



» Compiled by Robin Harris

Luiz Valdez



- Son of migrant farm workers
- Alumni of SJSU
- First full length play, ***The Shrunken Head of Pancho Villa*** performed by SJSU Drama Dept
- Member of SF Mime Troupe
- Created El Teatro Campesino (The Workers Theater) on the picket lines during the Delano Grape Strike
- Father of Chicano Theater in the United States
- First Chicano Playwright to have to work produced on Broadway

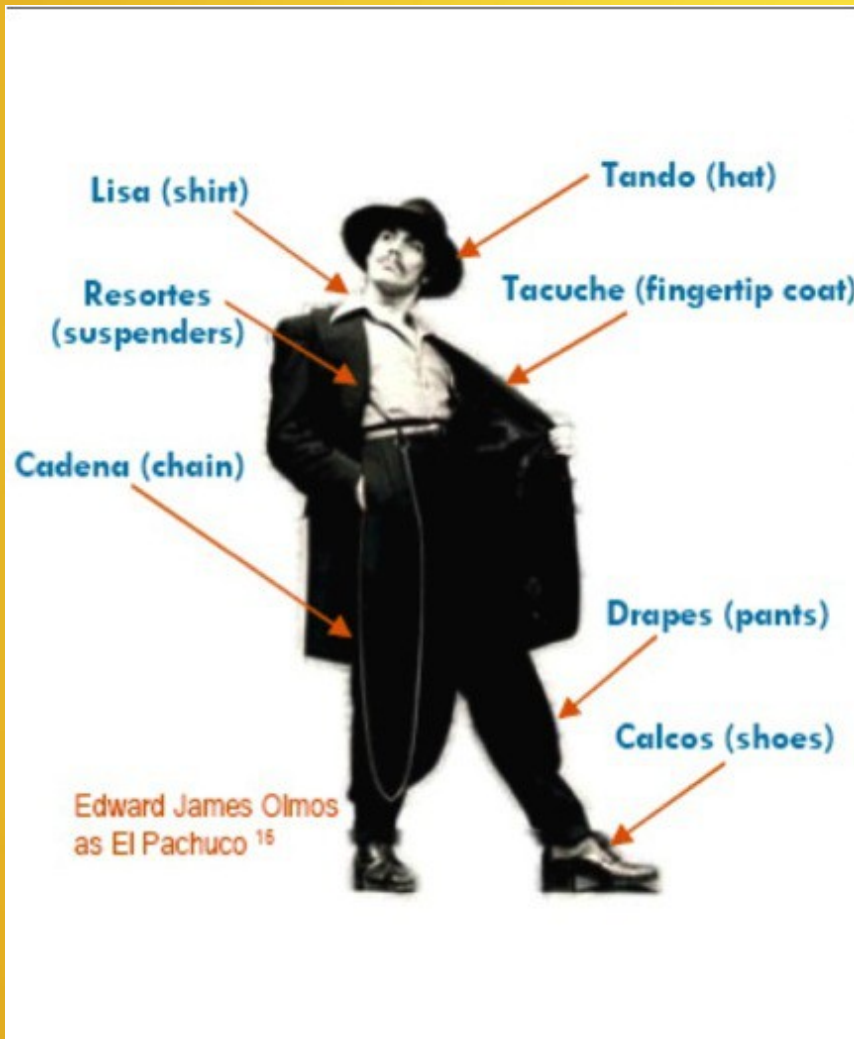
Press Release



Debuting in 1979, *Zoot Suit* was the first Chicano play on Broadway. The story shines a spotlight on a wave of racial injustice and disharmony that swept across Los Angeles in the early 1940s. The plot is a fictionalized version of real-life events -- sparked by the so-called Sleepy Lagoon murder trial -- and centers around Henry Reyna, better known as the zoot suiter El Pachuco. On his last night of freedom before beginning his Naval service, Reyna and his "gang" are accused of the murder of a rival "gangster" after a party. Unfairly prosecuted, the entire group is thrown in jail for a murder they did not commit. The play is set in the barrios of Los Angeles, against the backdrop of the tumultuous Zoot Suit Riots and World War II.

Says TRFT Department Chair, David Kahn, "We are delighted to have the opportunity to present this great play, especially since it's written by Luis Valdez, one of our most distinguished alums. The story presents an episode in history that many of our students may not be familiar with, but they should be, and its messages about the dangers of stereotyping and racial injustice are still fresh and relevant today."

Zoot Suit and Argentine Ducktail



“For the cuffs you could, you could use size 12, size 14, if you went to the tailor he would measure you up and you would tell him if you wanted it, it would cost you by the inch, the coat. Fingertip.

The hat, some guys wore a hat. I never wore, hardly ever wore mine, hardly ever. Or just once in a while you would wear it. But if you had good hair, then you had to comb it like a little duck tail in the back, right? Wrap around. And that was it. Yes. And your shirts were good, those shirts. You got some good shirts, right? Good shirts to match.” Carlos Espinoza

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_sfeature/sf_zoot_text.html

Pachuco/Pachuca



Manuel Ybarra (left), Josie right)

<https://tropicsofmeta.wordpress.com/2014/06/02/seventy-years-later-the-zoot-suit-riots-and-the-complexity-of-youth-culture/>

"Pachuco and Pachuca are terms coined in the 1940s to refer to Mexican American men and women who dressed in zoot suits or zoot suit-influenced attire.

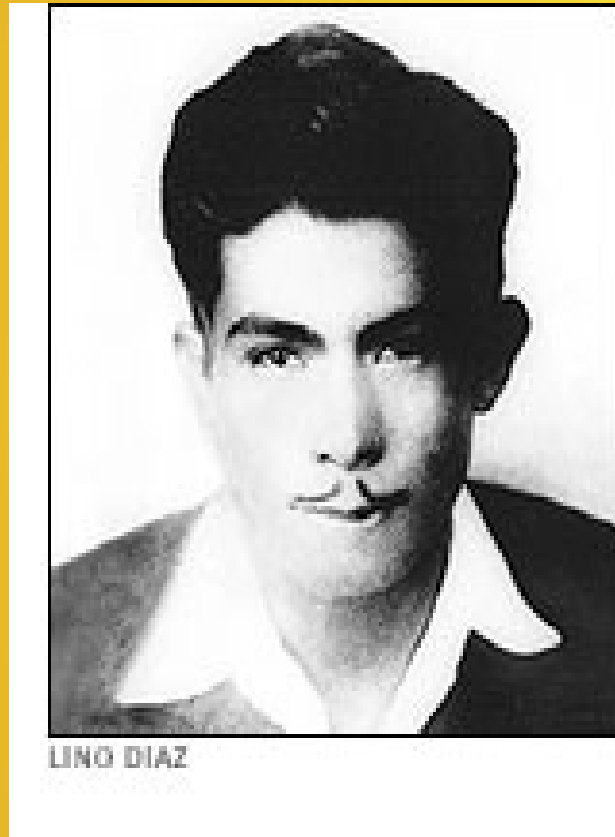
Though there is no definite origin of the word Pachuco, one theory claims that the term originated in El Paso, Texas. The city of El Paso was typically referred to as "Chuco town" or "El Chuco." People migrating from Los Angeles to El Paso would say they were going "pa' El Chuco" (to Chuco town). These migrants came to be known as Pachucos. This term moved westward to Los Angeles with the flow of Mexican workers migrating to industrialize city centers."

(Zoot Suit Discovery Guide

<http://research.pomona.edu/zootsuit/en/zoot-suit-la>)

The men swept the sides of their hair back to form an Argentine ducktail while the women piled their hair high on top of their heads in a pompadour, also known as a razor blade hairdo.

The Victim and The Accused

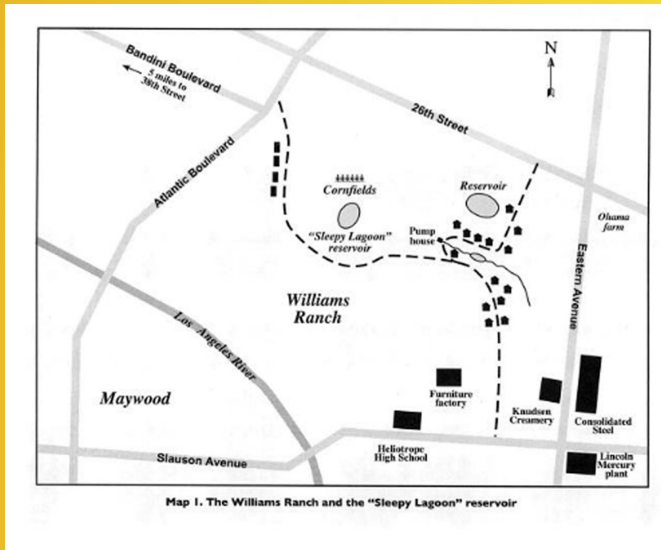


Jose Diaz



Members of the 38th Street Gang

What Was “Sleepy Lagoon”?



There was a reservoir on the Williams Ranch that Mexican American youth used as a swimming hole because they were barred from city owned recreational facilities. It was also a lover's lane at night and became famous when Jose Diaz's mortally wounded body was found on the morning of August 2, 1942. His death prompted the racially charged Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and the Zoot Suit Riots. It was dubbed “Sleepy Lagoon” after the popular song by Harry James.

“The memory of this moment of love

Will haunt me forever

A tropical moon, a sleepy lagoon

And you.”

The map was reconstructed by Eduardo Obregon Pagan, author of “Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race and Riot in Wartime LA” after he interviewed Lino Diaz, Jose's brother.

Jose Gallardo Diaz



I pray your death was not in vain but instead may it serve to remind the world of the evil that discrimination, prejudice and intolerance spawns; and help unite all colors to bring amity, harmony and goodwill to us all. RIP.

- Marcia Oct. 17, 2014

"flowers" left on Jose Diaz's memorial on www.findagrave.com

Jose Diaz was a twenty two year old farm worker who lived in a bunkhouse on the Williams Ranch with his family. His mother had sent him to have his picture taken, the first and only picture of him, the weekend before he was to leave for the army. He attended a party for Eleanor Delgadillo Coronado, near Sleepy Lagoon, and was murdered on his way home. He was found, unconscious and bleeding, on the morning of August 2, 1942. He never regained consciousness and could not tell the police what happened to him. His murder is still shrouded in mystery.

The official cause of death was the "result of a contusion of the brain and a subdural hemorrhage due to a basal fracture of the skull." Dr. Henry Cuneo, admitting physician and surgeon, testified at the trial that his "face was cut and swollen and he was bleeding from inside the left ear. He had been stabbed twice and a finger on his left hand was broken."
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_diaz.html

The Autopsy Surgeon suggested that his injuries were consistent with having been struck by a car or falling and hitting his head on a rock however the police chose to pursue his death as a homicide.
<http://dreamingcasuallypoetry.blogspot.com/2011/07/sleepy-lagoon-precursor-to-zoot-suit.html>

The Mystery of Jose's Death

There are major inconsistencies in eye witness statements and reports regarding the night of his death:

Jose left the party with Luis "Cito" Vargas and Andrew Torres, who were never produced as witnesses, several minutes before Hank Levyas and his friends arrived at the party.

Jose's body was either found by the police when they responded to the Delgadillo's home where they found "two other stabbing victims," by neighbors the following morning or by the 38th Street Gang.

According to the "Law in the Western United States" by Gordon Morris Bakken, "he bore no knife wounds, no gunshot wounds, but bruises and wounds indicated he had engaged in a fist fight prior to his death."

Other reports note that his pockets were turned inside out suggesting that he was mugged.

There were no eyewitness reports that Jose was involved in the brawl or that he crossed paths with the 38th Street group.

In "Zoot Suit Riots: The Sleepy Lagoon murder case that helped spur the WWII era Los Angeles race riots" by Ben Baedere on 12/31/69, one of cars with the 38th Street group got stuck in a ditch. When the girls got out to help push, they found Diaz, "nearly dead on the side of the road. He had been beaten and stabbed. As one of the girls cradled Diaz in her arms, a young man from the 38th Street group told the girl to step aside, witnesses said. He beat Diaz before the group drove away."

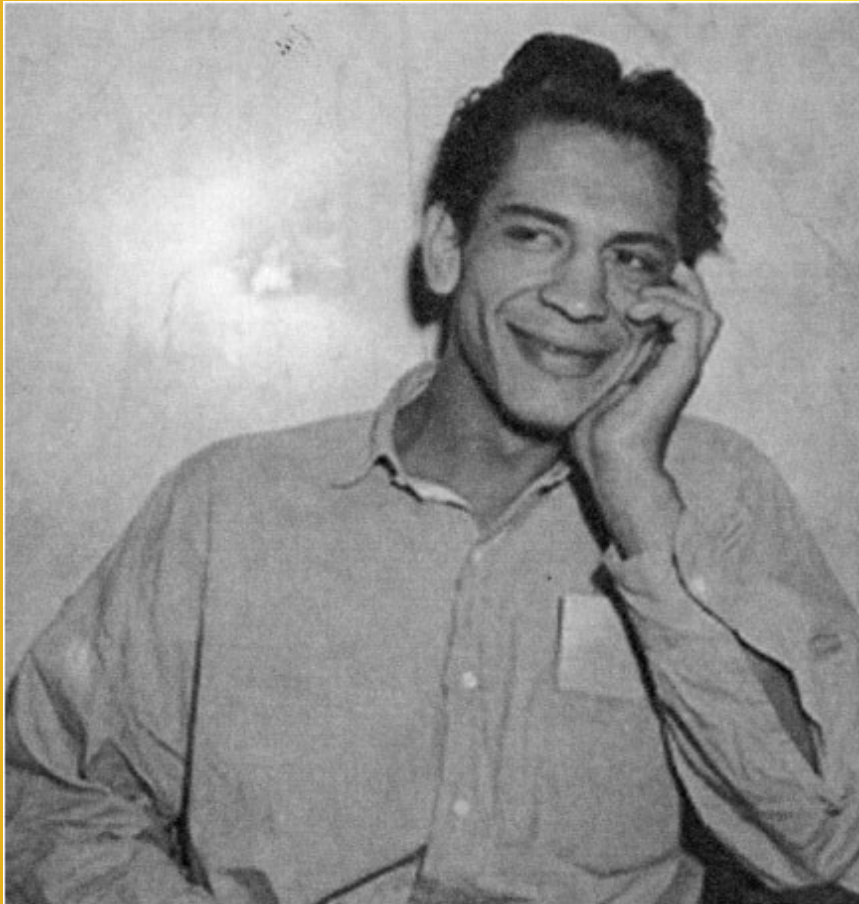
<http://www.sgvtribune.com/general-news/20130531/zoot-suit-riots-the-sleepy-lagoon-murder-case-that-helped-spur-the-w-ii-era-los-angeles-race-riots>

But in "No Boundaries: Transnational Latino Gangs and American Law Enforcement" by Tom Diaz, the girls found Diaz as they arrived at the house. After they brawled with the people in the house, one of the boys "paused long enough to kick the supine Diaz, giving him a few licks with a stick for good measure."

However, members of the 38th Street group are on record saying that they never saw Jose Diaz that evening so where did these "witness statements" come from?

Was it murder or a tragic accident? Why weren't the two young men who left him questioned? Either way, his death is still unsolved and his family has never received justice.

Leyvas Family



Hank Leyvas



HANK LEYVAS

“Hank Leyvas later testified that authorities admitted him to the station under a false name in order to make it difficult for his family and their attorney to find him. They finally found him in an interrogation room, unconscious, slumped over in his chair, blood and saliva covering his shirt and mouth. He had been beaten for a confession.” (This accusation was not denied in court.)

He was the reported “ringleader” of the 38th Street Gang.

Henry went with his friend Jack Melendez to join the Navy or Marines, but he was refused because of his police record. Ultimately, according to his sister, Leyvas enlisted in the Merchant Marines. But fateful events intervened before he could begin his service.

He was transferred to Folsom Prison for three months during his incarceration for fighting and spent time in “the hole.”

He was imprisoned for ten to twelve years for selling drugs.

He never married but opened a restaurant called Hank's on Whittier Blvd. He died of a heart attack at the age of 48 in 1971.

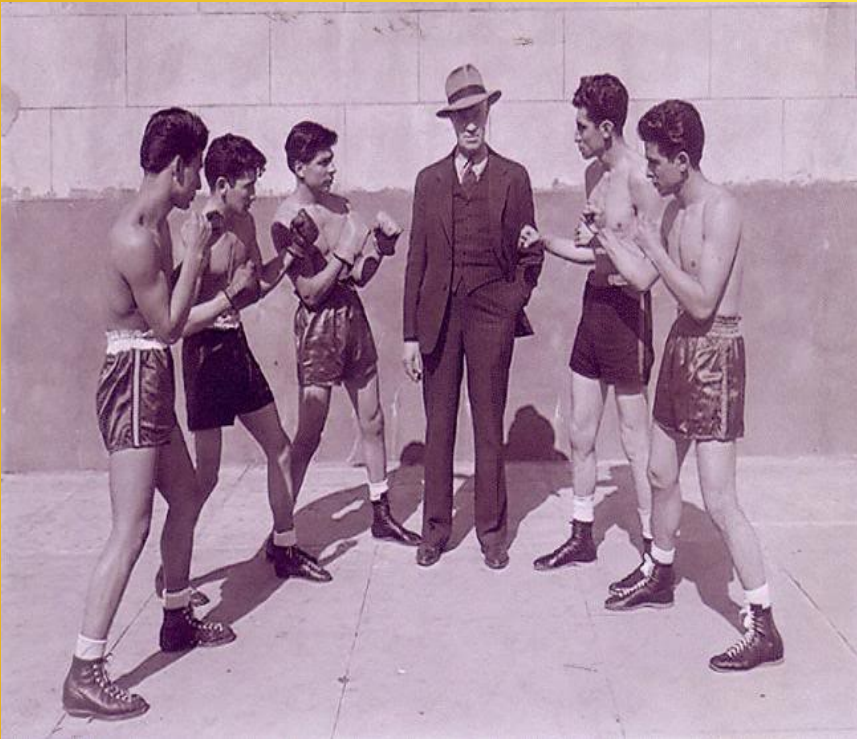
Hank Leyvas



"The same person, under different circumstances," remembered Ben Margolis, the lawyer who represented the Sleepy Lagoon defendants on appeal, "would have moved toward leadership. He was very bright, not much education; he had great emotions. But most important was... that of all of them, he had the greatest sense that he was a member of a group that was being walked on, being discriminated against, and that he was going to fight against it... he was going to carry on the fight wherever he was... regardless of what would happen to him, he was totally courageous and [showed] no physical fear as far as you could tell."

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_leyvas.html

The Defendants



I thought maybe you could get me a picture of some chick! I don't care if it is a picture of Frankenstein's mama, just so I can have one to put in my awfully bare album.

"Bobby" Thompson to [Alice McGrath](#) from San Quentin prison

Seriously, I am serving a long, long, time for wearing a [zoot] suit like that.

José "Chepe" Ruíz from San Quentin Prison

We were arrested just because we are Mexicans, but being born a Mexican is something we had no control over, but we are proud no matter what people think. We are proud to be Mexican American boys.

Manny Reyes from San Quentin prison

For more information about these young men, please go to:
http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_defendants.html

People v. Zamora October 13, 1942
aka The Sleepy Lagoon Trial
aka "The Goon Case"



Convictions

January 12, 1943

Three were convicted of first-degree murder and two counts of assault and are now serving life sentences at San Quentin Prison.

Henry Leyvas, 20, worked hard on his father's ranch until the day in August 1942 when he went down to the Sheriff's substation, because he heard they were looking for him. It was several days after that before anyone saw or heard from Henry. He was being held incommunicado—then his attorney unexpectedly walked into a room where he was handcuffed to a chair, being brutally beaten by the police.

Jose "Chepe" Ruiz, 18, wanted to play Big League Baseball—instead he's on the team at San Quentin. Chepe has had a good education in police methods already. In May 1942 he was arrested on "suspicion" of robbery and had his head cracked open by the policeman's gun—then found not guilty of the charge.

Robert Telles, 18, was working in a defense industry. Bobby has a talent for drawing and a sense of humor which didn't leave him even during the long bitter days of the thirteen-weeks trial, when he found it possible to draw caricatures that made the other 21 unhappy kids smile.

Nine were convicted of second-degree murder and two counts of assault and are now serving sentences of 5 years to life at San Quentin.

Manuel Reyes, 17, joined the Navy in July 1942. He was to have taken the pledge, but was arrested a few days before the date set. Manuel writes from San Quentin: ". . . we were treated like if we were German spies or Japs. They didn't figure we are Americans, just like everybody else that is born in this country. Well, anyway, if I didn't get to join the Navy to do my part in this war, I am still doing my part for my country behind these walls. I am buying Defense Stamps and going to volunteer to do some war work."

Angel Padilla, 18, was a furniture worker. He was beaten by Officers Hopkinson and Gallardo. "They hit me in the teeth and ribs and they kicked me below the belt. I couldn't get out of bed for a week."

Henry Ynostroza, 18, is married and the father of a year-old child. Henry supported his mother and two sisters since he was fifteen. He was beaten too. The officers kicked him in the legs till they were black and blue, and hit him with their fists all over his body.

Convictions

January 12, 1943

Ysmel "Smiles" Parra, 24, married and the father of a two-year-old girl. Smiles was working in a furniture factory. He writes from San Quentin: "It has come to my attention that there are many people who are trying to help us because they feel that our conviction was an injustice. I wish it were possible to thank them all personally." He's on the baseball team at San Quentin.

Manuel Delgado, 19, married and the father of two children, one born the day after he arrived at San Quentin. Manuel is a woodworker, was earning ten dollars a day at the time of his arrest. Now he's on the baseball team at San Quentin.

Gus Zamora, 21, was a furniture worker. Now at San Quentin, he makes cargo slings for the war effort and plays on the soft ball team.

Victor Rodman Thompson, 21, known to his friends as "Bobby" is the one Anglo-American in the group. During the trial the prosecutor implied that Bobby was as "bad" as the Mexicans because he went around with them.

Jack Melendez, 21, had already been sworn into the Navy before his arrest. The dishonorable discharge which came through about a week after his conviction was "like kicking a guy when he's down." Jack's brother has been overseas since May 1942 and Jack says that the thing that bothers him most about being in prison is that he can't be "over there" doing his share. He is doing office work in the hospital at San Quentin.

John Matuz, 20, had been in Alaska, working for the U. S. Engineering Department. When he was arrested the officers refused to believe that the \$98 he had with him was his. "They tried to make me say I stole it, and they smacked me around until I passed out."

Five of the boys are serving County Jail sentences ranging from six months to one year, having been convicted of assault. They are:

Andrew Acosta, Victor Segobia, Eugene Carpio, Benny Alvarez, Joe Valenzuela.

<http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb7779p4zc;NAAN=13030&doc.view=frames&chunk.id=div00012&toc.depth=1&toc.id=&brand=oac4>

The Defense Attorney, The Executive Secretary and The Judge



George
Shibley



Alice McGrath



Judge Charles
Fricke

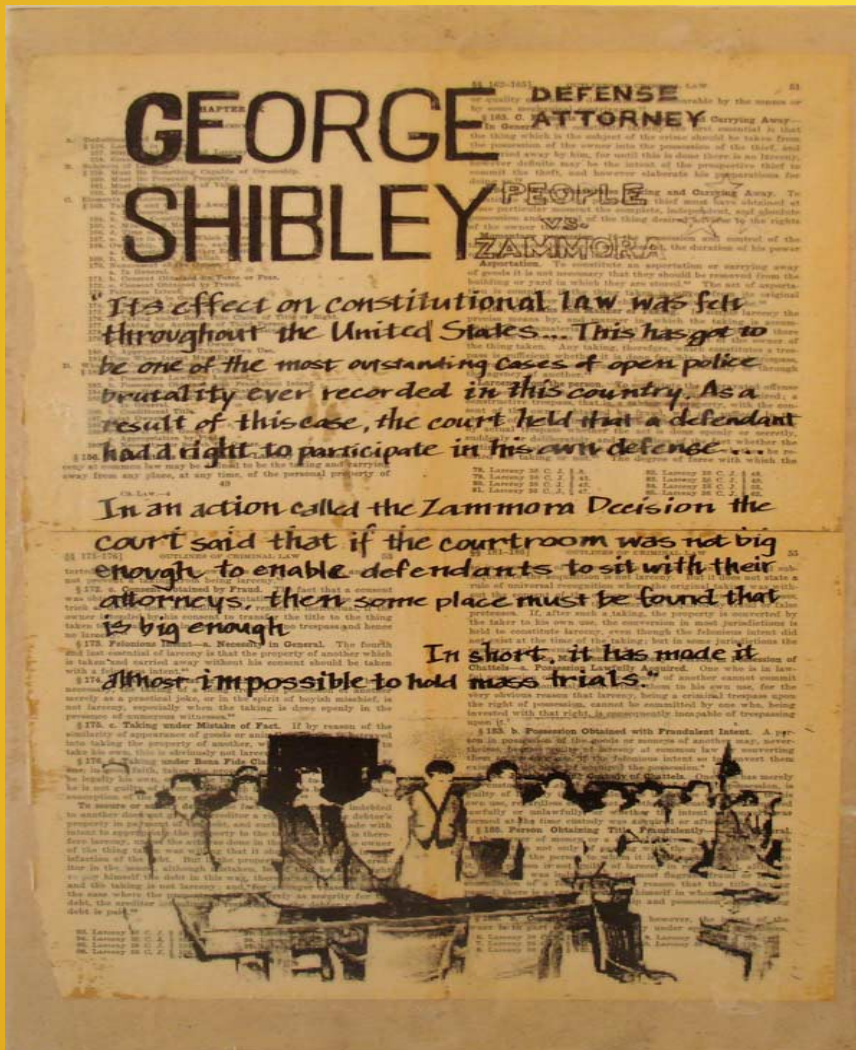
George Shibley

He was drafted into the military immediately following the trial but he had set the foundation for the appeal with the objections he raised during the trial.

He maintained close friendships with many of his clients. He was one of seven defense lawyers but the only one “the boys”, as he tenderly referred to them, trusted. When he died on July 4, 1989, they came to mourn with his family at this funeral.

Quote: Its effect on constitutional law was felt throughout the United States. ... This has got to be one of the most outstanding cases of open police brutality ever recorded in this country. As a result of this case, the court held that a defendant had a right to participate in his own defense. ... In an action called the Zammora Decision the court said that if the courtroom was not big enough to enable defendants to sit with their attorneys, then some place must be found that is big enough. In short, it has made it almost impossible to hold mass trials.

Long Beach Press-Telegram



Alice McGrath



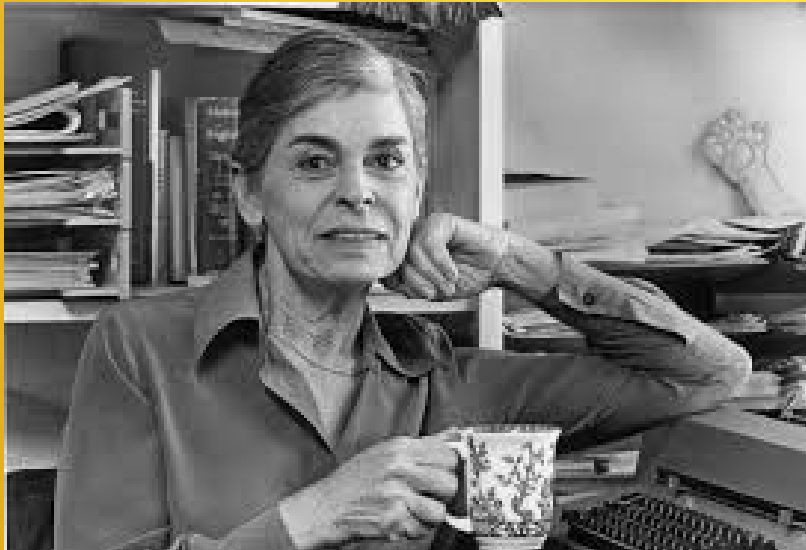
She was hospitalized for pleurisy when the trial began but George Shipley would bring her daily transcripts from the trial and she would write a summary. She began attending the trial after she was released from the hospital.

McGrath eventually became the executive secretary of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee. She functioned on a more personal level with the 38th Street boys. She visited "her boys" every six weeks at San Quentin. She would tell them about the Committee's progress, distribute its news bulletin, and tried to boost their morale. While she remembers a range of responses to her visits, from suspicion to appreciation, she quickly realized that she had become the lifeline between them and all efforts on the outside to have them released. With many of them, she forged lasting friendships and with [Hank Leyvas](#), the group's perceived "ringleader," an innocent infatuation.

www.pbs.org

Quote: "the most important event in my life. If I had never done anything since ... my involvement in Sleepy Lagoon would justify my existence."

Los Angeles Times 1981



Judge Charles Williams Fricke



..[the Sleepy Lagoon case is] the most difficult matter which has come before me during 25 years on the bench.

Judge Charles W. Fricke (note the skull on his desk)

“He was part of the elite Anglo community, as were most California judges at the time. Members of Los Angeles' white middle class had been increasingly expressing concerns about the Mexican American population and their ability to live within a civilized society.”

The prosecution ruled that the defendants could not cut their hair or change into clean clothes throughout the trial. The defense objected however Judge Fricke over ruled the objection on the grounds that “their appearance was crucial to understanding their character.”

He seated the defendants alphabetically in two rows opposite the jury while their seven defense attorneys remained seated at the defense table. The attorneys could only speak with their clients during court breaks.

Although the verdict was overthrown because his rulings had denied the defendants their right to counsel, the case was never reopened, the defendants innocence never “completely secured” and Jose Diaz’s murderer was never brought to justice however the Zammora decision ended mass trials in California.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_fricke.html

The Hangin' Judge

In the interview, Fricke totally justified his condemning people to death. I was able to grab this shot of Fricke as he continued to expound on the righteousness of killing people by law.

When we were ready to leave I asked, **“The skull that’s on your bench, Judge. Has that been there long?”**

“As long as I have , I guess.”

“My dad had one like that sent to him from a crime reader’s book of the month club.”

“I belonged to that club.”

“Was the skull on your bench when you sentenced Caryl Chessman, your Honor?”

“Why, yes. I suppose so.”

“And Santos and Perkins with Barbara Graham?”

“Yes.”

“All of those people stood before you looking up at the skull while you sentenced them to death?”

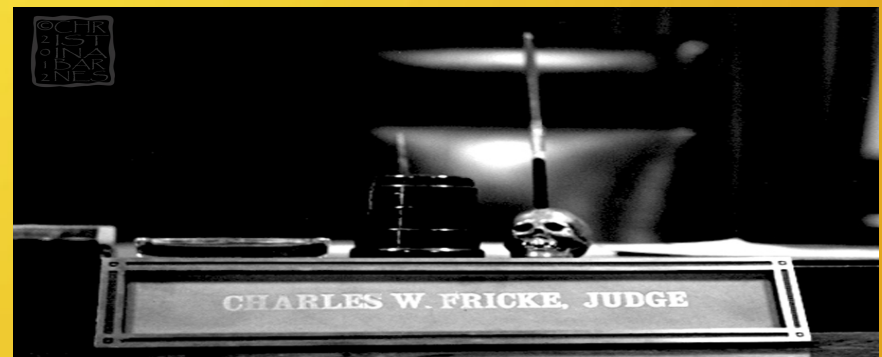
He smiled wryly from his heavily wrinkled face, “What’s your interest?”

“I just took a picture of it.”

Judge Fricke’s smile froze. There wasn’t a kindly line in his grotesque face. He indulged in lesser conversation while I took the first load of equipment to the car. When I returned, the skull was gone. It never appeared on the bench again.

After examining the portrait of judge Fricke more closely years later, I discovered still another skull in the clutter on his desk. Seems the old man had a penchant for death.

<https://iwitnesslife.wordpress.com/2012/10/14/the-hangin-judge/>



The Girls

“Although never tried or convicted, nine young women connected to the case were also detained by the police for months in a virtual state of solitary confinement. Three of them—Dora Barrios (18), Lorena Encinas (19), and Frances Silva (18)—were arrested as murder suspects. As juveniles, Barrios and Encinas, along with Juanita “Jenny” Gonzales and Betty Nuñez Zeiss, were sent to the notorious Ventura School for Girls of the California Youth Authority, where they served an average of sixteen months (Escobedo 2004, 67; Pagán 2003, 203; Ramírez 2000, 20).” Since the girls were not sentenced by the court but were committed by their parents, they were not released when the verdict was overturned and remained wards of the state until they were twenty one.

<http://history.msu.edu/hst327/files/2009/05/Defense-Committees-of-Sleepy-Lagoon.pdf>

There were allegedly five young women from the case that were sent to the Ventura School for Girls however the fifth girl is unclear. Francis Silva was committed for “Mexican fighting” and Josephine Gonzalez testified that she had been sent there at the trial but it isn't clear if she was sent back. (“From Coveralls to Zoot Suits: The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front” by Elizabeth R. Escobedo.)



Figure 3. From left: Dora Barrios, Frances Silva, and Lorena Encinas. Herald-Examiner Collection, Los Angeles Public Library.

“The lack of public outcry over the fate of the Sleepy Lagoon girls suggests that the public was willing to overlook a certain amount of violence as an acceptable part of masculinity but not female violence...these women who defied normative gender constructions got precisely what they deserved.”

(Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race & Riot in Wartime L.A. By Eduardo Obregon Pagan)

Why Was Ventura School for Girls So Bad?

The school had a reputation for being “hellish” and “draconian.” Girls would swallow safety pins to avoid being transferred there. The school was a reformatory for “wayward and sexually promiscuous young women” (PBS, Zoot Suit Riots). In the 2013 article “Spotlight on Ventura: Young Women's Perspectives on Reform in the California Youth Authority” Freeda Yllana interviewed two young women who were serving time there. According to the girls:

“A five minute wake-up call gave her just enough time to brush her teeth, wash her face, and fix her bed. If her bed was not made, they would not open the door to let her out. Some days she brought her laundry out, and it was returned by the time she got back from school. She had breakfast, and then went back to her room for fifteen minutes to get ready for school. She went to school from 8:00 am until 2:30 pm, with a half hour break for lunch. Esmeralda worked a shift in the kitchen where she labored for twelve cents an hour until noon, and then proceeded to class until school was over. After school, they were allowed two hours of “program” to choose their own recreational activity, such as using the telephone, watching TV, eating, or going outside and exercising. Then, they were off to the showers, and if everything went well, they got another hour of program before and after dinner. They were locked down in their rooms for an hour before bedtime and then, “it’s over.”

The girls were responsible for purchasing their own hygiene products and stamps if they wanted to write letters home. Calls were collect. If they were in lock up, she would be given a long blue vest to wear and slept on the floor with “a piece of material the size of a baby blanket.” She was allowed out to take a shower and for “45 minutes of program” but otherwise passed her time in darkness and isolation.

<http://scholarship.law.berkeley.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1239&context=bglj>

Injustices

Following Jose Diaz's death, six hundred young men and women were taken into police custody solely because they were Mexican American. The city of LA held an open line up so that citizens could pick out the guilty parties for various offenses.

The police also detained the witnesses from the party using a section of the penal code pertaining to lynching which allowed for the 'forcible removal of prisoners in order to press felony charges.' (Law in the Western United States by Gordon Morris Bakken).

The case was tried in the press as well as the court room. The media ran headlines such as "One Killed and 10 Hurt in Boy Wars," "Mexican Goon Squads" and "Pachuco Killers" inflaming fears of "Mexican crime waves" and "pachuco gangs." They reported on the trial every day calling the defendants the "goons of sleepy lagoon." Newspapers ran reports on how to "de suit a zoot suiter" during the riots.

Cops lined up outside of dance halls, armed with pokers to which sharp razor blades were attached, and they ripped the peg-top trousers and "zootsuits" of the boys as they came out.

(http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=605)

Taxis would drive the service men through the streets looking for pachucos for hours.

The defendants were forced to wear the same clothing for the duration of the trial and were prohibited from cutting their hair. The prosecution withheld clean clothes from the defendants for two months leading up to the trial.

They were seated alphabetically in two rows facing the jury and were denied access to their attorneys. They had to stand when their name was mentioned by a witness.

E. Duran Ayres of the LA County Sheriff's Foreign Relations Bureau stated that:

When the Spaniards conquered Mexico they found an organized society composed of many tribes of Indians ruled over by the Aztecs who were given over to human sacrifice. Historians record that as many as 30,000 Indians were sacrificed . . . in one day, their bodies ... opened by stone knives and their hearts torn out.... This total disregard for human life has always been universal throughout the Americas among the Indian population, which of course is well known to everyone.... This Mexican element ... knows and feels ... a desire to use a knife or some lethal weapon.... His desire is to kill. or at least let blood....

(http://www.oac.cdlib.org/view?docId=hb6m3nb79m&brand=oac4&doc.view=entire_text)

Why Was Wearing a Zoot Suit So Offensive?

Defiance of war time rationing made them unpatriotic



The Anglo soldiers and sailors often resented the zoot suiters whose sense of fashion made them stand out. While Mexican-Americans were serving in the military in a higher proportion than other groups, the soldiers and sailors often viewed them as draft-dodgers. In addition, the zoot suits were made out of wool which was rationed at the time. In 1942, the War Production Board—the government agency in charge of rationing—had drawn up regulations on clothing manufacture. Under these regulations, the manufacture of zoot suits was prohibited. However, there was still demand for the zoot suits and bootleg tailors were soon meeting that demand.

The soldiers and sailors justified their anti-Mexican racism as an expression of patriotism and when they saw Mexican-American youth in zoot suits, they saw people who they viewed as un-American. They saw the zoot suits as a way of flouting the laws of rationing.”

<http://www.dailykos.com/story/2014/01/03/1266933/-History-101-The-Zoot-Suit-Riots#>

Why Was Wearing a Zoot Suit So Offensive?

Race issues

Class issues

The suit was a marker of class as well as race. The zoot suit was sharp, always pressed, always clean, and never frumpy. The zoot was expensive, and most often tailor-made. Some zooters, for example a young Malcolm X, paid for the suits on installment plans. However, the zoot suit was not a middle-class style. In respect to Mexican Americans in Los Angeles, zoot suits were only worn by working-class youth, as noted by Cesar Chavez. "People that wore them *eran los mas pobres* [were the poorest], the guys like us who were migrant farm workers.

Though those wearing it were working-class, the zoot suit was a symbol of status. "By flaunting their disposable incomes, pachucos and pachucas underscored the instability of class and race categories. Via their expensive clothing, they demonstrated that Mexican Americans could and could climb the socioeconomic ladder." The fact that zooters wore the suit in leisure-based arenas like the dance hall was often incorrectly perceived as zooters having the financial resources to avoid work, a perception that radically challenged the race-based class structure of the country. In the case of Mexican American pachucos, the zoot suit signified the possibility of class mobility, a concept that was not welcomed by most whites. Of course, the fact that zooters worked (sometimes multiple jobs) and saved for months to afford a zoot suit remained invisible to outsiders.

<http://www.yale.edu/ynhti/nationalcurriculum/units/2012/1/12.01.01.x.htm>



Why Did They De-Suit the Zoot Suiters?

According to Marcious Mazon, the ritual was “more important than the reality.” Although an estimated 5,000 people joined in the Zoot Suit Riots, the “riots” were perceived as “nonviolent” because there was no loss of lives or property.” The purpose of the service men was to “depants” Pachuos, humiliate them and cut their hair. They were “symbolically annihilated castrated, transformed and otherwise rendered the subjects of effigial rights.”

Newspapers even ran instructions on how do de-suit a Zoot Suiter: “Grab a zooter. Take off his pants and frock coat and tear them up or burn them. Trim the “Argentine ducktail” that goes with the screwy costume.”

Uses psychoanalytic theory to explore why sailors experienced anti-Mexican hysteria in rioting against zoot-suited youth, arguing that they were enacting rituals of erasure against civilian youth that they themselves had been subjected to when inducted into the military.

Despite the violence and the humiliation, Marzano writes, “what transpired was a carnival-like atmosphere in which servicemen and civilians acted out inhibitions about the war in a complex series of symbolic rituals of death, rebirth, initiation and role-reversal.”

The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation by Mauricio Marzano

Sleepy Lagoon Defense

Daily News LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA
SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 1942

This is the Story of a 'Crime'

On the night of August 2nd, 1942, hours after a brawl, a man was found dead. Not a single witness could say who struck the man. Not a single witness could say under oath that the man was struck. Yet for this alleged "crime" seventeen boys were convicted—three to life imprisonment, nine to five years to life and five to one year—in the greatest mass betrayal of justice in the history of California law.

WHAT ARE THE FACTS?

On the night in question one Jose Diaz attended a birthday party at a home near a mud puddle derisively called Sleepy Lagoon. There was much drinking. Some surely guests left after a brawl. Later in the evening a group of youngsters crashed the party. A second fight resulted. Some time later the body of Diaz was found in a roadside ditch. It had neither knife nor bullet wounds. Bruises on hands and knuckles indicated that Diaz had given blows as well as received injuries. Diagnosis established an alcoholic condition. Death was caused by a fractured skull which could have resulted from a drunken fall, or a blow from a car passing or backing up in the dark. Many cars were parked in the area.

ZOOT SUIT HYSTERIA

These events occurred at a time when zoot suit hysteria was sweeping Los Angeles. Hysteria and justice are not bedfellows. In their zeal, police took into custody hundreds of youngsters from the streets of the Mexican quarter. Eventually 24 were indicted for murder. Some of the 24 voluntarily came to the sheriff's office when informed they were wanted for questioning. That is not the act of murderers. The oldest boy was 22. The youngest 15½. All but two were American-born citizens. American citizenship is not a crime. It should be a blessing. But the boys were of Mexican extraction. One attorney representing two boys asked for a separate trial. Permission was granted. The other 22 were to be tried together.

THE TRIAL

The trial started. Twenty-two boys came into court, unkempt, long-haired. One of the prosecuting attorneys had forbidden the boys to have a change of clothing or a haircut for over two months! Was this justice or histrionic cunning better reserved for movie plots? Yet it is a matter of record. It took a court order to get the boys a haircut.

There were seven attorneys for the defense when the trial opened. To prevent confusion, it was decided to consolidate the defense under one lawyer. New counsel was agreed upon and a three-day recess was requested for new counsel to study the case. The presiding judge refused. The reason? It would cause unnecessary delay. Three days against 22 lifetimes!

In the courtroom the boys were segregated in one group. Permission was requested for the boys to sit with counsel for necessary consultation during the trial. The case lasted 13 weeks. Need for consultation was great. But in his zeal the presiding judge refused. The reason? A scarcity of space!

Many concepts were an trial with those boys—the rights of minorities to equal justice in our courts—the Good Neighbor policy—the war—democracy itself. And democracy lost. Seventeen defendants were found guilty. Seventeen for one!

The day of the conviction, Radio Berlin short-waved the good news to all of Latin-America. Since then Radio Berlin has not let Latin-America forget.

"INSUFFICIENT EVIDENCE"

Some time later a separate trial was called for the remaining two defendants. The prosecution immediately asked for a dismissal. On what grounds? Insufficient evidence! Unbelievable, you say? But it is all a matter of record. Did the prosecution attorneys fear that the same evidence used to convict 17 could not twice stand the light of day? Did they hesitate in the presence of a judge perhaps less zealous? Were they aghast at the mischief they had so cunningly wrought? Or were they convinced that yesterday's case was now, without mass hysteria, no case at all?

THE CRIME

A hard-headed defense attorney heard sentence pronounced, heard the sweeping of murderers, fathers, sisters, and remarked, "what has just happened to those boys is a crime."

A crime against justice, against humanity, against the very principles of democracy.

A crime against the national and racial UNITY of peoples that is the very backbone of America—a UNITY which our enemies constantly and viciously attack.

A crime that strikes directly at the UNITY of our war effort.

A crime that we who love California must wipe out.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?

The Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee was formed to aid these boys in every possible way. Persons prominent in many professions, of every political party and every religious faith have joined the committee or contributed financial and moral support.

You as an individual should write Attorney General Robert Kenny at Sacramento urging him, as one who is opposed to racial discrimination, to join in requesting the court to set aside the convictions.

Defense attorneys are appealing the cases. Cases involved are considerable. The future of these boys—your own civil liberties—are at stake. The price of freedom is eternal vigilance, and in this instance—cash. Your financial contribution is desperately needed for the defense fund. So is your help and encouragement. Send checks, cash, letters to—

SLEEPY LAGOON DEFENSE

Carey McWilliams, National Chairman
1006 Broadway Arcade Building Los Angeles 13, California

(This Advertisement Contributed By A Friend)

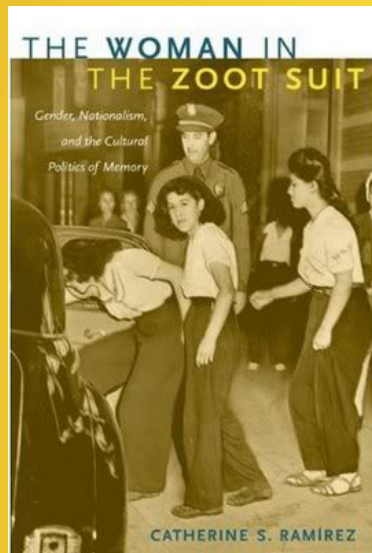
Reprinted from the Los Angeles DAILY NEWS by the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee

Black Widow

The riots now spread beyond California to Arizona and Texas. Now media coverage began to concentrate on gangs of women zoot-suiters like the Slick Chicks and the Black Widows. The appearance of the female zoot suiters was linked to the breakdown of family normality . "... There are many indications that the war years saw a remarkable increase in the numbers of young women who were taken into social care or referred to penal institutions, as a result of the specific social problems they had to encounter" (Cosgrove). **The Slick Chicks and Black Widows wore black drape jackets, fishnet stockings and tight skirts with heavy make-up, dark lipstick and black eyeliner, with pompadour hairstyles.** Some adopted the full zoot suit outfit, challenging heterosexual norms of dressing. Cosgrove again : "The Black Widows clearly existed outside the orthodoxies of wartime society: playing no part in the industrial war effort, and openly challenging conventional notions of feminine beauty and sexuality".

Black Widow

<http://labloga.blogspot.com/2009/08/whos-that-woman-in-zoot-suit.html>



We're reinserting her here in a sketch to honor her a bit and to summarize her attire and look, which Ramirez discusses in detail. This particular pachuca is very cool in her **huarache sandals, although more feminine pachucas might have worn short skirts and heels. Her hair is styled into a pompadour. This was also known as a razor blade hairdo, as la pachuca's big hair was supposed to serve as a perfect hiding place for razor blades.** Myth or reality? Perhaps in la pachuca's world you never knew when you were going to have to throw down. Also emblematic were her **thinly plucked eyebrows and her dark lips,** traits later visible in cholas and cha cha girls. Some pachucas donned the **zoot suit jacket with a skirt that fell above the knees, scandalous attire at the time. Others, like the sketch here, wore the entire tacuche or zoot suit, taking on a masculine or butch persona, and therefore signaling gender and sexual transgression.** According to Ramirez, it was this transgression that challenged heteronormative views of nationalism, like La Familia, and that ultimately relegated la pachuca to status of "other" and "outcast."

Racial Profiling



Figure 2. Young women under investigation for connection with the Sleepy Lagoon case stand in a lineup after the 1942 police dragnet. Left to right: Betty Zeiss, Ann Kalustian, Frances Silva, unknown, Lorena Encinas, Dora Barrios, Josefina "Josephine" Gonzales, and Juanita "Jennie" Gonzales. Photo courtesy of the *Herald Examiner* Collection/Los Angeles Public Library.

Yellow Journalism



Suspects Must Not
Change Haircut,
Judge Rules

17 Face
Prison in
Goon Case

Under prison sentences today were the 17 so-called "goons of Sleepy Lagoon," pachuco boys convicted in connection with the slaying of Jose Diaz last October. Sentence was pronounced late yesterday by Superior Judge Charles V. Fricke.

The judge denied a defense motion for a new trial. He sentenced three of the youths found guilty of first degree murder—Henry Leyvas, 17, Jose Ruiz, 17, and Robert Telles, 17, alleged leaders of the gang—to life im-

Zoot Suit Riots

May 31 – June 8, 1943

Riots of 1943: Sequence of Events

May 31: Twelve sailors and servicemen clashed violently with Pachuco youth near downtown Los Angeles.

June 3: Fifty sailors leave the Naval Reserve Armory in Chávez Ravine, near Chinatown, attacking anyone wearing zoot suits.

June 4-5: Rioting servicemen conduct search-and-destroy raids on Mexican Americans in the downtown area.

June 6: The rioting escalates and spreads into East Los Angeles.

June 7: The worst of the rioting occurs.

June 8: Major rioting ends in Los Angeles but spreads into other ports and urban centers such as Detroit, Chicago, Philadelphia and Harlem where African Americans dressed in zoot suits become targets.

Zoot Suit Discovery Guide

<http://research.pomona.edu/zootsuit/en/riots/>

The first ones attacked were 12-13 years old:

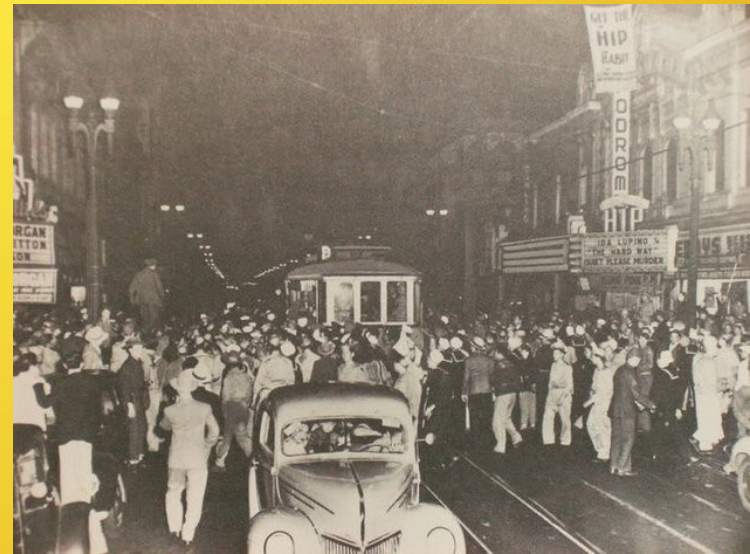
“ Unable to find any zoot-suiters at Alpine, they proceeded toward downtown and stopped at the Carmen Theater. After turning on the house lights, the sailors roamed the aisles looking for zoot-suiters. The first victims of the zoot suit riots -- 12 and 13-year-old boys -- were guilty of little more than being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Ignoring the protests of the patrons, the sailors tore the suits off their bodies and beat and clubbed the boys. The remains of their suits were then set ablaze.”

The worst violence was on June 7:

One Los Angeles paper printed a guide on how to "de-zoot" a zoot suiter: "Grab a zooter. Take off his pants and frock coat and tear them up or burn them." That night a crowd of 5,000 civilians gathered downtown. By this time the mob was no longer made up of only sailors from the Armory. Soldiers, Marines, and sailors from other installations as far away as Las Vegas eagerly joined in the assaults. Part of the mob headed south for the predominately African American section of Watts and another group headed east for Mexican American East Los Angeles.

(http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/e_riots.html)

Zoot Suit Riots



Newspaper Articles About Zoot Suit Riots

<https://web.viu.ca/davies/H324War/Zootsuit.riots.media.1943.htm>

Being There

An eyewitness to the attacks, journalist Carey McWilliams, described the scene as follows:

“Marching through the streets of downtown Los Angeles, a mob of several thousand soldiers, sailors, and civilians, proceeded to beat up every zoot suiter they could find. Pushing its way into the important motion picture theaters, the mob ordered the management to turn on the house lights and then ran up and down the aisles dragging Mexicans out of their seats. Streetcars were halted while Mexicans, and some Filipinos and Negroes, were jerked off their seats, pushed into the streets and beaten with a sadistic frenzy.”



Acquittal October 1944



What She Knew



TED ENCINAS

On her deathbed, Lorena Encinas confessed to her children that her baby brother, Louis Jesus, "jumped" Jose.

"According to Ted Encinas, Lorena's son, on the evening of August 1, 1942, Lorena attended a birthday party at the Williams ranch. She told her children decades later that Louis and some friends had crashed that party, and after a brief altercation the family ordered him to leave. He told her that upon leaving, he and his friends encountered a boy who had just left the party and "jumped him." Later, when the Los Angeles police answered a call that there had been a murder near the house, they questioned Lorena. She refused to say anything and was subsequently taken into custody."

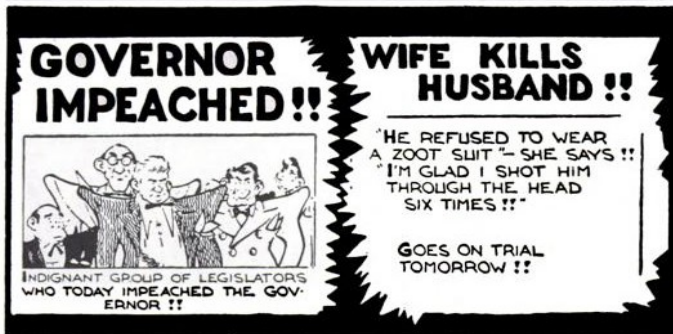
"Lorena had to give her child up to her mother to raise for the length of her internment. Her brother Louie's safety, however, was preeminent to her and she would allow her friends and herself to be locked up before implicating him.

Louis committed suicide while holding up the Bank of America in 1972. He was buried near his victim.

timelines given by eyewitnesses prove that Jose was still alive after Louis was ejected from the party so the confession is in question.

http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_peopleevents/p_encinas.html

Did a Cartoon Make Them Do It?



"Well, I ain't Zoot Suit Yokum." (Tommy.)

Zoot Suit Yokum was a Lil Abner character created by cartoonist, Al Capp, who was in cahoot with zoot suit manufacturers to take over of the world. In "The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation" by Mauricio Mazon, Mazon states that "Capp orchestrates what may well have been one of the greatest preconscious stimulants to the riots" when Zoot Suit Yokum's storyline ended with the "complete annihilation of the zoot suiters." (page 36.)

Did he create feelings of paranoia in his readers that could only be quelled by overpowering and defeating a cartoon character who came to life on the streets of L.A. In 1943?

Six Degrees of Separation

Members of the Brown Berets frequented Hank's, a restaurant that Hank Leyvas opened, often sought his counsel Luis Valdez's play "Los Vendidos" opened at a Brown Beret junta in Elysian Park in East Los Angeles.

When All Else Fails, Remember:

