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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory* by Catherine S. Ramírez

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his story in an engaging, personal way. One could wish for a more clearly organized story and a quieter, more narrative-driven book design. Each loosely organized chapter, which begins with a hard-to-read design, jumps around in time with often-undated photographs, ephemera, and art reproductions. This can leave the reader scrambling to put the story together on the temporal plane. The index does not help much because it contains only proper nouns, with no theme or idea categories. Both chapter and art design were likely driven by the fact that the bulk of visual material comes from the earlier part of the story, but is used evenly throughout for the sake of graphic flow.

These distractions do little to rob enjoyment from this new addition to Los Angeles history. “Pacific Standard Time” galleries might consider selling the book as a sideline.

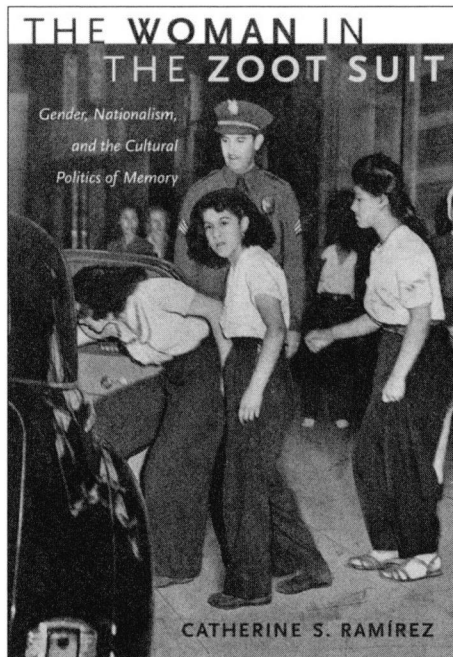
*Michele Zack is the author of Altadena: Between Wilderness and City (2004), and Southern California Story (2009)—both commended for excellence by the American Association of State and Local History, and the latter the recipient of four design awards. An independent scholar, Zack has partnered on three Teaching American History grants, working with the Huntington–USC Institute on California and West since 2006 on professional development for public school teachers.*

**THE WOMAN IN THE ZOOT SUIT: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory.** By Catherine S. Ramírez. (Durham, NC, and London: Duke University Press, 2009. 229 pp. \$22.95 paper.) Reviewed by Michael Nevin Willard.

*The Woman in the Zoot Suit* by Catherine Ramírez is a comprehensive if not landmark reconfiguration of the zoot suit and the pachuco. As iconic images, the zoot suit and the pachuco have held political and discursive relevance in Mexican American culture, historiography, and, since the late 1960s, in Chicano cultural production. But, Ramírez amends, the pachuca has largely been absent.

As a project of recovery, drawing from history, literary criticism, ethnic studies and cultural studies methodologies to carry out sophisticated, theoretical discourse analysis, Ramírez focuses on both the historical actors—the young women who called themselves pachucas, adopting zoot styles of clothing, hair, and makeup as statements of racial, gendered, sexual, oppositional identity—and the pachuca in the written texts and visual representations that comprise public discourse, which she refers to as *la pachuca*. Ramírez refocuses scholarly analysis on “pachucas as agents and *la pachuca* as icon . . . show[ing] the ways in which both have been excluded from or included in World War II-era conceptions of the American home front, the Chicano Movement’s *familia de la raza* (family of the race), and a late-twentieth-century coalition of Chicana feminists” (xv).

Ramírez argues that *la pachuca* in both American nationalist and Chicano Movement discourses has served as a “constitutive other” (9). *La pachuca* was



invoked as an aberrant figure during World War II in the rhetoric of state institutions; the press; the military; schools, law enforcement and the legal justice system; and among Mexican Americans (in everyday life, the Spanish language press, and community newspapers), and during the 1960s and 1970s in Chicano movement cultural production (visual art, literature, theater, film, and academic treatises). Thus construed as deviant, this figure reinforced normative feminine, masculine, and heterosexual roles in mainstream American society and, through the cultural nationalist concept of *familia de la raza*, in the Chicano Movement.

Ramírez pairs an examination of Mexican American women's agency— involvement in the Sleepy Lagoon trial, Zoot Suit Riots, and zoot suit subculture—with analysis of representations

of *la pachuca* in newspapers, government posters, and academic treatises. Chapter one begins with the legacy of these events as they have been interpreted by Chicano artists. Focusing on the 1972 poem, "Pachuco Paz" by Chicano Movement poet Alurista and the well known 1978 play and 1981 film *Zoot Suit* by Luis Valdez, Ramírez calls attention to the ways such written texts and visual images of pachucos as icons of resistance have contributed to limited knowledge of past events, and equally profoundly, the continued production of narrow definitions and shared understandings of gender and sexual norms that privilege masculinity, circumscribe girls' and women's roles, enforce normative heterosexuality, and punish homosexuality (27).

In the rest of the chapter Ramírez recovers the roles of women in Sleepy Lagoon and the Zoot Suit Riots showing that the events of Sleepy Lagoon were not a "homosocial affair involving 'homeboys' exclusively" (29). Mexican American girls and young women were present and involved at every moment. Most significant, five young women were sentenced to the Ventura School for Girls, some remaining—but little acknowledged by historians—until 1948, long after the 38th Street boys had been acquitted for the murder of José Díaz at Sleepy Lagoon in October 1944. Ramírez also documents the little acknowledged activist and leadership roles of Lupe Leyvas and Josefina Fierro de Bright with the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, as well as behind the scenes work of many other girls and young women. Ramírez further points out that both white men and Mexican American men saw their role in the interracial conflict of the riots in terms of protecting women. In detailing the sexism of the riots generated from broader

practices of policing women's presence in public to "protect" them, Ramírez offers a valuable corrective to historical accounts that explain how the Riots were racist but ignore the fact that they were also sexist.

Finally, Ramírez shows how Mexican American women negotiated their status in relation to the pachuca as a constitutive other. Some women emphasized in eastside newspapers their status as Americans who contributed to the war effort through their jobs in the defense industries and as "ladies." Drawing from her own interviews with Mexican American women who lived in Los Angeles during the 1930s and 1940s Ramírez shows that they had a more complex relationship with pachucas and *la pachuca* than simply invoking her only to reject her. Responses included empathizing with and admiring them, and wearing pachuca styles with their mothers' approval.

In chapter two Ramírez compares *la pachuca* to three contemporary archetypes: the "feminine patriot," Rosie the Riveter (the female war worker), and *el pachuco* (the iconic pachuco). Whether dressed in a skirt or wearing masculine clothing, if not a full zoot suit, the pachuca constituted a threat to the feminine ideals of the woman patriot—as circulated in newspapers, magazines, and government posters—in the military or on the home front and whose attributes of a "lady" or "mother" ensured the success of the U.S. war effort. *La Pachuca* by contrast was not only monstrously feminine in terms of the hyper sexuality read into her hair, makeup, and clothes, but also in terms of her reputed masculine, juvenile-delinquent criminal involvement with gangs. Other scholars have emphasized in their analyses of pachucos' and pachucas' stylized appearance that pachucas' "dark beauty" and preference for black clothing transgressed white racial norms. But Ramírez also shows how pachucas queered (and thus threatened) both dominant American culture and respectable Mexican American culture as well.

In chapter three, Ramírez analyzes the gender dimensions of pachucas' speech to show how young women transgressed the gendered expectations for proper, ladylike speech but also how, in his play and subsequent film, *Zoot Suit*, Luis Valdez erases the oppositional speech of women like fourteen year old Bertha Aguilar contained in the *People vs. Zammora* transcript of the Sleepy Lagoon defendants. Using unladylike slang and emotionally detached, cool silence when she refused to answer prosecuting attorneys' questions, Bertha Aguilar is an example of the gender-ambiguous, masculine speech practiced by pachucas. In *Zoot Suit*, however, to turn the pachuco into an icon of resistance suitable to the gender ideals of Chicano cultural nationalism, Luis Valdez rewrites Aguilar as the character of "loudmouthed" Bertha Villareal. For Valdez, Bertha Villareal serves as the un-feminine, overly sexual, constitutive other, the whore paired with the virginal character of Della. However, both female characters, because they cannot control their emotions (anger and sentimental tears respectively), contrast to the cool repose and active agency of the character of El Pachuco.

In the final chapter Ramírez focuses on *la pachuca* and *el pachuco* in Chicano movement works, explaining how *el pachuco* could be incorporated into cultural nationalist ideology while *la pachuca* was excluded "because of the ways she articulated a dissident femininity, female masculinity, and, in some instances, lesbian

sexuality" (110–111). The cultural nationalism of the Chicano movement held that the Mexican experience was separate from the Anglo majority and the result of histories of imperialism, racism, and segregation that relegated Mexican Americans to the position of a separate nation within the United States. As such, cultural nationalism stressed group identity over internal diversity and difference. Images of group unity contained within the concept of *la familia de la raza* were central to the representational and discursive logic of Chicano cultural nationalism. In practice, the emphasis that movement-era cultural works placed on family defaulted to the model of the heteropatriarchal nuclear family. *El pachuco* could be incorporated into this formulation of group identity as a “disobedient son,” but, unlike her male counterpart, the female rebellion of *la pachuca* did not accord with the role of women as mothers and keepers of family tradition. Ramírez finds in the poetry of Carmen Tafolla, Inés Hernández, and Cherríe Moraga, the visual art of Judith Baca, and drama by Cherríe Moraga, cultural work that locates *la pachuca* within relationships between women (as sisters, daughters, or lovers). In contrast to work like Valdez’s *Zoot Suit*, these works create a counter discourse that produces the possibility for living an alternate, non-patriarchal, open-ended model of family.

*The Woman in the Zoot Suit* is a thorough explanation of how normative knowledge about embodied individuals comes to be produced and represented in different eras. The wide range of sources Ramírez analyzes is one of the book’s strengths. In every chapter Ramírez juxtaposes disparate images and thus makes it possible to see how the pervasive production, reproduction, and circulation of knowledge about race, gender, and sexuality comes to be shared and accepted as normative.

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**EROTIC CITY: *Sexual Revolutions and the Making of Modern San Francisco*.** By Josh Sides. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 292 pp. \$29.95 cloth.) Reviewed by Whitney Strub.

The pantheon of San Francisco’s sexual history looms large in the public memory, with the Gold Rush–era “wide-open city,” the Beats, Carol Doda, Haight-Ashbury, the Mitchell Brothers, the Castro, Harvey Milk, and more, constituting an iconography whose sheer scope and scale must prove daunting to any social historian aspiring to dig beyond this attention-grabbing (and potentially monopolizing) surface. It is thus to Josh Sides’ profound credit that in *Erotic City* he manages to balance those famous reference points against thoughtfully nuanced examinations of the broad social fabric that links them together, recovering geographies, lives, and identities outside the limelight but equally important in shaping the varied sex cultures of one of America’s most revered and maligned cities.

Sides’ central conceit in the book is a strong one: urban historians have yet to fully integrate the role of sexuality into dominant narratives of the shaping