

The Zoot Suit Riots



Carlos Espinoza

I think for the most part, like youth of any generation, the zoot suit was a symbol of one's own generational style. There was a kind of assertiveness in the dress. A sense that this was unique. This was to really assert that, you know, we are here, and we want to make a statement about the fact that we're here. But it was also, I think, a connection with other minority and poor youth in the United States. I mean, a zoot suit was also worn by black youth, certainly worn by Malcolm X in New York. So there was a sense that the zoot suit was not just a Mexican dress, it was also a connection with other minority youth, but in Los Angeles also was representative of the Mexican American population, in a certain way.

They went to extreme, you know? Man, they wore a big hat and a feather and a chain dragging down there, ankle chokers, and a long -- they used to call it fingertip, below the fingers, you know, way down, you know? That was it, and you says man, that guy is wearing an expensive, you know. You go to Murray's and you'd buy that outfit, you know? That's the only place you could buy these zoot suit things, you know? And the shoe store, Price's, on Sixth and Broadway, you'd get lined up just buying shoes there because they would double sole them. They would always double sole their shoes. They never walked out with a regular, you know, they'd walk out with those shoes and right away they would dye them black, and shine them and keep shining them, and then the grain would disappear, and all you'd see is a plain, beautiful shine, and then you'd get your argyle socks there...



Arthur Arenas

Crowds Downtown on Hunt for Zoot Suiters

Los Angeles Examiner

June 8, 1943

...As riot call after riot call was reported at police headquarters, the auxiliary police and motorcycle reserves were called out to help maintain order. Sirens sounded for hours as radio cars and patrol wagons raced to the scenes of reported riots.

...As the main element of the revenge-bent service men converged on downtown streets for the fourth night, they were joined -- for the first time in large numbers -- by civilians. From Main street they fanned out to comb through all possible haunts of pachucos....

Law enforcement officers did not attempt to stem the surging throngs. Occasionally, however, they stepped in to disarm anyone with a club or a weapon.

...

At Twelfth and Central police were summoned after a melee developed between servicemen and pachucos. Five of the latter were arrested...

At 10th and Los Angeles streets 20-year-old Edward Massey was taken in hand by 150 sailors and soldiers after he assertedly pulled a knife on a sailor. He was stripped of all clothing but his long coat...

The United States Attorney's office in Los Angeles announced it was checking Federal laws to see whether action can be taken against anyone assaulting men in uniform.

Name _____

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http://cita.disability.uiuc.edu/courses/2003-01-LIS350AR/lec19/flash/zoot-site/zoot/eng_sfeature/sf_zoot_text.html

http://cita.disability.uiuc.edu/courses/2003-01-LIS350AR/lec19/flash/zoot-site/zoot/eng_sfeature/sf_press.html

1. What was the zoot suit a symbol of?
2. What was it serve as a connection to?
3. What was “extreme” about the zoot suit dress?
4. How might this offend some Americans?”
5. What actions by the police led to more rioting?