context in which it was worn rendered it so" (Kelley 1994, 166). Pachucos had the privilege of expressing individual panache through their attire and language, whereas servicemen forfeited all sense of individuality when they joined the military. Young enlistees and draftees were required to leave their friends and family at home, to cut their hair, and to wear uniforms. Their superiors dictated how they would spend most hours in a day, where and when they would face combat, and in some situations, whether they would live or die. Hence, it comes as no surprise that in Los Angeles the clean-cut serviceman—in particular, the clean-cut, white serviceman—seemed to represent the epitome of self-sacrifice and patriotism; while the male zoot-suiter—namely, the able-bodied, male zoot-suiter of Mexican descent—became his antithesis.

Clothes Make the Man

In addition to embodying laziness, urban pretension, and youthful extravagance, the pachuco, as "Kid Zopilote" illustrates, embodied feminine narcissism during World War II. In its first report of the Zoot Suit Riots, the *Los Angeles Times* described male zoot-suiters as "gamin dandies." The paper assured its readers that zoot-suiters were now "staying home nights" because of the "great moral lesson" the rampaging

servicemen had taught them.¹⁸ Like Pepe García, Los Angeles' pachucos were feminized by their removal from public space and their confinement to the domain of women and girls: the home.

Several scholars have argued that servicemen symbolically castrated pachucos when they beat them, cut their hair, and "unpanted" (i.e., defrocked) them during the Zoot Suit Riots (Adler 1970; Mazón 1984; Mirandé 1987; Wyatt 1997). According to Mauricio Mazón, the riots enabled servicemen to reenact their own experiences in basic training, "a symbolically castrating experience, a death initiation rite." During basic training, recruits "were hauled into depersonalized lines[,] swiftly given a haircut, 'unpanted,' and put into the drab nondescript garb of the recruit's uniform" (Mazón 1984, 87). Although servicemen symbolically castrated zoot-suiters, they also attempted to force their victims to conform to a narrow definition of masculinity (as well as to a narrow definition of Americanness). That is, the servicemen masculinized (and Americanized) what many perceived as the effeminate and foppish pachuco.

Even though some contemporary commentators charged that the pachuco, like other working-class men, was excessively masculine (Humphrey 1945; Paz 1961), others belittled him as feminine and, therefore, deviant. In a 1944 article, psychiatrist Ralph S. Banay, for example, complained that male zoot-suiters paid too much attention to their hair and clothing, and too little to athletics and their studies. As if they took their cue from Banay's article, the pachucos in "Kid Zopilote" primp themselves before a mirror above a scale at Kaiser's Shoeshine Parlor, rather than weigh themselves. And even though the masculine version of the zoot suit accentuated the male physique with its broad shoulders and cinched waist (Sanchez-Tranquilino 1987), it was still denigrated as feminine. Banay likened the male zoot-suiter's knee-length coat to a skirt: "...in jitterbugging the tail of the long coat swirls like a girl's skirt in a pirouette" (Banay 1944, 84). Similarly, *Colliers* reporter Walter Davenport compared the male zoot-suiter's billowing trousers to a full skirt and noted, "From the midriff to the hips they're as snug as a prewar girdle" (Davenport 1942, 26). Another contemporary observer opined that the male zoot-suiter's "coat hips fit...like sister's pre-war girdle" (Walton 1945, 129). Together, the coat and trousers emphasized a "girlish waist" (Davenport 1942, 24).

According to Banay, the zoot suit was "evidence of an adolescent neurosis." It indicated a "chaotic" and "ill-defined" sexuality (Banay 1944, 84). Male zoot-suiters were sexually confused, he argued, and, therefore, emotionally unstable and aggressive. Banay even attributed the Zoot Suit Riots to emotional instability and aggression on the part of Mexican-American male zoot-suiters. In comparing the pachuco and the white sailor, he observed that the former concealed his masculinity with long, curly hair, a long coat, and a pair of baggy trousers that "completely hid... the genital characteristics." The latter, on the other hand, "emphasized if not delineated his masculine development" with "his short blouse and tight-fitting trousers." Banay concluded "There should be little wonderment that in Los Angeles the two extremes led to violent clash" (84).¹⁹

Clothes Encounters in the Streets of L.A.

Like their male counterparts, pachucas challenged wartime race and class categories by appearing to celebrate conspicuous consumption and unconventionality during a period of enforced austerity and social homogenization. As American propaganda campaigns attempted to weld the home front into a spartan economic army "willing to make sacrifices for the good of American soldiers" (Honey 1984, 6), pachucas claimed for themselves the prizes of proletarianization and urbanization and, at the same time, appeared to indulge in indolent activities (including inactivity). Although most women's zoot suits probably required less fabric than men's zoot suits, they, too, flouted rationing regulations. In March 1942, the WPB issued Order L-85, which set restrictions on women's apparel. Order L-85 "attempted to control yardage" and "introduced what was called the 'silhouette': a uniform dress design to be worn by all American women (Walton 1945, 76). Despite the WPB mandate, many pachucas continued to sport long coats, which required a relatively large amount of fabric. During the Zoot Suit Riots, the *Saint Paul Pioneer Press* in Minnesota quoted a Los Angeles pachuca who defiantly declared, "I paid \$75 for my outfit and nobody is going to take it off me, either."²⁰

Additionally, pachucas challenged wartime gender norms by venturing into the public sphere (namely, the street, courtroom, and police station). While Pepe García revels in the attention he receives when he wears his

zoot suit, “decent” (i.e., sheltered, modest) Mexican-American women were to remain invisible. As Ruiz’s work has shown, numerous young Mexican-American women in the first half of the twentieth century were not permitted to leave their parents’ homes unless they were accompanied by a chaperone, especially at night (Ruiz 1993; 1998).

Immediately following the Sleepy Lagoon incident, Los Angeles’ most widely read newspapers (and a national magazine) splashed photographs of young Mexican-American women *qua* pachucas across their pages. The press featured incriminating, sensationalist photographs of young women in courtrooms and police stations (in one instance, they were photographed in a police line-up).²¹ Meanwhile, *La Opinión*, Los Angeles’ Spanish-language daily with the greatest circulation, condemned pachucas for causing a public uproar. According to the newspaper, pachucas shamelessly drew attention to themselves by wearing disgraceful attire, by dragging their feet as they walked, and by fighting in the street (“*refirir en la vía pública*”).²²

By participating in what Hebdige (1989) terms a “spectacular” subculture (i.e., a visible, public, youth culture), pachucas transgressed both physical and social boundaries. As public women, they “refused to be contained by domesticity or limited by the prevailing orthodoxy of appropriate female behavior” (Fregoso 1999, 78). They took part in (and publicly claimed for themselves) a youth culture—in particular, one that was associated with adolescent rebellion and criminality. In her study of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century working-class women in New York, Kathy Peiss observes that “youth” is often the prerogative of middle-class teenagers who have the privilege of “nurtur[ing] a separate culture in high schools and colleges,” rather than of those young people who “fe[el] the pinch of financial responsibility at an early age and subordinate...individual desires to the family’s survival” (Peiss 1986, 56). Although many pachucas may have labored on behalf of their families inside and/or outside the home, they also nurtured “a separate culture” distinctive from that of their parents. In doing so, they appeared to privilege individual desires over the family’s survival (as well as the nation’s survival). Hence, it should come as no surprise that *La Opinión* branded pachucas *malinches* (i.e., feminine traitors).²³ By participating in the zoot subculture, pachucas seemed to betray the United States during wartime, middle-class standards of feminine respectability, and working-class expectations of the dutiful daughter.

Dressed to Thrill

Undeniably, pachucas were not the only women to deviate from the confines of domesticity during World War II. Increasing numbers of women, including wives and mothers, left their homes in order to work. For many Americans, World War II threatened conventional gender roles and family patterns (Anderson 1981; Bérubé 1990; Costello 1985; Dabakis 1993; Hartmann 1978; Higonnet et al. 1987; Honey 1984; Lingeman 1976; Meyer 1996; Rupp 1978). While numerous women sought jobs outside the home, many men left their families to join the military or to seek employment in centers of war industry. Migration, housing shortages, and childcare problems threatened to tear families apart. Marriage, birth, and divorce rates surged (Anderson 1981).

The exigencies of war left many youngsters—male and female alike—unsupervised and, as a consequence, in trouble with the law. World War II saw “new patterns of adolescent behaviour” and, subsequently, the emergence of a new social category: that of the “juvenile delinquent” (Cosgrove 1984, 80). Increasing numbers of girls under the age of seventeen years were arrested for violent crime and “sex delinquency,” such as prostitution (Anderson 1981; Lingeman 1976; Reckless 1942). “Sex delinquency” among girls and young women drew the attention of public officials, scholars, and the media. The Office of Community War Services’ Social Protection Division sought women “whose conduct indicated that they might be sexually active outside the institution of marriage” in order to “provide them with medical treatment, if necessary, and with punishment and/or rehabilitative counseling” (Anderson 1981, 104). Additionally, Congress attempted to curb the proliferation of sexually transmitted diseases among servicemen by prohibiting houses of prostitution near military bases with the May Act of 1941. Meanwhile, the Army and Navy offered sex education classes and issued prophylactics to servicemen (Bailey and Farber 1992; Campbell 1984; Lingeman 1976; Meyer 1996).

Despite such efforts, the number of STDs continued to rise in the United States and among servicemen in particular during the early war years. Sociologist Ernest W. Burgess attributed the dramatic increase in “venereal infection” among servicemen to the “prevalence...of...trailer camps” outside military bases, whose denizens often included Victory Girls (Burgess 1942, 343). Also known as “v-girls,” “free girls,” and “khacky-wackies,” Victory Girls were young women who allegedly

pursued sexual relations with servicemen to do their part for the Allied war effort. D'Ann Campbell asserts that they did not simply take advantage of the looser mores of wartime, "but felt they were 'doing something for their country' when they had sex with soldiers." What's more, v-girls supposedly "would not think of having sexual relations with a civilian" and "refused money for their services" (Campbell 1984, 208). Richard R. Lingeman concedes that the v-girl "was next door to being a prostitute," but adds, "...there was about her at least a certain refreshing lack of cold professionalism" (Lingeman 1976, 88). In contrast, a March 1943 *Colliers* story declared that some v-girls had "no objection to the money in it." The magazine reported that a sixteen-year-old girl who charged servicemen one dollar each for sex had amassed thirty dollars at the end of one busy night (Winter 1943, 52).

Enter the pachuca. With her reputation for fighting and talking back—combined with her short skirt, high hair, and "loud" makeup—she appeared to embody wartime fears of both juvenile delinquency and unbridled female sexuality. Not surprisingly, the pachuca's critics paid close attention to what they perceived as her dangerous sexuality. During the Zoot Suit Riots, for example, the *Los Angeles Herald-Express* emphasized "'zoot girls'" alleged promiscuity. The newspaper claimed that pachucas engaged in "free relationships" with pachucos, adding, "[w]hatever sexual activity there is...it does not bear the stain of prostitution for the gang girl gives herself freely if she likes the boy. If she doesn't she knifes him or has other girls in her gang attack him." In addition, the *Herald-Express* described pachucas' appearance in extremely titillating terms. It asserted that most wore extreme mini-skirts—"sometimes twelve inches above the knee." The newspaper determined that, while "zoot girls" were "not particularly clean," they were "always 'sharp-looking,'" "cute," and "charming." Above all, a pachuca, according to the *Herald-Express*, was "always very sexy looking."²⁴

Similarly, *La Opinión* described pachucas as physically and morally impure. The newspaper claimed that the young women wore very short, black skirts ("*falda negra muy corta*"), and that they punctuated their racy ensembles with a bushy head of matted hair soaked in grease ("*un greñero empabilado de grasa*"). The upstanding, middle-class editors also lamented that pachucas painted their faces—in particular, their lips and eyes—in a scandalous manner ("*una manera escandalosa*"), and insinuated that the

young women were prostitutes by referring to their male companions as pimps ("*explotadores de mujeres*").²⁵

Turning his attention from undersexed pachucos to oversexed "zoot suit girls," Banay asserted that the latter emphasized "their secondary sexual characteristics in...very tight sweaters and Basque shirts with broad vertical stripes of many colors" (Banay 1944, 81). The psychiatrist noted that jitterbugging "exaggerate[d] their...sexuality" (ibid., 84), and compared the athletic dance to a strip tease show because it supposedly provided a bystander with glimpses of a young female dancer's "v-shaped underwear" (ibid., 81). What's more, he contended that female zoot-suiters were just as wild and promiscuous as their male counterparts, for "both sexes are reported to take part in drunken mass sexual releases" (ibid.).

Both the pachuca's friends and foes underscored what they saw as her exotic sexuality. In *American Me*, a 1947 collection of essays and short stories about the Mexican-American zoot subculture in and around Los Angeles, Beatrice Griffith, a social worker sympathetic to the needs and concerns of Mexican-American adolescents, observed that pachucas adorned their bodies with mascara, lipstick, earrings, flowers, and "short, full skirt[s]" that revealed their "brown knees" (Griffith 1947b, 47). She added, "As important as the costume itself was the manner in which it was worn. A bravado and swagger accentuated the dark beauty of these girls, an impudence that was attractive to all males, light or dark. Many of these Pachuquitas were 'little tornadoes of sexual stimuli, swishing and flouncing down the streets'" (ibid.).²⁶

For several contemporary observers, the pachuca's sexuality was hyperbolic and grotesque: as one *Herald Express* commentator noted, she was "not particularly clean"; her hair was matted and greasy; and she "exaggerate[d]," and "accentuated" her sexuality. In short, the pachuca's style was often described as excessive: she wore her skirt short, her hair big, and her makeup loud. In other words, pachucas looked "tacky" (i.e., extravagant) and "cheap" (i.e., sexually available and/or oversexed) according to middle-class standards of femininity. Sherry B. Ortner has observed that "the working class is cast as the bearer of an exaggerated sexuality, against which middle-class respectability is defined" (Ortner 1991, 177). As working-class women who wore "very shiny" attire and "very high" coiffures, pachucas were denigrated as oversexed and were

excluded from middle-class definitions of feminine beauty and respectability. Ironically, even though their makeup and garments may have been signs of disposable income and evidence of class mobility, they marked them as “trashy” and “vulgar.” That is, they marked pachucas as lower-class and, thus, as sexually available.

Although some pachucas may have actively dismissed middle-class standards of feminine beauty and respectability, many did not regard themselves as indecent or depraved.²⁷ However, as Julie Bettie observes in her recent study of girls at a California high school, “[i]n spite of the meanings that working-class girls themselves g[i]ve to their gender-specific cultural markers, their performances [a]re always overdetermined by broader cultural meanings that code women in heavy makeup and tight clothes as oversexed—in short, cheap” (Bettie 2000, 17). Thus, even though many young, zoot-clad, working-class women may not have considered themselves fast and loose, many Anglo-Americans and Mexican Americans perceived them as such.

Dressed to Kill

As Griffiths’ comments regarding pachucas’ “brown knees” and “dark beauty” make explicit, pachucas’ sexuality was defined in terms of not only gender and class, but also race. After the Sleepy Lagoon incident and throughout the Zoot Suit Riots, the mainstream Angeleno press emphasized that pachucas were not quite white (specifically, it underscored their blackness). References to the “Black Widows,” an alleged pachuca gang, and pachucas’ black coats, black skirts, and black trousers abounded. The focus on pachucas’ darkness (in relation to complexion and/or clothing) functioned to make them appear all the more menacing. It proclaimed them not only impure, but foreign and, therefore, subversive.²⁸

With her “cheap” looks and brown complexion, the dark-skinned pachuca provided a sharp contrast to other wartime feminine archetypes, such as the stereotypical v-girl, the “feminine patriot” featured in American popular and mass media, and Rosie the Riveter. Although many Rosie the Riveters were in fact Mexican-American (Gluck 1987; Ruiz 1993; Ruiz 1998), and some Mexican-American women may have been v-girls or “feminine patriots,” by and large, all three feminine archetypes were portrayed in the mainstream American media as white.

In general, v-girls, like pachucas, were perceived as promiscuous (and as a public health threat). Yet, for the most part, the former were considered patriotic, whereas the latter were vilified as un-American and treacherous.²⁹ In contrast, the “feminine patriot” was depicted as a pure, frail woman who remained at home. During World War II, American propaganda campaigns actively feminized American women by rendering them “symbols of the besieged nation.” That is, propagandists depicted “feminine patriots”—specifically, white, middle-class housewives and mothers—as the embodiment of a stable, vulnerable home front in need of protection. In short, such women “...came to stand for those cherished qualities that had been snuffed out by carnage and danger: innocence, gentleness, idealism, continuity and safety” (Honey 1984, 6–7).

Whether male or female, many Mexican-American zoot-suiters—in particular, those with dark skin and Indian features—appeared to be foreigners because of race. Furthermore, contemporary observers’ comments indicate that the pachuca represented the antithesis of purity and vulnerability. After all, pachucas hung out in the street, ignored austerity measures by wearing finger-tip coats, and teased their hair into rats. Meanwhile, the “Women’s Activities” section of the *Los Angeles Examiner* heralded “ultimate daintiness” as the most important characteristic of a woman’s appearance and urged “feminine patriots” to roll their curls into the letter “V” (for “victory”).³⁰

Unlike the archetypal “feminine patriot,” Rosie the Riveter (i.e., a woman who entered the work force and performed jobs from which women had traditionally been excluded) was far from dainty. And, like the pachuca, she appeared to threaten gender norms. In his famous cover illustration for the 29 May 1943 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*, Norman Rockwell portrayed Rosie the Riveter as androgynous, if not downright masculine. According to Lingeman, contemporary popular novels, films, and cartoons reflected growing concern with the “‘amazon image’ of the lady war worker.” One contemporary observer fretted that it was difficult to distinguish female welders from their male counterparts and announced that “a new type of tough girl” had emerged: the “New Amazon,” who allegedly could “outdrink, outswear, [and] outswagger the men” (Lingeman 1976, 153–54).

While pictures and newsreels of women working in coveralls were to inspire patriotism, the working woman, like the “feminine patriot” who

remained at home, was required to “remain pretty and feminine For the Boys [sic]” (Lingeman 1976, 150). She was still supposed to wear lipstick, but in moderation. In short, American women were called upon to contribute to the war effort by sacrificing their allegedly innate femininity as they entered the labor force. At the same time, American women—namely, white American women—were expected to do their part for the war by being pretty and ladylike, for they not only remained at home, they embodied the home front. Although American government propaganda and women’s magazines urged acceptance of women in jobs historically held by men, they also highlighted female laborers’ femininity (Rupp 1987). That is, they stressed that women enter the labor force as self-sacrificing, self-effacing, soldier-oriented patriots, rather than as self-interested, ambitious, independent, career-minded individuals. As Rupp has observed, “[T]he appeal to patriotism usually took on a personalized cast, urging women to work for their men.... Such an appeal made use of a concept of extended motherhood” (Rupp 1987, 156). Women were called upon to do what they had always been expected to do within the confines of the domestic sphere—i.e., to care “for the boys” (their sons, husbands, boyfriends, and brothers). The war merely demanded that they do so outside the home.

Pachucas may have appeared feminine, albeit dangerously so. Their short skirts and use of cosmetics were not read as proof of conformity, but as a declaration of insubordination. Their behavior, in contrast, was condemned as masculine. Indeed, pachucas seemed to exemplify the dreaded “New Amazon.” In addition to flaunting their sexuality, they allegedly drank whiskey, smoked marijuana, formed gangs, talked back, cursed, and fought in public. During the Sleepy Lagoon investigation and trial, Los Angeles’ four major newspapers highlighted “revelations of...screaming, hair-pulling girls,” “girl hoodlums,” and “girl ‘gangsterettes.’” Front-page headlines blared, “Black Widow Girls in Boy Gangs” and “Girls Join in Youthful Gang Forays Here.” In an editorial published in the wake of the Sleepy Lagoon incident, the *Los Angeles Herald-Express* quipped, “Particularly disturbing in one of the new outbreaks was the participation of several girls. It was hoped that the prevalent delinquency might be confined to the boys who stand accused.” Meanwhile, the *Los Angeles Times* announced that “girl gangs also exist in certain districts of Los Angeles city and county.” The four dominant English-language newspapers and *La Opinión* declared that female gangs with lurid names, such as the “Black Widows,” the “Cherry Gang,” and the

“Bowlegs,” terrorized the city and county. The *Times* enticed its readers with reports that “several girl witnesses” had divulged “[d]etails of strange rites through which new members must pass before being admitted to membership.”³¹

Marilyn Domer remarks that, in the months leading up to the Zoot Suit Riots, many Los Angeles newspapers presented young Mexican-American women as “an integral part of...gang activities and nearly as immoral and vicious as the boys” (Domer 1955, 62). When the riots broke, the papers reported that pachucas jumped and slashed a lone woman; taunted innocent high school girls; attempted a carjacking; and prolonged the riots by continuing to instigate brawls after their male companions had been arrested and/or hospitalized.³² One contemporary observer noted, “Rumors of all varieties circulated over every bar and soda fountain,” including one about “[n]ine pachuca girls with knives in their hair [who] had been arrested and had confessed to a pact to seduce and murder sailors” (Tuck 1946, 217). This rumor in particular seems to have encapsulated the multiple threats that the pachuca represented: criminality, dangerous sexuality, and subversion.

The *Herald-Express* presented some of the most lurid accounts of the alleged activities of “pachuco girls” during the Zoot Suit Riots. On June 5, 1943, it claimed that a “girl zoot suiter” had attacked and robbed a sixteen-year-old boy: “The girl, about 20, and wearing the long zoot coat over a black skirt tucked into dark slacks, laid [her victim] out with a blow to his chin.” Then, on June 7, 1943, the newspaper reported that a gang of zoot-suiters, including one “girl zoot suiter,” beat and robbed a soldier in a café in downtown Los Angeles. According to the victim, “four zoot suiters beat him up and held him while the girl went through his pockets, getting \$15.” The following day, the *Herald-Express* announced that the police had arrested two “‘zoot-suit’ girls, in their black blouses and slacks,” and that “large groups of ‘zoot’ girls [were] working with the male gangsters.”³³

As the violence of the Zoot Suit Riots began to subside, the *Herald-Express* published an especially inflammatory story entitled “Girl ‘Zoot Suiters’ Gird to Join Gangland Battle” on June 10, 1943. The newspaper warned that “girl ‘auxiliaries’ to masculine mobs might be preparing to prolong the ‘Battle of Gangland.’” Then, the following day, in what appeared to be a blatant, last-ditch effort to fuel the riots, the *Herald-Express* announced that merchants in Watts had reported that “all their black shirts and green sweaters sold out as ‘pachuco girls’ outfitted

themselves to join their menfolk in the mob disorders.” The newspaper purported to lament the involvement of the “pachuquitas” in the street clashes—“just when the boy gangs were about to shed their zoot suits wholesale and lie low before the civilian and military forces massing against them.” The story concluded with the “female mobsters” alleged declaration: “We won’t quit.... It’s them or us.”³⁴

Fashion Crimes, Fashion Police

Additionally, the *Herald-Express* declared that pachucas not only behaved like men; they dressed like men. During the riots, the paper stressed that many of the pachucas who were arrested for allegedly attacking servicemen wore pants. Moreover, it announced that some pachucas cross-dressed. In one story, the *Herald-Express* claimed that they “[s]ometimes...wear the peg-topped slacks and the long coats of their masculine counterparts.” In another story, it asserted that “girl gangsters who can afford it have taken to wearing custom made slack suits—the exact replica of the boys’ suits.”³⁵

The *Herald-Express*’ sensationalist stories aside, there is evidence that some women, including Mexican Americans, wore the masculine version of the zoot suit during the 1940s. In their study of lesbians in Buffalo, New York, during the 1940s and 1950s, Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline Davis interview a white woman and self-described femme by the name of Pearl who recalls “get[ting] real...brave[,]” pinning her hair up, and wearing the masculine version of the zoot suit on occasion (Kennedy and Davis 1993, 156). In addition, in June 1943, the *California Eagle*, an independent, black-owned newspaper in Los Angeles, featured advertisements for “Drapesuits, Coats and Pants for Men, Boys and Women” (italics added). While this is not proof that African-American women wore the masculine version of the zoot suit during the early 1940s, it is evidence that they may have been available to them.³⁶

Yet, what happened when a Mexican-American woman donned the masculine version of the zoot suit during World War II, a period in which gender norms were simultaneously threatened and reinforced? A photograph published in a 1978 issue of *Lowrider* magazine presents a woman wearing the masculine version of the zoot suit, complete with a double-breasted finger-tip coat, a pair of billowing trousers, and what appears to

Figure 3.



COURTESY LOWRIDER MAGAZINE (216) [1978]: 22

be a tie (Figure 3). The woman stands with a man and two other women. (The caption beneath the photo reads: “1942: La Dora, El Paul, La Lupe y La Chubby. Q-vo raza.”) She holds her head high—almost cocked at an upward angle—and looks into the camera. Yet, despite her raiment and pose, the cross-dressed woman does not appear entirely masculine by early twenty-first-century standards, for she wears her hair long and in a pompadour, the same style as the two other women in the photograph.³⁷

However, according to middle-class standards of femininity during World War II, the cross-dressed woman in the photograph is still far from feminine. After all, she wears pants and, although increasing numbers of working-class American women wore pants during this period, they were not entirely acceptable for middle-class American women until later in the twentieth century (Crane 2000, 123–24).³⁸ As Lingeman comments, “[N]ice girls’ didn’t wear slacks” during World War II (Lingeman 1976, 150). In particular, “nice” Mexican-American girls did not wear slacks. Shortly after the Zoot Suit Riots, the *Eastside Journal*, an independent East Los Angeles newspaper, published a photograph of a group of young Mexican-American women who gathered together to protest articles in the Angeleno press that “defamed” young Mexican-American women by

"infer[ing] that [their] moral characters were questionable."³⁹ The women stressed that they were honor students, high school graduates, and patriotic defense plant workers and added that none "ha[d] ever been in trouble with the law." In the photograph, seventeen of the eighteen self-described "young ladies" wear dresses, ribbons, and high heels. Only one woman, who sits a short distance from the others in the photograph's far right-hand corner, dons slacks.⁴⁰

As the *Eastside Journal* photograph reveals, dresses, ribbons, and high heels signified feminine decency. They simultaneously produced and confirmed the young women in the photograph as "nice girls" and "young ladies," labels associated at times with working-class femininity, but, more often than not, with middle- or upper-class femininity. Wearing not only pants, but the masculine version of the zoot suit, a sign of working-class masculinity, the cross-dressed woman in *Lowrider* magazine does not appear to be a "lady," for the zoot suit she wears was a sign of criminality: it signified juvenile delinquency and treachery to the nation during wartime. Moreover, women who cross-dressed in public (or who failed to wear at least three articles of women's clothing) could be arrested for "male impersonation" during the 1940s and 1950s (L. Davis 1992; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Nestle 1987). In short, in the dominant Anglo- and Mexican-American cultures of the period, the zoot suit signified illicit activity and street-smarts, which, as Reina Lewis and Katrina Rolley point out, are now regarded as "signifiers of butch bar-dyke culture of the 1950s" (Lewis and Rolley 1996, 85).⁴¹

Yet, is the cross-dressed woman in the *Lowrider* magazine photograph butch (i.e., a woman who is "more comfortable with masculine gender codes, styles, or identities than with feminine ones" [Rubin 1992, 467])? One may argue that she is not butch because she is easily identifiable as a woman. At the same time, one may argue that the cross-dressed woman is indeed butch precisely because she is identifiable as a woman. Distinguishing butches from cross-dressed women who passed as men, Kennedy and Davis note, "The masculine image that butches projected [in the 1940s] was of necessity ambiguous—otherwise they would have been passing women, not butches" (Kennedy and Davis 1992, 64). And, as Nestle recounts, "None of the butch women I was with...ever presented themselves to me as men; they did announce themselves as tabooed women who were willing to identify their passion for other women by wearing clothes that symbolized the taking of responsibility" (Nestle 1987, 100). In other words, the effect of butchness, for Nestle and the

women Kennedy and Davis interview at least, is predicated upon ambiguity, upon the presence (and/or appearance) of an identifiable female body clothed in masculine garments.⁴²

What's more, one may argue that the cross-dressed woman in *Lowrider* is butch because her attire signifies a working-class identity. In discussing the gender effects of class, Garber argues that terms like "crude" and "rough" may connote "lower-class behavior" (Garber 1992, 64). The "crude" or "rough" woman—in other words, the butch, the bull dyke, the bulldagger—is often associated with the lower or working classes, who historically have been deemed oversexed in relation to the middle and upper classes (Case 1989; Garber 1992; Kennedy and Davis 1993; Livia 1995; Meyer 1996; Nestle 1987). Thus, by donning identifiably working-class, masculine garb, the cross-dressed woman in *Lowrider* magazine becomes butch. That the zoot suit as worn by young men in the 1940s was actively feminized and homoeroticized by contemporary observers points to yet another set of transgressive associations.

Unlike the stereotypical v-girl, the pure and frail "feminine patriot" featured in American propaganda, and the ideal "lady war worker," the pachuca did not seem to serve "the boys" in the military as either an ersatz mother or a dutiful sexual partner (despite her reputation as sexually loose). As the mainstream Angeleno newspapers of the early 1940s illustrate, pachucas were not portrayed as patriotic, nurturing, or maternal; nor did they personify vulnerability, innocence, or family life. On the contrary, pachucas represented the antithesis of proper (i.e., middle- or upper-class) femininity and/or Americanness. They wore risqué attire and associated with "mobsters." They allegedly formed gangs, smoked "loco weed," and got into fistfights. Some even cross-dressed. In short, pachucas betrayed gender norms and, in doing so, they betrayed the nation during wartime.

While the mainstream press rendered the bodies of the stereotypical v-girl, the "feminine patriot," and Rosie the Riveter intelligible by emphasizing their alleged patriotism and femininity, the pachuca's body was unintelligible to American nationalism during World War II. Susan Bordo defines the "intelligible body" as

our scientific, philosophical, and aesthetic representations of the body—our cultural conceptions of the body, norms of beauty, models of health, and so forth. But the same representations may also be seen as forming a set of practical rules and regulations through which the

living body is “trained, shaped, obeys, responds,” becoming, in short, a socially adaptable and “useful body.” (Bordo 1989, 25–26)

Whether her zoot suit consisted of a short skirt or a pair of dark trousers, the pachuca defied the “set of practical rules and regulations through which the body is trained [and] shaped.” As Mexican Americans, most pachucas embodied a discrepancy between the racialized subject and the ideal national subject. As working-class consumers, they threatened the stability of class and race categories. Finally, as working-class women of color, they were simultaneously too feminine and too masculine. In summary, the pachuca’s body, unlike that of other wartime feminine archetypes, was of no use to the war effort or American jingoism—except, of course, as its constitutive other.

Badder than “Bad”

Women’s fashion magazines of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century often include a section on fashion “dos” and “don’ts.” In this section, photographs of women who adhere to the dictates of proper or acceptable fashion (“dos”) are juxtaposed with those of women who have committed “fashion crimes” (“don’ts”). In the latter group of photographs, a black strip (identical to the one that frequently appears in photographs of murder or accident victims) covers the “culprits” eyes in order to conceal their identities.

Like fashion magazines’ “don’ts,” pachucas committed “crimes” of fashion. In doing so, they committed “crimes” of gender, class, and nation and were vilified by both white Americans and Mexican Americans. And, like fashion magazines’ “don’ts,” pachucas’ identities have been erased from much Chicano historiography, literature, theater, and visual art. Just as her body was unintelligible to American nationalism during World War II, the pachuca’s body, unlike that of the pachuco, was (and remains) unintelligible to Chicano cultural nationalism. The discourse of cultural nationalism, which dominated much Chicano cultural production from the late 1960s to the early 1980s (at least), has relied upon and maintained gender norms. The pachuca, as this essay underscores, defied such norms: she was simultaneously monstrously feminine and not quite feminine enough. Thus, she has been excluded from narratives of Chicano style and resistance, while her male counterpart has

been upheld as an icon of Chicano hipness and rebellion.⁴³ Yet, like pachucos, pachucas cultivated a distinct style that offered a critique of wartime jingoism and celebrated difference. Badder than “bad,” pachucas pointed to the constructedness of gender and class categories (among both Anglo-Americans and Mexican Americans); rejected middle-class definitions of feminine beauty and decency; and redefined U.S. citizenship by claiming a right to collective goods, including not only coats, trousers, and lipstick, but public space.

NOTES

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1. I draw the term “pachuco patois” from Griffith (1947a). A pachuco was a Mexican-American homeboy (i.e., a “tough,” urban, working-class youth) of the 1940s and 1950s. Many pachucos spoke a sort of jive known as *caló* and wore zoot suits (a.k.a. “drapes”), which often consisted of a long, “finger-tip” coat, a pair of billowing trousers that tapered at the ankle, and a long watch chain that sometimes extended from the waist to the calves (see Figure 1). Some pachucos may have associated with formal gangs and may have had criminal records. If pachuco is defined in terms of gang affiliation and/or criminality, then not all Mexican-American zoot-suiters were pachucos, for some youths wore drapes, but were not gang members or criminals. However, if pachuco is defined in terms of style and the zoot subculture, then the terms pachuco and zoot-suiter may be used interchangeably.
 2. Drawing from Hebdige (1989), I define the Mexican-American zoot subculture as a “group identity” that distinguished itself from the dominant culture via “[t]he communication of a significant difference” (Hebdige 1989, 102; italics original). Hebdige stresses that subcultural difference is usually conveyed as style—i.e., as an “emphatic combination...of dress, dance, argot, music, etc.” (101). Identifying features of the wartime Mexican-American zoot subculture include the zoot suit, the jitterbug, jazz, and *caló*. Although some zoot-suiters may not have been criminals and/or members of gangs, the Mexican-American

zoot subculture was also associated with criminality—in particular, with violent gangs and illicit drug use.

3. See “The Pachuco and Other Extremes,” which Paz wrote while living in Los Angeles during the 1940s (in Paz 1961). I discuss portrayals of zoot-suiters and the zoot subculture in the Mexican-American newspaper, *La Opinión*, during World War II below. For an excellent analysis of representations of pachucos and the zoot subculture in Los Angeles’ wartime Spanish-language newspapers, see Gaytán (1996).
4. The Sleepy Lagoon incident took place in Los Angeles in 1942 and involved an alleged gang fight and murder near a swimming hole known as “Sleepy Lagoon.” The majority of the suspects in the case were Mexican-American youths, whom the police and mainstream press branded “juvenile delinquents” and “gangsters.” In June 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots occurred. During the riots, young Mexican Americans and white servicemen attacked one another in the streets of Los Angeles. When the servicemen apprehended zoot-suiters, they usually beat them. Sometimes, they cut their victims’ hair, disrobed them, and burned their clothing. For more information concerning Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots, see Adler (1970), Domer (1955), Green (1995), Jones (1969), Mazón (1976; 1984), Pagán (1996), Scott (1970), and Sine (1976).
5. Other writers and artists who have praised the pachuco as a hero, rebel, and/or precursor of the Chicano movement include Granado (1974), Madrid-Barela (1974), Montoya (1977), Salazar (1970), Steiner (1969), and Zamora (1986). I discuss representations of the pachuco as a hero, rebel, and precursor of the movement in Ramírez, 2000.
6. Scholarly writings on the style and subculture of male zoot-suiters include Chibnall (1985), Cosgrove (1984), Kelley (1994), Márez (1996), Mercer (1994), Noriega (2001), Pagán (1996), Sanchez-Tranquilino (1987), Sanchez-Tranquilino and Tagg (1991), and Tyler (1989). Regarding pachucas, see Cotera (1976), Fregoso (1999), Green (1995), Pagán (1996), Ruiz (1998), Sanchez-Tranquilino (1987), and Sanchez-Tranquilino and Tagg (1991). With the exception of Fregoso’s essay and Green’s thesis, these texts do not discuss pachucas at length. The pachuca has also been featured in a handful of literary and artistic texts. See, for example, Baca (1976), Garza (1988), Griffith (1947b), Hernández-Tovar (1978), Moraga (1983; 1986), and Ponce (1989; 1993). I discuss representations of the pachuca in Chicana/o literature, theater, visual art, and scholarship in Ramírez, 2000. Elizabeth Escobedo’s forthcoming dissertation on Mexican-American women in Los Angeles during the 1940s promises to make a valuable contribution to scholarly discourse on pachucas.
7. Here, I draw from Kelley’s 1994 essay on Malcolm X’s participation in the zoot subculture and Márez’s 1996 essay on working-class Chicano style.
8. I draw the term “full citizenship” from Rosaldo (1989). Full citizens are produced, acknowledged, and, at times, protected by the state and its apparatuses (e.g., schools, hospitals, the legal system, etc.). In other words, full citizens are permitted, encouraged, and often expected to participate fully in a society.

My assertion that the zoot suit articulated the shared experiences of and a sense of collectivity among working-class Mexican-American youth is indebted to Mercer’s analysis of African-American zoot-suiters in the 1940s. Mercer argues, “In this historical moment style was not a substitute for politics. But, in the absence of an organized direction of black political discourse and in a situation where blacks were excluded from official channels of ‘democratic’ representation, the logic of style manifested across cultural surfaces in everyday life reinforced the terms of shared experience—blackness—and thus a sense of collectivity among a subaltern social bloc” (1994, 119).

9. *New York Times*, 10 June 1943: 23.
10. Regarding the urbanization and proletarianization of Mexican Americans in Los Angeles during the first half of the twentieth century, see Romo (1983) and Sánchez (1993).
11. Ponce’s novel *The Wedding* (1989) explores the class aspirations and anxieties of young, working-class pachucas and pachucos who reject and mock that which they deem “hick,” from “the sticks,” and/or “Tijuana.”
12. “6 Zoot Suiters Sent to Hospital by Servicemen.” *Los Angeles Daily News*, 8 June 1943: 6.
13. By “Los Angeles’ four dominant newspapers,” I refer to the newspapers with the greatest circulation during World War II: the *Daily News*, *Examiner*, *Herald-Express*, and *Times* (Domer 1955).
14. “Campaign to Wipe Out Juvenile Gangs Speeded.” *Los Angeles Times*, 6 Aug. 1942: Part II, 2. “Zoot Origins Are Traced.” *Los Angeles Daily News*, 10 June 1943: 16.
15. “Police Seize 300 in Boys’ Gang Drive.” *Los Angeles Times* 10 Aug. 1942: 1. Along with Japanese immigrants and Japanese Americans, striking workers—in particular, the United Mine Workers—were suspected of disloyalty to and sabotage of the United States. See Lingeman (1976), Mazón (1984), and Perret (1973).
16. The Ayres Report appears in Jones (1969).
17. “Scan Zooter Black Market.” *Los Angeles Daily News*, 12 June 1943: 10.
18. “Zoot Suiters Learn Lesson in Fights With Servicemen.” *Los Angeles Times*, 7 June 1943: Part I, 1.
19. As late as 1960, the pachuco would be pathologized as “queer.” See Braddy (1960).
20. “Zoot Suit Girls Kick and Knife Waitress as Battle Continues.” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, 11 June 1943: 1.
21. See, for example: *Los Angeles Daily News*, 5 Aug. 1942: 10; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 3 Aug. 1942: 5; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 4 Aug. 1942: 3; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 5 Aug. 1942: 18; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 10 Aug. 1942: Part II, 1; *Los Angeles Examiner*, 12 Aug. 1942: 3; *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Aug. 1942: 2; *Los Angeles Times*, 10 Aug. 1942: 6; *Los Angeles Times*, 12 Aug. 1942: 2; and “Black Legion.” *Newsweek*, 24 Aug. 1942 (page number unavailable). The photograph of pachucas in a police line-up appears in the December 1943 issue of *Sensation* (pp. 32–33).
22. “Origenes De ‘Pachucos’ Y ‘Malinches.’” *La Opinión*, 26 Aug. 1942: 3.

23. In Mexican and Chicano Spanish, *malinche* is synonymous with traitor (specifically, female traitor). The term derives from *La Malinche*, the name given Malintzin Tenépal, the indigenous woman who, according to legend, served as Hernán Cortés's translator, travel guide, strategist, and concubine. Tenépal is blamed for aiding the Spaniards in conquering Mexico and is considered the mother of Mexico's *mestiza/o* people (Alarcón 1989; Del Castillo 1977).
24. "Girl 'Zoot Suiters' Gird to Join Gangland Battle." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A3. By early twenty-first-century standards, a dress or skirt that exposes the knees is far from obscene according to many Americans. However, some Americans in the early 1940s regarded such articles of clothing as unseemly, if not outrageous. Walton, for example, cites a letter to the WPA from an irate woman who complained that Order L-85 was un-Christian and sinful. Order L-85 mandated that dress and skirt lengths be raised to the knees in an effort to conserve fabric (Walton 1945, 78).
25. "Origenes De 'Pachucos' Y 'Malinches.'" *La Opinión*, 26 Aug. 1942: 2-3. For a discussion of *La Opinión*'s position regarding zoot-suiters, the Sleepy Lagoon incident, and the Zoot Suit Riots, see Gaytán (1996).
26. Some of Griffith's contemporaries echoed her observation that pachucas were "attractive to all males, light or dark." In fact, some attributed the Zoot Suit Riots to a competition between white servicemen and Mexican-American men over Mexican-American women. See, for example, "Zoot Suits and Service Stripes: Race Tension Behind the Riots." *Newsweek*, 21 June 1943: 35-40; Cayton (1943); and Himes (1943). Over the years, many writers have continued to assert that a sexual competition sparked the Zoot Suit Riots. See Domer (1955); Ford (1961); Turner and Surace (1956); "Carnalismo en Los Califas." *La Causa*, 22 May 1972: 2; Acuña (1972); Adler (1970); Henstell (1978); McGrath (1987); Meier and Ribera (1972); Mirandé (1987); Nash (1985); Scott (1970); Sine (1976); Valdez (1992); and Wyatt (1997).
- Quotation marks appear at the end of this excerpt. Unfortunately, I do not know whom Griffith may have been quoting.
27. A few of the Mexican-American women I interviewed as part of this study stressed that many female zoot-suiters were not promiscuous, amoral, or violent. Some compared the zoot suit to the hip-hop look popular among many young people in the United States today. They noted that many young people who wear hip-hop attire are not gang members or criminals. However, the look, like the zoot suit of the past, is often associated with violence and criminality.
28. Stories that highlight pachucas' blackness include: "Black Widow Girls In Boy Gangs; War On Vandals Pushed." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 3 Aug. 1942: A1+; "Origenes De 'Pachucos' Y 'Malinches.'" *La Opinión*, 26 Aug. 1942: 2+; "Sailor 'Task Force' Hits L.A. Zooters." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 5 June 1943: A1+; "Army, Navy End War on Zooters After Wild Rioting." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 8 June 1943: A1+; "Web of 'Zoot Suit' Gangs Spreads Over Entire L.A. Area." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 8 June 1943: B1+; "Zoot Girls Stab Woman; State Probes Rioting." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A1; and "Launch State

- Probe of L.A. Zooter Raids." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 12 June 1943: A1+. I must credit Green (1995) for pointing out the newspapers' emphasis on pachucas' alleged blackness.
29. Delano astutely observes that, during World War II, "the sexually independent woman...[was] maligned for being an enemy who transmits venereal disease to the male member" (2000, 43). Yet, as Campbell's and Lingeman's comments above indicate, the v-girl was considered patriotic and well-intentioned—albeit overzealous and misguided.
30. "Feminine Charm Is Measured by Good Grooming, Daintiness." *Los Angeles Examiner*, 6 Aug. 1942: 16; "Let Victory Go To Your Head." *Los Angeles Examiner*, 2 Aug. 1942: 10.
31. "Inquest Jury Told of Gang Brutalities." *Los Angeles Examiner*, 12 Aug. 1942: 3; "One Killed and 10 Hurt in Boy 'Wars.'" *Los Angeles Times*, 3 Aug. 1942: 1+; "Black Widow Girls In Boy Gangs; War On Vandals Pushed." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 3 Aug. 1942: A1+; "One Man Slain; Girls Join in Youthful Gang Forays Here." *Los Angeles Examiner*, 3 Aug. 1942: 1+; "Youthful Gang Evil." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 4 Aug. 1942: B2; "Ranch Killing Inquiry Opens." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 Aug. 1942: 1+.
- As late as July 1944 (more than one year after the Zoot Suit Riots), the *Los Angeles Times* published a lurid "exposé" of pachuca gangs. See "Youthful Gang Secrets Exposed." *Los Angeles Times*, 16 July 1944: Part II, 1.
32. Regarding the attack on the lone woman, see "Zoot Girls Stab Woman; State Probes Rioting." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A1+; "Clashes Few as Zoot War Dies Down." *Los Angeles Times*, 11 June 1943: 1+; "Zoot Girls Kick and Knife Waitress as Battles Continue." *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, 11 June 1943: 1; and "Zoot Suits and Service Stripes: Race Tension Behind the Riots." *Newsweek*, 21 June 1943: 35-40. Regarding the taunting of high school girls and the attempted carjacking, see "Launch State Probe of L.A. Zooter Riots." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 12 June 1943: A1+. Regarding pachucas' efforts to sustain the riots, see "Girl 'Zoot Suiters' Gird to Join Gangland Battle." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A3; "Train-Attacking Zoot Gangs Broken Up." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 11 June 1943: A1+; "Zoot Suit Girls Kick and Knife Waitress as Battles Continue." *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, 11 June 1943: 1; and "Riots Subsiding in Zooter war, Police Declare." *Los Angeles Daily News*, 11 June 1943: 1+.
33. "Sailor 'Task Force' Hits L.A. Zooters." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 5 June 1943: A1+; "New Servicemen-'Zooter' Fights Follow Weekend Clashes." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 7 June 1943: A3; "Army, Navy End War on Zooters After Wild Rioting." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 8 June 1943: A1+.
34. "Girl 'Zoot Suiters' Gird to Join Gangland Battle." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A3; "Train-Attacking Zoot Gangs Broken Up." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 11 June 1943: A1+.
35. "Web of 'Zoot Suit' Gangs Spreads Over Entire L.A. Area." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 8 June 1943: A1. "Girl 'Zoot Suiters' Gird to Join Gangland Battle." *Los Angeles Herald-Express*, 10 June 1943: A3.

36. *California Eagle*, 3 June 1943: 4B.
37. "Lowriders Pasados." *Lowrider* 2(6) (1978): 22. "Lowriders Pasados" is a section of *Lowrider* magazine that features photographs of readers (and/or their friends and family) from the 1940s and 1950s.
38. Crane notes that, even in the late twentieth century, "middle-class professional and businesswomen have not been permitted to don a totally mannish look but are still expected to retain elements of femininity in their office clothes....In middle-class corporate workplaces, taboos against the use of trousers by women executives remain, although these women typically wear jeans and other types of trousers for leisure activities" (2000, 124). I know a female lawyer who usually wears pants to work, but keeps a skirt in her office. If she must go to court, she replaces her pants with the skirt. She says that she does so because, as late as the early twenty-first century, some judges do not regard favorably female lawyers who wear pants.
39. Regretfully, it was impossible to reproduce a publishable copy of this photograph for this essay. The photo has been republished on page 102 of Sanchez-Tranquilino and Tagg (1991).
40. "Mexican-American Girls Meet In Protest." *Eastside Journal* 16 June 1943: 5.
41. Orson Welles's 1958 film *Touch of Evil* offers some memorable images of butch women of the 1950s (who, incidentally, are also coded Mexican-American and pachuca).
42. Of course, for some, the effect of butchness is predicated on the female cross-dresser's ability to pass as a man. See, for example, Bell (1993), Garber (1992), Halberstam (1998), and Kennedy and Davis (1993).
43. I discuss the prevalence of the pachuco and relative absence of the pachuca in movement-era Chicano cultural production at length in Ramírez, 2000.

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