

## 'Zoot Suit' and history – Part 1

Posted on [June 27, 2011](#)



I was extremely fortunate to attend Wednesday night's showing of "Zoot Suit" and hear remarks by the panel that preceded the show. Betto Arcos moderated a session with director Luis Valdez, Rose Portillo (Della), Edward James Olmos (El Pachuco) and Eric Avila, associate professor of Chicano studies at UCLA.

"Zoot Suit" is a powerful movie (because of the small budget, it is essentially a film of the play) and the historian in me kept whispering: "Look it up." Here's a sample of what I found:

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“Zoot Suit” combines two historic events: The 1942 “Sleepy Lagoon” killing and the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots. To keep things from becoming overly complicated, I’m going to look at the Zoot Suit Riots first and then delve into the “Sleepy Lagoon” killing.

*Photo 1: Program for “Zoot Suit” Credit: Jose Legaspi*

*Photo 2: A mob stops a streetcar looking for a zoot-suiter, June 8, 1943. Credit: Los Angeles Times*

My curiosity was aroused by the gigantic newspaper headlines from the Los Angeles Examiner used in “Zoot Suit,” with production design by Tom H. John and set decoration by Fred S. Winston. Given the dates (1942-43) this would have certainly been during the era of City Editor Jim Richardson, whose ruthless coverage of the Black Dahlia killing remains a case study in the excesses of the press.

Specifically, I wondered whether he wrote about it in his autobiography “For the Life of Me,” which could carry the subtitle: “I was a better reporter drunk than you are sober and don’t you ever forget it.” As city editor, Richardson undoubtedly shaped the Examiner’s coverage of the Zoot Suit Riots.

Unfortunately, Richardson doesn’t seem to have written anything about the incident. (Nor are the riots mentioned in two other reporters’ autobiographies of the era: Agness Underwood’s “Newspaperwoman” and Florabel Muir’s “Headline Happy.”)

# The Lighter Side

By HENRY McLEMORE

I put on my "zoot" suit with a rear pleat, with a drape shape and a stuff cuff, and went to the Trianon to swing and sway the jitterbug way with a new crop of Americans.

The new crop is composed of defense workers — boys and girls who work their heads off in airplane factories during the day and dance their feet off at night.

They wear "zoot" suits, too. That's right, "zoot" suits.



## This Is Zoot Suit

I'll do my very best to describe a "zoot" suit to you. The male "zoot" suit is made of gray-and-white-striped mattress ticking. From about a mile away, it looks like the stuff morning coats are made of. The cuff of the trousers is seven inches wide. At the knee the pants measure 30 inches. At the thigh they are 53 inches around. The pants keep going on up until they threaten the wearer's Adam's apple.

A coat goes with this. Quite a coat, too. It has the length, the cut, the drape, the piping and the accessories of a coat that a colored minister from Georgia would buy for the funeral of a top member of his congregation. A chauffeur, say, who always threw a buck in the plate on Sunday morning.

There has been a song written about "zoot" suits. Ray Gilbert and Bob O'Brien did it. When they play this at the Trianon, and the "zoot" suiters start swinging—well, brothers, it's like Fourth of July in a zoo with the lion and the tiger as joint master of ceremonies.

## Girls Wear Drapes

with Bob. I got me a "zoot" suit and cut loose.

I'm a bit old for jitterbugging, and the creaking of my bones could be heard over the music of the orchestra, but I stuck at it. I cut a rug with a Lockheed girl. I twisted an ankle with a Douglas lassie. I sashayed with a Vega lovely. I stomped and jumped and hopped and leaped with a Consolidated honey and a Boeing beauty.

At 12:30 a.m. I was about dead, but out of devotion to my readers, you lovely people who make it possible for me to earn bread and butter, I kept a-jumping.

At 12:31 Bandleader Crosby hoisted his baton, waved it a few times and sent his band into the Vultee swing.

## Song by Crosby

The Vultee swing is a song written by Crosby for the boys and girls who work in the Vultee airplane plant from 4 in the afternoon until midnight. They have to have some time to play, so they play at night.

In they came, riveters, layout men, jigmakers, punchpress operators, drop-hammer operators, rougher operators, girls who inspected rivets, girls who sorted, checkers.

There was Georgette de Mouline. There was Ray Dameron. There was Barney Jackson. There was Rhys James. There was Irene Loeffler. Boys and girls. Working on bombers. Working on pursuits. Working on the things that finally will win this war for us.

A new life for them. New hours. New entertainment. A new crop of Americans. F. Scott Fitzgerald could have taken them and brought them to life on the printed page. "Zoot" suits. Swing hands at those hours near dawn. No natural life. Girls, boys, all thrown out of line by a nation at war. But girls and boys accepting that fact and making the most of it.

<p>The girls wear "zoot" suits, too. Only they don't call them that. They call them "defense drapes" and "defense capes." They are made of the same material and allow full freedom for jitterbugging.</p> <p>The idea of going to a place like the Trianon came to me through an article in Life magazine. It told of the new crop of fun seekers from defense plants.</p> <p>I followed this lead and asked Bob Crosby, the band leader, about it. He said he played at the Trianon. He said the Trianon, a vast armory of a place, with acres of hardwood floor and miles of beer concessions, was the night and day rendezvous of the defense workers.</p> <p>So I went to the Trianon</p>	<p><b>Nice Boys, Sweet Girls</b></p> <p>Nice boys with kicky feet. Sweet girls with lovely smiles, although just a little bit tired. A dollar to spend. A soft drink. A beer. A little favor.</p> <p>Some fuss about income tax. Uh, gonna cost us a lot of money. Some fuss about inconveniences. No tires. No silk. No this, and no that.</p> <p>Let us fuss. Our fussing doesn't matter. Back of us, without a dime, with no luxuries to lose, no softness to trade no, stands and walks the youth of this country. As always, they'll fight our battle. And always, they'll win it. And then—for their reward—they'll be able to turn to the youth that will follow them.</p> <p>It's a vicious circle, yes, but a lovely one, too.</p> <p>Distributed by McNaught Syndicate, Inc.</p>
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The earliest mention in The Times, on Feb. 6, 1942, is a lighthearted look at zoot suits, which treats them as a sort of youthful fad. The men and women who wear zoot fashions are mostly defense workers, according to Henry McLemore, who visited the Trianon Ballroom, 2800 Firestone in South Gate. (With music by Bob Crosby!) It all sounds like white, middle-class entertainment. The Times notes in Feb. 12, 1942, item that a novelty song titled "[Zoot Suit](#)" has been recorded by Kay Kyser of "Three Little Fishies" fame. Not exactly Lalo Guerrero and "[Los Chucos Suave](#)."

Attitudes toward the zoot suit hardened within months however. as reflected in this Lee Shippey column of April 2, 1942. And on Aug. 6, 1942, The Times noted that some men at "Glendale's fighter control station" called their baggy coveralls "zoot suits."

**THE ZOOT SUIT**

Not all the courage is in the Army or the Navy. It takes a good deal of it to nerve a young man to the wearing of a zoot suit in a place in which he is sure to encounter men in uniform. The latter have taken to stepping up to zoot suit wearers and politely asking: "May I have this dance, Miss?"

In September, the War Production Board prohibited the manufacture of zoot suits to conserve wool and the ban was extended to cotton, rayon and any fabric necessary for the war effort. For many people, zoot suits became symbol of waste and lack of patriotism. (I was about to say that the famous "Ike jacket" was introduced to conserve fabric — [but that story is a little hard to confirm](#).)

By October the zoot suit is no longer a harmless fad of defense workers blowing off steam after a shift at Vultee. It's portrayed in The Times as the fashion of the outlaw, favored by violent Eastside Latino gangs.

2 TUESDAY MORNING.

**Zoot Gangsters Knife and Rob More Victims**

## Three Men Beaten by Bandit Bands and Woman Attacked as Officers Map War Against Crime

Even as authorities yesterday mapped plans to squelch East Side outlawry which Saturday night caused the murder of one man and the serious wounding of six others, including a woman, three more men were knifed, robbed and beaten and a woman was outraged by zoot-suit-wearing footpads.

Added to the 25 arrests made Sunday in the aftermath to the murder of Andrew Diaz, 21, and other knifings and beatings, four young men were arrested yesterday—two of them on suspicion of killing him.

### PREPARE CHARGES

The prisoners are John A. Fabela, 16, of 337 S. Pecan St., and Freddie Amado, 15, of 222 S. Hunter St., against whom Detective Lieutenant Roger Hanson of the Newton St. Police Division sought murder complaints at the District Attorney's office and Reyes M. Silva, 20, of 225 N. Kern St., and Thomas Trejo, 18, of 221 N. Kern St., held on suspicion of robbery and assault with a deadly weapon on the person of Alvaro Moreno, 19, of 117 N. Carmelita St., East Los Angeles.

Moreno is in General Hospital in critical condition from knife wounds in the stomach and from loss of blood.

### REPORT CONFESSION

Deputy Sheriff Harry O. Hines and Edward F. McGuire of the Sheriff's East Los Angeles substation said Silva and Trejo confessed holding up Moreno at First and Rowan Sts. yesterday, stabbing him several times and robbing him of \$2—all he possessed.

Although Moreno fainted frequently from weakness, he identified Silva and Trejo at the hospital, the deputies announced. Both prisoners were jaunty in zoot suits.

Other victims yesterday of gang violence included Miss Jessie Delcour, 26, waitress of 518½ E. 22nd St., who was beaten in bed, outraged and then robbed of \$50 by a young man of Mexican appearance. She was treated at Georgia Street Re-

He is in General Hospital in grave condition with a possible skull fracture, deep lacerations and other injuries. He said he was surrounded by a group of Mexican youths wearing zoot suits who assaulted him with knives and clubs. He was robbed of \$10.

Galvanized by the week-end violence, Chief of Police Horrall and Sheriff Biscailuz summoned their department heads, juvenile workers and investigators and charged them with snuffing the outbreaks by as stringent measures as necessary.

Horrall's instructions were given Capt. Joseph Reed, assistant administration officer of the Police Department, and Capt. Verne Rasmussen, head of the central homicide detail.

### MANY DELINQUENTS

Reed reported most of the gang suspects are sons of Mexican immigrants during World War I and many of them have been juvenile delinquents. Many have registered for the draft but have not yet been called up for service.

"Round up all suspects without visible means of support," Horrall ordered, and "check their draft status and every other angle. Maybe some of them could turn their talents for combat to killing Japs."

Sheriff Biscailuz said many of the East Side trouble makers had been refused admission to the armed services because of criminal records or venereal diseases but that undoubtedly some of them would be found to be draft dodgers or eligible for induction.

Biscailuz ordered Capt. Clem Peoples, chief criminal deputy, and other departmental heads to redouble their efforts to curb lawlessness, and use whatever means the situation required.



ceiving Hospital for severe head lacerations and other mistreatment.

#### ATTACKER LEAVES CLUE

Her attacker left a key ring with six keys attached. Police hoped this clue would enable them to identify the intruder.

Jesus Gutierrez, 20, of 220 S Sunol St., East Los Angeles is in General Hospital in serious condition with concussion, a possible skull fracture and severe lacerations as the result of an encounter with 13 young men, all attired in zoot suits at First and Rowan Sts.—the location of Moreno's wounding.

Gutierrez said he fainted after being kicked savagely in the abdomen while being robbed. Although he lost consciousness several times, he managed to reach home, where his mother summoned Sheriff's deputies.

Fred Gutierrez, 21, of 924 N Eastman Ave., was found unconscious on a bench at 4119 Brooklyn Ave. by Sheriff's deputies.

means the situation required.

#### KEEP STREETS SAFE

"We must make and keep the streets safe for man, woman or child 24 hours a day," the Sheriff asserted. "We're losing good men into the armed services from the department, and not getting enough replacements, but that situation should only make the rest of us work all the harder."

"I want every man to bear down, all along the line."

A selective service official who declined use of his name said that local boards had full control over draft registrants in their districts, and that "each case must be decided strictly on its own merits."

More than 40 prisoners, most of whom were arrested Sunday and yesterday, will appear in a showup at 8 p.m. today at Central Jail, when victims of gang violence who are able to attend will attempt to identify various of the suspects.

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## Five Alleged 'Zoot-Suit' Gang Members Jailed in Round-up

### Policeman Injured in Rough-and-Tumble Fight Says Suspect Tried to Bite Off One of His Fingers

Five alleged members of the 'Zoot Suit' gang, believed responsible for numerous assault crimes, were in jail yesterday, and one police officer was under treatment for bruises and lacerations as a result of a rough and tumble fight which occurred during one of the arrests.

Policeman C. I. Christopher accused Gilbert Flores, 29, of 2572 Lancaster St. of trying to bite off one of his fingers in the encounter which took place in an E. First St. cafe.

The beating of two robbery victims William Flores, 18, of 1248 Chelsea St. Santa Monica and F. M. Dominguez, 13, of 1616 1/2 Griffith Ave. started the roundup early yesterday.

Flores was struck with a pop bottle as he was leaving a cafe at 221 E. First St. and was treated at Georgia Street Hospital for a possible skull fracture. Dominguez was accosted by gangsters at First and Vignes Sts. and forced to drive them in his car to Washington and Atlantic Blvds. where he was robbed and beaten.

Those held on suspicion of being members of the gang responsible for the assaults are:

John Sanchez, 21, of 658 1/2 N State St. Tony Mergil, 23, of 107 S Mott St. Martin Fajio, 18, of 516 Ducommun St. and Lalo A. Gutierrez, 20, of 759 Lord St.

## New Zoot Gangster Attacks Result in Arrest of 100

Complaints Against 43 Issued, Accusing Them  
of Unlawful Assemblage in Week-end Outbreaks

Attacks by gangs of zoot suit youths on citizens over the week end yesterday resulted in severe action by Los Angeles city and County authorities.

Nearly 100 persons, two-thirds of them adults, were held for investigation and 43 complaints were issued by Donald M. Redwine, chief complaint deputy in the City Attorney's office.

These complaints, charging unlawful assemblage, were issued against adults who assertedly participated in a disturbance Sunday night at a dance hall at 4607 W. Pico Blvd. While police arrested 71 persons there.

Appearing before Municipal Judge Edwin L. Jefferson in Lincoln Heights Court yesterday afternoon, 11 of the defendants entered pleas of guilty and asked for probation, while 32 pleaded not guilty.

The probation hearing was set for Nov. 4 and the trial of the other 32 defendants for Nov. 7. Bail for all was set at \$500.

The charges on which they are to be tried carry a maximum penalty of six months in jail or a \$500 fine, or both.

Meanwhile, eight youths and three girls were arrested early

yesterday by Sheriff's deputies of the East Los Angeles station as suspects in an attack on a man in a cafe in that area.

The girls, all juveniles, were released to their parents and the youths were booked on suspicion of robbery and assault.

Following reports that Felix Pinuelas, 3930 Langford St., had been beaten in a cafe at Brooklyn Ave. and Hazard St., deputy sheriffs arrested the 11 suspects in two cars nearby.

In another attack, three men were set upon by a gang of 'zoot suit' youths in two automobiles and one was severely injured.

The victims were Carlos Montoya, 21, of 3211 Eagle St., Bob Triester, 22, of 1121 Gage Ave. and Don O. Narvesson, an enlisted man in the Navy.

### Hit-and-Run Driver Kills Woman Instantly

Speeding west on Washington Blvd. at Helms Ave., a car early yesterday struck Arvie Harrison, 32, of 1304 Helms Ave., Culver City, hurling her 100 feet to almost instant death, deputy sheriffs reported. The driver failed to stop they said.

MONDAY MORNING.

## Ten Seized in Drive on Zoot Suit Gangsters

Six Held on Suspicion of Assault With Deadly  
Weapon, Three for Vagrancy and One in Theft

Continuing their roundup of zoot suit gangster suspects, Sheriff's officers yesterday arrested six men on suspicion of assault with a deadly weapon, three on vagrancy and one on burglary charges.

Joe C. Posedada, 4739 Hammel St., who was assaulted and beaten by a gang in front of a cafe at 329 N. Mednik St., East Los Angeles, Saturday night, identified six men as his assailants. Upon his pointing out the suspects who were sitting in the cafe at that address, Investigator Foster Kellogg and Deputy Sheriff E. F. McGuire arrested and booked them at the County Jail.

Investigation developed that all six had been convicted of prior offenses, the officers reported.

Those arrested on the assault charge are Robert Sanders, 24, of 838 1/2 Carmelita St.; Henry P. De

Anda, 24, of 113 N. Arizona St.; Christy La Costa, 38, of 343 N. Arizona St.; David N. Loya, 23, of 318 N. Eastman St.; Gregory H. Nunez, 23, of 4625 Michigan St., and Gilbert Palacio, 21, of 4435 New York St.

Four more gangster suspects were arrested at 4353 Floral Drive, East Los Angeles, when deputy sheriffs observed them loitering in front of a beer parlor at that address.

One of the four, Joseph Aleman, 19, of 828 N. Humphreys St. was booked at the East Los Angeles Sheriff's substation on a charge of suspicion of burglary.

The other three, Ernest A. Alvarez, 21, of 801 N. Eastern Ave.; Ansencio F. Castro, 18, of 832 N. Humphreys St., and Louis V. Marquez, 19, of 817 N. Cordova St., were detained on vagrancy charges. They are to be arraigned in Belvedere Justice Court today at 9 a.m.



# Gang Death Inquest Called for Today

Following an inquest at 9:30 a.m. today, police will seek formal complaints against four youths and a girl held on suspicion of murder in the "zoot suit gang" shooting of Felix Miramonte, 15, Sunday night, authorities said yesterday.

Those held by police are Virginia Morales, 18, of 736 Judson St.; Edward A. Hernandez, 21, of 358 Bailey St.; Arthur Mendoza, 18, of 1651 Pomeroy Drive; Genaro Juarez, 19, of 737 N. Boyle Ave., and John M. Montez, 20, of 1623 Pleasant Drive.

Private J. V. Olivas of the United States Marine Corps, who was arrested with the group, has been cleared of implication in the murder, but is being held on request of San Diego authorities, police reported.

Times photo

## Side of Youths in 'Gangs' Told

**Mexican Aid Group  
Takes Up Enforcement  
Matters With Sheriff**

Members of the Mexican Youth Defense Committee yesterday met with Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz and Undersheriff A. C. Jewell to discuss problems between law enforcement officers and zoot-suit-clad east-side youths.

Phillip Connolly, State president of the C.I.O. who acted as spokesman for the group, complained to the Sheriff about the manner in which deputies reportedly "rousted" Mexican

youths in investigating juvenile gang disorders.

A number of the Mexican youths are members of the C.I.O., Connolly said, and are law-abiding citizens.

#### PROPAGANDA BLAMED

The union official asserted that the fault for recent outbreaks of youthful killings and vandalism lies not with the young men, but with "propaganda against them."

During a recent grand jury investigation of the situation, Connolly said, the inquisitorial body inferred that Mexicans are of an "inferior" class.

Sheriff Biscailuz denied the accusation, replying that law enforcement agencies treat all suspects alike, regardless of their race or creed.

#### PRESSURE OPPOSED

Emphasizing that any person with constructive criticism to voice is welcome in his office, the Sheriff warned that any group attempting to bring pressure to bear against his office with respect to the youth delinquency problems will be given short shrift.

Connolly asked that Deputy Sheriff E. E. Duran-Ayres be discharged for writing a pulp magazine article about the local juvenile delinquency situation. The article was carried under the byline of Clem Peoples, chief criminal deputy.

#### DISCHARGE REFUSED

Sheriff Biscailuz refused any such action, commenting that Duran-Ayres is a "good man." Later the deputy denied authorship of the article.

Included in the committee's membership are Mrs. L. S. Fletcher, member of the League of Women Voters; Oscar Fuss, legislative director of the C.I.O.; Robert S. Norris Jr., member of the Lawyers Guild; John Bright, member of the Council of Pan-American Democracies; Mrs. LaRue McCormick, secretary of the Committee for Defense of Mexican-American Youth; Mrs. Josephine Fierro de Bright, secretary of the Spanish-speaking Peoples Congress, and Manuel Ruiz, chairman of a committee organ-

ized by the Board of Supervisors  
to study the juvenile problem.

On the first anniversary of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, the Mexican Youth Defense Committee meets with Los Angeles County Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz to protest mistreatment of Latino zoot-suiters. Notice this: "During a recent grand jury investigation of the situation ... the inquisitorial body inferred the Mexicans are of an 'inferior' class." Biscailuz denied the accusations.

And the year concluded with one more crime by a zoot suit gang.

U.S.O. did the right thing.

## Zoot-Suit Gang Beats Up Man

**Invited for Lift,  
Victim is Later  
Hurled From Auto**

Beaten over the head with bottles and brass knuckles by four members of a zoot-suit gang, Frank A. Getz, 53, of 619 McDonald St., was taken to General Hospital early yesterday with severe head injuries.

He told deputy sheriffs that the youths offered him a ride as he stood waiting for a bus at Brooklyn Ave. and Rowan St. When he got in the car they started beating him, eventually throwing him out at First and Townsend Sts., where he was found lying in the street.

Getz said all the youths were between 16 and 20 and dressed in zoot-suit outfits.

## ‘Zoot Suit’ and History – Part 2

Posted on [June 28, 2011](#)



**May 9, 1943:** Al Capp satirizes zoot suits in a series about “Zoot-Suit Yokum.”

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[In Part 1](#), we saw that in 1942, The Times originally portrayed zoot suits as a youthful fad, but that attitudes hardened toward them once the War Production Board outlawed them to conserve fabric. We saw that some servicemen were hassling zoot-suiters and there were regular reports of crimes committed by Eastside zoot suit gangs.

### Significance of Zoot-Suit Gangsters

BY TIMOTHY G. TURNER

**Jan. 14, 1943:** Here’s an essay by Timothy Turner, and the headline, unfortunately reflects the bias of whoever wrote it rather than Turner’s thoughts. Turner was an interesting fellow who spent many years in Mexico and covered the Mexican Revolution.

Here’s part of what he has to say:

The Mexican problem confronting this city today is compounded by color prejudice. Most of these young Mexicans have much Indian blood. There is a definite caste system against them. It is not like that against the Negro. Like Orientals they can go into restaurants and theaters. But a young Mexican American finds the economic bars up against him. He or she cannot get a job in stores or offices, even as a waiter or waitress in restaurants. The Mexican, however, can be a bus boy. This is being changed by the manpower shortage, and we are beginning to see Mexican faces where we never saw them before. Mexicans have been barred from many factories engaged in war work, causing much bitterness. The Mexican, generally speaking, is left to hard labor or the most menial work. We have graduated a whole generation of young Mexicans out of high school, educated sons and daughters of Mexican laborers into a middle class which for them does not exist.

**No Badge of Crime**  
His honor was barking up the wrong tree, however, for the zoot suit is no label of juvenile delinquency. Many a young Mexican in a zoot suit works hard and takes his money home to mamacita for frijoles refritos, and many a young zoot-suited Negro never shoots craps and goes to the Baptist church every Sunday.  
You still see many zoot suits in Belvedere Gardens and along Central Ave. Sometimes you see one walking down Broadway.

This, folks, is a daring statement for the editorial page of the conservative, right-wing Los Angeles Times.



**March 22, 1943:** A Times cartoon shows zoot-suiters as “solid citizens minding their own bizness.”

On **March 22, 1943**, The Times published a story by Turner that makes fun of the zoot suit but is sympathetic to young men who wear them. “The zoot suit is no label of juvenile delinquency,” he says.

The Zoot Suit Riots are three months away....

# Significance of Zoot-Suit Gangsters

BY TIMOTHY G. TURNER

It is high time to inquire dispassionately into the recent outbreaks of Mexican-American gangsterism in Los Angeles, which resulted in the conviction of 17 youths on various charges Tuesday. There has been much nonsense about it, and some sad mistakes made.

The police have committed the stupidity, common to police in all cities, of making wholesale arrests when anything gets out of hand. To throw probably in-

When this first generation problem is removed or passes, the gangsterism disappears. On our own East Side we had a similar problem years ago with children of the Russian Molokons colony. There is now none.

The Mexican problem confronting this city today is compounded by color prejudice. Most of these young Mexicans have much Indian blood. There is a definite caste system against them. It is not like



innocent youths in jail makes more criminals than it cures, and it is likely to arouse sympathy which is applied to the guilty as well as the innocent.

On the other hand the mush-headed sentimentalists are busy with their talk of "naughty boys" who should not be punished too severely. The fact that these young men wear silly looking zoot suits and that most of them are in their teens does not change the facts. It is hardly a boy's prank to invade peaceful social gatherings and knife people to death, or to pick up people off the street, drag them into automobiles, beat them and then throw them into the street bleeding and groaning.

Then the Communists as usual are making trouble and confusing issues. They say that the gangsterism is inspired by Axis agents. This is absurd.

Of course, enemy propagandists may take advantage of it after the fact.

The reasons for zoot-suit gangsterism are complex. This writer, who has had a lifetime of association with Mexicans, can testify that they generally are a kindly, polite and goodhearted people. The gains of the revolution were mostly to the good, but there is no denying that some classes of Mexicans lost much of their fine culture and the restraining influences of the Catholic religion. Many of these boys come from homes of recent immigrants of the worst kind, and our lavish relief system has not helped matters. It is the fault of our culture, however, that they have been exposed to an idealization of gangsterism which has existed since the days of prohibition, the evil effects of which are not yet over. These young men thus represent the worst of both races, and the shame of it should be mutual.

#### PRIMARY REASON

But those reasons do not include the principal one. It lies in the social problem of first generation Americans and there is nothing new about it. Gangsters in eastern cities in recent years have been mostly young men raised in this country, sons of recent Italian and Jewish immigrants. Some 40 or 50 years ago they were Irish, though then the gangster was called a tough. In all these cases the thing is the same as we find in Los Angeles today. The gangsterism is inspired by a love of lawless adventure; seldom at first is it for purposes of robbery. Gangs fight gangs and anybody who comes in their way. It is a youthful return to complete savagery. It is the breeding ground of future criminals in the fullest sense.

According to best opinion, it is due to a feeling of separation from the rest of society due to prejudices against the recent immigrants and their children. The youth feels he is no part of the community and starts war on it. He is in the academic phrase socially maladjusted.

that against the Negro. Like Orientals they can go into restaurants and theaters. But a young Mexican-American finds the economic bars up against him. He or she cannot get a job in stores or offices, even as a waiter or waitress in restaurants. The Mexican, however, can be a bus boy. This is being changed by the man power shortage, and we are beginning to see Mexican faces where we never saw them before. This only serves to emphasize the barrier. Mexicans have been barred from many factories engaged in war work, causing much bitterness. The Mexican, generally speaking, is left to hard labor or the most menial work. We have graduated a whole generation of young Mexicans out of high school, educated sons and daughters of Mexican laborers into a middle class which for them does not exist. If we study a city like El Paso, which is half Mexican and half Anglo-Saxon American, we find young Mexicans as a rule are capable of almost any kind of work in shop or office and are socially most charming people and politically good citizens. In El Paso for various reasons they got a break they never have had in Los Angeles or San Antonio.

#### SOMETHING TO DO

The writer has no solution to offer for these disturbances. But he suggests that the first thing to do is to punish the young men found guilty by fair trial of these atrocities, but to avoid anything savoring of persecution of the innocent. In other words, the authorities should be just.

Above all we should not close our eyes to it. It is true, but it is not enough, to say that these young gangsters are an insignificant percentage of the large and generally lawful Mexican population. They represent a symptom of a more serious disorder, our own minority problem in the Southwest. We should not be hypocrites and protest against minority problems abroad when we cannot solve our own at home.

#### VWhen

BY L. MAGRUDER PASSANO

VWhen Hitler hushes and Goebbels speaks the truth,

VWhen Goering starves, when Nazis shall feel ruth,

VWhen Deutschland uber Alles is a hymn That angels sing to humankind below,

VWhen concentration camps are clean and prim,

VWhen doves build nests within the Gestapo,

VWhen Germans distinguish truthfulness from lies,

VWhen Adolf Schicklgruber gasps and dies,

There will be meaning in our VV.

VWhen all this happens and the world is free



# Zoot Suits Still Parade Here Despite O.P.A. Ban

## Draped Garments to Disappear When Present Wardrobes Gone, Because Output Halted

BY TIMOTHY TURNER

The zoot suit was man's attempt to look as silly as some women make themselves look. It was an utter failure.

In Los Angeles zoot suits are still widely worn among a certain clientele on the other side of the tracks, worn with gusto by young men who are not afraid to be different. But they violate O.P.A. rules at so many places that long since none have been manufactured; and when the current ones are worn out there will be no more zoot suits.

Latterly a Southern California judge condemned two young Mexicans who had been boisterous near a cop to wear their zoot suits no longer, and they wept, actually wept, so much does youth want to be outlandish.

### No Badge of Crime

His honor was barking up the wrong tree, however, for the zoot suit is no label of juvenile delinquency. Many a young Mexican in a zoot suit works hard and takes his money home to mamacita for frijoles refritos, and many a young zoot-suited Negro never shoots craps and goes to the Baptist church every Sunday.

You still see many zoot suits in Belvedere Gardens and along Central Ave. Sometimes you see one walking down Broadway.

The zoot suit looks as if it were out for a walk with nobody

in it because it is so ample all around and because with it usually goes a very wide hat, with a telescoped crown, worn low down on the head.

### All Worst Features

The zoot suit seems to have been an attempt by some malicious designers to make a style embodying all the worst features of men's clothes for the last 50 years; the peg top pants, the high waist up under the armpits, and the long, loose-backed coat. For luck they sprinkled pleats here and there.

Zoot suits were made by manufacturers all over the country, and sold like hot cakes. The more conservative young men didn't go for them, not even the college boys who, the Lord knows, are not very conservative. They went for them in the foreign districts; in fact the name seems to derive from a mispronunciation of the word "suit."

"I wanna buya zoot," the customers would say in East St. Louis. "I wunt pay no mor'n \$20, wid altercations."

"Very well, sir," the clerk would answer. "Here you have a very stylish zoot."

### Origin Not Clear

Some say the style originated in Chicago, others Los Angeles, inspired by some clothes worn in a Hollywood period picture. The origin is not clear, but the result is. There is no mistake

### Finnish Sewing Circle.

ing a zoot suit once you see it, there, being nothing subtle in the style. It is in fact a kind of a burlesque suit of clothes, a sartorial practical joke that was taken seriously.

If clothes are worn for satisfaction of the inner man the zoot suit has fulfilled its purpose. It has given joy to the wearers, and probably to their girl friends who have come to associate the zoot suit with manly virtue and an elegance of sorts. For style, like love, is an illusion.

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