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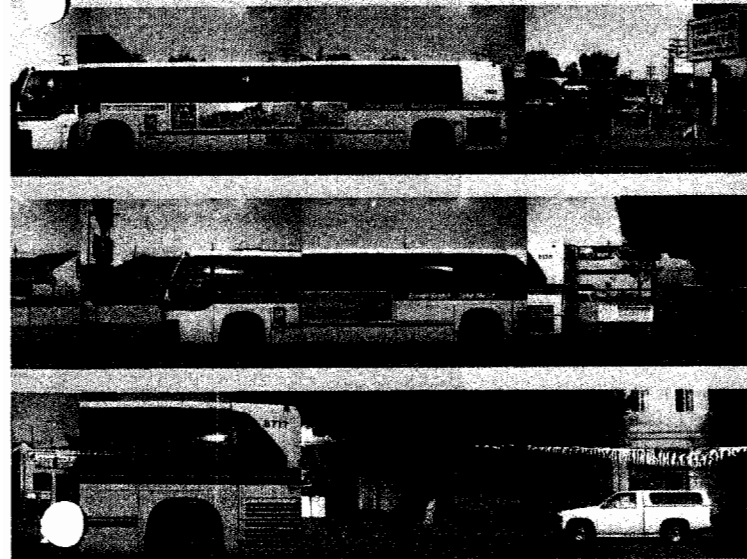
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Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles

Anthony Macias

In April of 1940, swing big-band leader Jimmie Lunceford held a concert at the Shrine Auditorium in central Los Angeles, just southwest of downtown.¹ According to one contemporary account, “their angers flamed by free liquor, 6,000 assorted white, Negro, Mexican, and Filipino jitter-bugs . . . suddenly went wild, smashing windows, flashing razors, and swinging fists” in a disturbance that called for twenty-five police officers and left seven people injured. This sensationalistic story described a “riot” provoked by a rival promoter’s saboteurs, but trumpeter Gerald Wilson, who performed that night in the Lunceford Orchestra, simply recalled that “they had so many people they had to stop the dance.”¹

One month after this incident, the Los Angeles Police Department refused to issue a Mexican American social organization called La Fiesta Club a permit to host a concert featuring the Benny Goodman Orchestra at the Shrine Auditorium. According to the *California Eagle*, the city’s oldest African American newspaper, the L.A.P.D. officers, along with conservative Los Angeles City Council members, were afraid that whites, blacks, Mexicans, and Filipinos might be allowed to dance together.² Also in May of 1940, Mayor Fletcher Bowron prohibited public entertainment establishments from serving alcohol after two in the morning, in an attempt to curtail what a *California Eagle* reporter called the “swarms of white visitors making the rounds” on Central Avenue, the heart of the city’s African American jazz district.³

As these instances illustrate, popular music and dance performances provoked reactionary regulation by the established authorities. This antagonistic relationship suggested a broader social dynamic in which two contrasting models of civil society—one of multiracial musicians, dancers, and entrepreneurs, the other of white urban elites and law enforcement—played out in multiple music venues, with the public freedom and cultural values of Los Angeles at stake. Reacting to the cross-cultural swing scene, local politicians and municipal arts administrators created a Bureau of Music in order to en-

courage patriotic citizenship, prevent juvenile delinquency, and bring proper music to the people of the city. After World War II, this dialectic took a new turn, as disc jockeys, dance promoters, and independent record store and record label owners began attracting white youths to rhythm and blues (R&B). In response, the city music bureaucrats tried to replace the popular musical participation of R&B with a more wholesome, state-sanctioned version. When even larger numbers of whites became involved in what would become rock and roll, the forces of law and order intensified the antagonism as they continued to suppress, rather than supplant, the race mixing in their midst. Ultimately, the educational infrastructure, cultural production, and grassroots initiatives of musicians, promoters, and fans brought music to more people, and brought more people from different neighborhoods together, than the official middle-class music programs of the city government did.

Indeed, beginning in the 1930s, when Mexican deportation drives, restrictive housing covenants, and anti-miscegenation laws were the order of the day, successive generations of Angelenos defied the city's rule of racial separation and white domination, creating a multicultural urban civility as they intermingled in dance halls, ballrooms, and auditoriums.⁴ This civility was far from utopian, given the existence of sporadic racial prejudice within and between different groups. Nevertheless, dance music facilitated intercultural affinities that went beyond mere politeness or courtesy to include respect and tolerance. In diverse but distinct music scenes, people sustained egalitarian social relations in the face of blatant attacks on their civil liberties. As part of a cultural corollary to ongoing political struggles for dignity and equality, jitterbugs, zoot-suiters, and R&B lowriders exercised their right to freedom of assembly in public spaces.

During the early 1940s, with the rise of the bold, baggy zoot suit, African American hep cats and "slick chicks," along with Mexican American *pachucos* and *pachucas*, became the catalysts for a heated showdown over the public face of the modern metropolis. Not every Mexican American sported the "draped" zoot style, but many of them traversed Los Angeles, dancing the jitterbug to swing music with mixed-race audiences near MacArthur Park at the Royal Palms Hotel, and downtown at the Avadon and Zenda Ballrooms, as well as the Million Dollar and Orpheum theaters. Relying heavily on public streetcars, Mexican Americans also mixed with African Americans at the Club Alabam, Jack's Basket Room, and the Elks Hall on Central Avenue, as well as the Plantation Club in Watts, where they would see bandleaders like Count Basie and Jimmy Lunceford. For example, as a teenager, Soledad "Chole" Camarena, who was disdainfully called a *pachuca* by many of her elders for

wearing a powder blue zoot suit, would often go dancing in South Central with the *pachucos* from her Lincoln Heights neighborhood, but they never experienced any interracial violence. As Camarena recalls, "the blacks were friendly as long as the Mexicans talked to them."⁵

On the east side, Boyle Heights trumpeter Paul Lopez explains that formal "black-and-white" balls would be held at "Mexican social clubs," while some "Mexicans would go" dancing "among the Americans" at big band ballrooms throughout the entire Los Angeles area.⁶ Significantly, Mexican Americans even patronized several establishments that typically refused to admit African Americans, such as the Palladium Ballroom in Hollywood, the Trianon Ballroom in South Gate, and the Aragon Ballroom in Venice. By participating in the swing music scene, male and female Mexican American youths, often still in high school, contributed to the city's urban culture as dancers, musicians, and singers. Carey McWilliams has observed that during the war years many young Mexican Americans were lured beyond their neighborhoods "into the downtown shopping districts, to the beaches, and above all, to the 'glamor' of Hollywood."⁷ In a 1942 study surveying 213 "Mexican boys" aged thirteen to eighteen, the majority of respondents "indicated no serious handicap in their search for amusement, except . . . at certain public beaches, because of their Mexican appearance," while 76 percent "felt that there were enough good places to which they could take a girl to dance."⁸

Yet the other 24 percent encountered racist resistance, and in this same study, 63 percent of the respondents "felt that the police treated Mexican boys more unfairly," while 51 percent claimed to have "been taken to the station for questioning when they had done nothing wrong."⁹ In East Los Angeles, police officers "routinely raided parties," "broke up outdoor games and gatherings," "chased young people out" of public parks after sundown, or arrested them for loitering, then beat them "while in custody until they confessed their guilt."¹⁰ Even though Mexican Americans were relatively freer to move about a wider range of the city in their search for public amusements than African Americans were, doing so exposed them to further police discrimination. For instance, in 1943 Alfred Barela and a group of his friends were unjustly detained and harassed by police officers in the beach community of Venice. In a letter to the Los Angeles municipal court judge who had dismissed the charges of disturbing the peace, Barela proclaimed, "We're tired of being told we can't go to this show or that dance hall because we're Mexican or that we better not be seen on the beach front, or that we can't wear draped pants or have our hair cut the way we want to."¹¹

In the spring of 1943 several incidents occurred at the Lick Pier amusement park in Venice, where brazen Mexican American zoot-suiters would walk

the boardwalk arm-in-arm, four abreast, forcing the locals to disburse before them.¹² In May of 1943 a mob of five hundred white sailors and civilians assaulted a smaller group of Mexican American teenagers exiting Venice's Aragon Ballroom after an evening of dancing.¹³ In front of two thousand spectators, the police arrested the victims, many of them from the Alpine Street barrio near Chinatown, but the charges of disturbing the peace were eventually dismissed due to insufficient evidence.¹⁴ Three weeks later, the Alpine, Chavez Ravine, downtown, Boyle Heights, East Los Angeles, and Watts districts erupted into a domestic battle zone as white servicemen and civilian vigilantes, with the cooperation of white Los Angeles Police Department officers, physically put Mexican Americans and African Americans back in their place during the so-called zoot-suit riots.

The African American campaign for a "Double Victory" over racial intolerance abroad and at home had already forced the creation of the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which, despite its halfhearted enforcement, enabled young working-class Angelenos of color, especially Mexican Americans, to cash in on the regional defense-industry economic boom.¹⁵ Decked out in their finest attire, they asserted themselves about town with greater self-confidence. The national press demeaned black and brown zoot-suiters as draft-dodging "dandies," while the local newspapers not only reported the racial comeuppance of supposedly bloodthirsty Mexican "hoodlums," but slanderously denigrated the virtue and respectability of supposedly hypersexual Mexican American "zoot girls" in the public sphere.¹⁶ With the War Production Board rationing fabric, the federal government even filed an injunction against one of the main Los Angeles stores selling zoot suits on the grounds that it used too much cloth. On June 9, 1943, after the worst of the rioting, the Los Angeles City Council got into the act, passing a resolution that officially prohibited wearing zoot suits within the city limits, declaring such action not only "a public nuisance," but also a misdemeanor punishable by thirty days in jail.¹⁷

Perceiving zoot-suiters as disturbers of the peace and public nuisances, Los Angeles officials responded to the multiracial music culture by creating their own contrasting version. In August of 1944, the city council established the Los Angeles Bureau of Music as part of the Municipal Art Department.¹⁸ Emphasizing the need to recognize "the personal and social power of music," proponents such as Arthur Leslie Jacobs, a musician and member of the Church Federation of Los Angeles, argued that "the Bureau of Music has an important function in city government as it brings people together to make music, and in so doing makes them better neighbors and citizens."¹⁹ To win the support

of the Los Angeles City Council and Mayor Bowron, the Music Bureau's founding fathers employed the rhetoric of civic responsibility, claiming that music should receive the same support given schools, libraries, and museums. Artie Mason Carter, founder of the Hollywood Bowl, articulated the bureau's *raison d'être*, insisting that music, like education, is one of the "community necessities of daily life and should be brought easily within the reach of all."²⁰

With its official slogan of "More Music for More People," in 1947 the bureau began a program of youth choruses, adult choruses, and community sings that soon became its signature feature. The program, which presented community singing, followed by talent show-style local entertainment, garnered high praise.²¹ *Los Angeles Times* reporter Lee Shippey stated that "in one district a Mexican group and an Anglo-Saxon group combined with such perfect teamwork that all their friends and relatives grew friendlier when they gathered to applaud them. In (another) chorus there are Negroes, Nisei, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Anglo-Saxon singers creating harmony, both musical and social."²² Writing about the bureau's efforts in the Chavez Ravine area for the magazine *Music of the West*, Isabel Morse Jones claimed that "this Palo Verde district has been a center of city tensions between the Mexicans and the surrounding neighborhoods. The chorus is helping to relieve those tensions and bring harmony."²³ A journalist from the *California Eagle* attested that in the East 14th Street neighborhood, just south of Pico Boulevard, people no longer worried about juvenile delinquency because from 400 to 600 children, and their parents, turned out for the events sponsored by the Bureau of Music. Despite initial reservations, "the community sings caught on and now neighborhood youths are staging their own acts to supplement the Monday night programs."²⁴

Mayor Bowron also lauded the bureau's ameliorative effects, and reaffirmed its overall mission, declaring that because

the people of this city should have music in their lives, the Music Bureau has endeavored to carry music to all the people. Through the remarkable organization of youth choruses . . . thousands of our growing boys and girls in all sections of this vast community . . . will be better citizens and ours will be a better city in which to live.²⁵

The portrayal of the Music Bureau as a deterrent to juvenile delinquency reveals a faith in both cultural determinism and progressive reformism. That it was also depicted as a means toward racial harmony reflects a belief in liberal integrationism. As David Theo Goldberg notes, however, the integration model purported to improve race relations and minority social conditions, "yet the

central values continued to be defined monoculturally.”²⁶ Accordingly, the bureau’s attempts at exposing all young people to the character-building glories of Western musical masterpieces were flawed by its own cultural biases.

For example, as the *Music Journal* reported in 1952, the Music Bureau presumed that “in an impoverished area where little familiarity with great musical traditions is found among the youngsters,” people did not really want such exposure to the arts anyway.²⁷ By this logic, the various community sings are deemed successful precisely because they are tailored

to the wishes of the participants. Thus there is no attempt to force a group of Mexican children of little musical experience into the preparation of a Bach cantata for a youth chorus festival program. (Talented members of any chorus naturally have the opportunity to audition for any of the Bureau’s several concert-type choruses.) On an occasion when folk songs were a feature of such a festival they had a starring part, however.²⁸

Apparently, the music bureaucrats felt that low-income Mexican residents were fit to perform only their quaint folk songs and that they possessed neither the aptitude nor the desire for classical music. In reality, unbeknownst to most Anglo Angelenos, not only were there minority musicians with classical training, but a Mexican American teenage violinist from Roosevelt High School, Edmundo “Don Tosti” Tostado, had held the concert chair as concertmaster of the Los Angeles All-City High School Symphony Orchestra from 1939 to 1941.²⁹ Moreover, two Mexican American Angelenos, drummer/timpanist Chico Guerrero and bassist Tony Reyes, as well as Mexican trumpeter Rafael Mendez, played for Hollywood studio orchestras during the 1940s, although ethnic Mexicans were excluded from the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra, the city’s premier cultural institution.³⁰ Nevertheless, in the Music Bureau’s hierarchical cultural scheme, which made clear distinctions between “the ‘high-brow’ music-lover” and “the person of little musical knowledge who enjoys community singing,” there were no trained Mexican musicians, since Mexican folk songs did not impart any true musical knowledge or experience.³¹

The Music Bureau relegated the city’s rich tradition of ethnic Mexican community singing to the periphery, devaluing a poetic oral culture in which traditional lyrics are sung in unison, across generations, at baptisms, *quinceañeras*, weddings, anniversaries, and other social gatherings. For instance, pianist Eddie Cano, who received formal classical training as a youth in Chavez Ravine and Lincoln Heights, vividly recalled “his uncles and family friends performing traditional Mexican music on the porch of his grandfather’s house on Sundays.”³² In South Central Los Angeles, Jaime Corral’s immigrant mother would

sing mariachi and *ranchera* songs with Mexican neighbors on her front porch or at house parties, with somebody invariably accompanying her on acoustic guitar. In 1944, at the age of six, Jaime started singing the popular *rancheras* of Jorge Negrete and Pedro Infante before this audience of neighbors, one of whom taught him the basic chords on the guitar.³³ In addition to these unofficial Mexican choral programs and community sings, Chico Sesma describes hearing Mexican music wafting out of homes and stores while walking down the streets of Boyle Heights, while even some jazz-loving, jitterbugging *pachucos* played acoustic guitar and composed *corridos*.³⁴

The Los Angeles Music Bureau never fully incorporated the diverse cultural practices of Mexican Americans, but it did offer more than a hundred summer concerts a year on a rotating basis in the city’s public parks, including Lincoln Park and Hollenbeck Park, both in neighborhoods fast becoming majority ethnic Mexican. The bureau tried to consider the varied tastes of its constituents, contracting the Los Angeles Symphony and Civic Center Orchestras, but also the Mexican Tipica Orchestra, which was, with its singers, dancers, and conductor Jose Cordova Cantu, “extremely popular in East Los Angeles.”³⁵ However, apparently these free concerts never came to any predominantly black neighborhoods, nor were existing South Central Los Angeles orchestras or musicians from the Jim Crow black Local 767 of the American Federation of Musicians’ Union invited to perform. In this case, the Music Bureau acknowledged Mexicans but ignored blacks, thus casting doubt on its assertion that the city’s “music program reaches *all* of its citizens,” from the San Fernando Valley to the San Pedro Bay, from Westwood to Lincoln Heights.³⁶

If Mayor Bowron, the city council, and the music bureaucrats wanted a working model for successful public music programs, supplemented with private support, that stimulated interest in the arts while bringing together the diverse citizenry of Los Angeles, they needed to look no further than the mixed-race urban cultures of Boyle Heights and South Central Los Angeles. In Boyle Heights, Roosevelt High School provided concert and swing orchestras, as well as excellent courses in music theory, composition, and arranging, while the nonprofit Neighborhood Music School, originally modeled after Progressive settlement schools, gave personal lessons in instrumentation, music theory, and classical music technique, at little or no cost.³⁷ In Watts, Jordan High School offered music classes and a swing band, while private instructor Lloyd Reese ran a one-man conservatory out of his home, teaching musical mechanics, harmonics, and philosophy. Reese also organized a weeknight swing band rehearsal at a South Central recreation center playground, where young Mexi-

can American and African American musicians from throughout the city would come to practice, and a Sunday rehearsal at the black musicians' local, where his students and other musicians would work out their experimental ideas.³⁸ Private music teachers like Bill Green also flourished in South Central Los Angeles, as did private institutions like the Gray Conservatory of Music and the Western School of Music.

At Jefferson High School, visionary music teacher Samuel Browne taught classes in reading, arranging, composing, theory, harmony, counterpoint, classical, and opera, encouraging his African American and Mexican American students to find private teachers for intensive study of their respective instruments. In addition to conducting the school orchestra and organizing student jam sessions, Browne scheduled concerts for his school swing band at predominantly white schools like Fairfax High on the west side and Taft High in the San Fernando Valley. Browne also conducted field trips to the Hollywood rehearsals of jazz stars, while professional musicians, Jefferson High alumni, and visiting artists alike would not only play school assemblies, but would talk to, sit in with, and try out new arrangements on, his young music students. Browne created the best music program in the city, and one of the best in the nation, on a par with those at public high schools like Cass Technical and Miller in Detroit, Wendell Phillips in Chicago, and Douglas, Manassa, and Booker T. Washington in Memphis. These high school music programs treated jazz music as a serious discipline, emphasizing its theory and its practice, and were thus at least thirty years ahead of the rest of the country, including most college-level courses.³⁹

Jefferson, Jordan, and Roosevelt High Schools not only provided vocational training and professional advice for musicians who were already working night jobs throughout the city, but their programs also turned at-risk youths toward a life of continuing education and study. However, when proponents of the Los Angeles Music Bureau spoke of bringing music to the people, they were not talking about jazz music, nor even all the people. The Music Bureau touted its claim that "Los Angeles is the *first and only* major city in this country to have an organized music program for all its citizens which emphasizes participation," and that "Los Angeles is actively using music as a moving force in drawing together the scattered communities which comprise this metropolitan area of more than 2,000,000 people."⁴⁰ Yet these statements ignored a musically mature listening, dancing, and performing public that was already participating in musical expression, and was already connected through both organized and informal networks.

As the summer concert park series illustrated, the Music Bureau neglected certain areas. In fact, rather than bind together the area's "scattered communi-

ties," the bureau merely attempted to oversee and administer them. In the bureau's model of municipal integrationism, the twelve different community sings under its auspices were "each of a markedly different character, reflecting the working, economic, racial, and general cultural backgrounds of the participating community."⁴¹ Paradoxically, the community sings were described as tying Southern California's decentralized municipalities "into the metropolis as a whole," but they were "virtually autonomous community enterprises operated under the supervision of the city's Music Bureau."⁴² While the local dance music scenes had already successfully achieved a functional integration, the bureau, depicting itself as an equal-opportunity vehicle for uniting Los Angeles, pursued a policy of scientific management that included the appointment of a "city music coordinator."⁴³ Furthermore, the bureau enjoyed a city budget that expanded from \$4,000 in 1944 to \$100,000 in 1952, and several of the community sings even had their own bank accounts.⁴⁴

The youth choruses and community sings, along with the civic symphony and public park performances, were evidently popular, boasting impressive attendance figures that expanded from almost 6,000 in 1945 to almost 419,000 in 1952.⁴⁵ Although it is difficult to determine the exact attendance figures for the countless swing, R&B, and rock-and-roll concerts, not to mention the various Latin music performances, in and around Los Angeles since the middle 1930s, the city's multicultural urban civility arguably drew together more people from more neighborhoods than municipal and county music programs. Still, when Los Angeles County board supervisor John Anson Ford wrote in 1948 about providing young people "with a priceless opportunity to grow in their . . . understanding of a great and noble art," he was referring to the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra's series of Symphony Concerts for Youth, not the city's public school music programs and orchestras or its neighborhood music schools and instructors, and certainly not its nightclubs, dance halls, and ballrooms.⁴⁶ Tellingly, the majority of the Los Angeles County Music Commission's funds supported the Hollywood Bowl, the Los Angeles and Long Beach Philharmonic Orchestras, the Civic Light Opera, the Guild Opera, and other highbrow cultural activities, consciously avoiding "a destructive competition with commercial entertainment in the area."⁴⁷ Municipal and metropolitan music programs were indeed competing with an urban popular culture that increasingly blurred the lines between high and low, but local politicians and arts patrons, in their efforts to imbue their fellow Angelenos with moral uplift, cultural refinement, and virtuous citizenship, could not see past their own ideological preconceptions.

In this postwar battle over the hearts and minds of the people, the city's elite did not form a monolithic bloc but included both conservative and lib-

eral factions. The conservative faction was represented by politicians, urban planners, and corporate leaders interested in economic development and the removal of urban "blight," and by the Los Angeles City Council, which continued its wartime jumble of politics and morality.⁴⁸ For example, the city council voted against a proposed 1949 ordinance that would have made it illegal for the white musicians' union local "to refuse membership to Negroes." Contentious councilmen rushed through and defeated the measure "to avoid trouble" with the black community, and to avoid "dissension," which they claimed "is exactly what the Communists want."⁴⁹ In support of conservative politicians and businessmen, and representing a propertied silent majority, Los Angeles law enforcement agencies provided the muscle to regulate the dancing bodies of residents in a vain attempt to control the widespread race mixing that accompanied the city's "musical miscegenation."⁵⁰

The liberal faction was represented by John Anson Ford, who championed racial integration and subsidized music, and by the Music Bureau, which countered "attacks made by various taxpayers' groups . . . opposed to municipal support of the arts."⁵¹ Music continued to be presented as the perfect tool to produce enlightened citizens, but by 1948, a contingent within the liberal faction also promoted a broad concept of "recreation" that excluded many public amusements, but included athletics and dancing. Hence Mayor Bowron, John Anson Ford, and the other county board supervisors consistently advocated parks and recreation monies, in tandem with officially sanctioned social activities, as a means to defeat juvenile delinquency. Jaime González Monroy, program director of the East Los Angeles Young Men's Christian Association, argued that recreation was not only the "means of bringing youth of all groups together," but the medium through which "many of the evils of racial misunderstanding and conflicts would certainly be lessened."⁵² However, even though recreational programs were offered as panaceas against prejudice, and as positive alternatives to the temptations of street life, some observers, such as University of Southern California student Kiyo Umeda, noted that many Los Angeles social agencies discriminated against people who were *pachucos* or suspected gang members.⁵³

While the municipal music proponents stressed highbrow cultural enrichment, some of the recreation advocates emphasized physical and emotional release, including social dancing. Thus, in 1952, the Los Angeles Metropolitan Recreation and Youth Services Council extolled the benefits of "wholesome" recreation for young people, listing "dancing and other social events," as well as "music and rhythmic activities" as two of its official categories. Recreation, the council explained, releases the tension of "mental and emotional

strain," providing "opportunities to use abilities, muscles, impulses, tendencies, not permitted use during work," while "discharging aggression" and "satisfying social hunger." In addition, recreation "maintains emotional balance," granting "temporary escape from intolerable realities."⁵⁴

Yet African Americans already possessed a long tradition of refreshing the body and relaxing the mind after a hard week's labor. As Robin Kelley claims, in darkened dance halls, blues clubs, and jook joints, black workers, in spite of occasional fights, reinforced a sense of community and expressed an often socially circumscribed sexuality. By reclaiming their overworked bodies for pleasure, they undermined capitalist labor discipline and the Protestant work ethic, and by "dressing up," they constructed "a collective identity based on something other than wage work."⁵⁵ As Rosa Linda Fregoso argues, dance, with its "ritual properties," is also "central to the everyday life of Chicano and Chicana working-class culture," not just as "an end in itself," but as a pleasurable and meaningful "means to express one's relation to the world through stylized movement."⁵⁶ In Los Angeles, the communal, emotionally engaging vernacular traditions of Mexican Americans and African Americans almost certainly reached more people, and better reflected the multiracial character of the city, than the official ersatz version of expressive culture.

Rather than wait for the city's Music Bureau to bring music appreciation to a public park near them, or for the county board of supervisors to fund their social activities, many Mexican American and African American communities drew upon their own resources. By July of 1946, the Catholic Youth Organization had enrolled more than five thousand Mexican American boys and girls in athletics, orchestral music, dramatics, art, and dancing programs, with ninety-one gangs represented.⁵⁷ In Mexican districts like La Colonia, in the heart of Watts, the Catholic Church would host *jamaicas*. These bazaars, or charity sales, were more like block parties, since residents would come out and dance to *rancheras*, polkas, and swing tunes.⁵⁸ Weekly dances were sponsored by Mexican American neighborhood associations, while informal "home parties" enticed adults and youths and often included African Americans, Italian Americans, and Irish Americans, thereby "maintaining social cohesion and developing community ties."⁵⁹

In 1950 a cross-cultural "Twilight 'Til Dawn" benefit dance to raise money for the Boy Scouts of Los Angeles was held at El Sombrero, a downtown Latin nightclub owned by a wealthy Mexican couple. With members of the Alta Qualidad Club assisting the local black hostesses, this philanthropic event boasted Joe Adams, the first African American disc jockey in Los Angeles, as the master of ceremonies. Revealing the breadth of popular styles missing from

the municipal music programs, the evening's entertainment included a jazz contest for local musicians, "nimble swing . . . square dancing," solo performances by soprano and jazz vocalists, a rhythm-and-blues vocal harmony group, and a Latin band.⁶⁰ During the postwar years, the Armenta Brothers band would play at Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church in East Los Angeles, while all around the city enterprising young people hired bands to play at neighborhood playgrounds, and car clubs organized dances and "battle of the bands" concerts in which Mexican American groups "played R&B and Latin music."⁶¹

These grassroots initiatives complemented a bustling, multiethnic commercial dance scene during the late 1940s, a transitional postswing period in which black musical styles like jump blues, gospel, urban blues, and boogie-woogie blended into a new genre called rhythm and blues. In fact, from 1945 through the early 1950s, Los Angeles was home to the largest number of independent R&B labels in the country, including Modern, 4 Star, Exclusive, Excelsior, Aladdin, Specialty, and Imperial.⁶² For several years in the mid-1940s, at least half of the nation's best-selling R&B recordings came out of Southern California.⁶³ Nevertheless, the county board of supervisors and Los Angeles Bureau of Music concept of music participation did not encompass the exciting "race music" that circulated throughout the urban soundscape via record retailers, jukebox operators, nightclub promoters, and, especially, white disc jockeys. Al Jarvis became the first disc jockey in Los Angeles to play jazz on his 1930s radio program, "Your Make-Believe Ballroom." Hunter Hancock followed in 1943 with his one-hour show, "Holiday in Harlem," and its opening refrain: "From blues to ballads, from bebop to boogie, featuring the very best in Negro entertainment." In 1948, Hancock became the first disc jockey to play an all-rhythm-and-blues format with his daily three-hour program, "Harlem Matinee," which was quite popular among Mexican Americans and African Americans.⁶⁴

In 1948, Johnny Otis, the veteran Central Avenue swing drummer, singer, bandleader, and composer, brought the gutbucket grooves of his Barrelhouse Club in Watts to a largely Mexican American audience at the Angeles Hall on First Street in Boyle Heights.⁶⁵ By 1950 Otis began promoting and starring in Sunday shows at the Angeles Hall, where Boyle Heights resident Ed Frias remembers Mexican Americans and African Americans from "different segments of the city" gathering to see local black "honking" tenor saxophonists Cecil "Big Jay" McNeely, Joe Houston, and Chuck Higgins.⁶⁶ In this exuberant, swaggering style, the "honkers" would make their horns squeal, bleat, and growl, hitting one low note repeatedly in extended solos that worked the crowd

into a frenzy. Regular Angeles Hall acts Big Jay McNeely, Johnny Otis, and the Armenta Brothers continued to draw enthusiastic fans through 1955.⁶⁷ The Mexican Americans and African Americans who met there were the primary rhythm-and-blues fans in Los Angeles, but despite many cultural affinities, their social interaction had its limits.

For example, Ed Frias remembers seeing "black guys with Anglo girls, but you did not see black guys with Chicana girls. That was a no-no . . . among the Mexicans."⁶⁸ In 1951 and 1952, Chole Camarena, who had gone dancing on Central Avenue in the war years, would see Joe Higgins and the Honeydrippers at the Angeles Hall, where she and her Lincoln Heights friends would chat with Mexican Americans from other neighborhoods over pitchers of beer. Among the regular patrons, there were two young African American men who would ask Chole and her Mexican American friend Mable to dance. The two young women always said yes, but the exchange was limited to the dance floor, for as Chole says, "We did not socialize with them or bring them home with us." Nonetheless, their willingness to dance with black partners earned them "bad reputations" as "nigger lovers."⁶⁹ In essence, the antiblack bigotry of Camarena's Mexican American companions was stronger than, but compatible with, their love of African American music.

In fact, Mexican American fans, particularly car club members, played a key role in the success of local African American artists, as R&B records became the cruising anthems of neighborhood lowriders.⁷⁰ For instance, one night in 1950, Big Jay McNeely, the "king of the honking tenor saxophonists," drew so many cars to neighboring drive-in theaters at Whittier and Atlantic Boulevards in East Los Angeles that traffic was blocked "in every direction." According to then-novice Anglo American disc jockey Dick "Huggy Boy" Hugg, "the place went so crazy the sheriffs had to come out to control things."⁷¹ In their McNeely mania, Mexican Americans showed the way to other Angelenos, and their taste for rhythm and blues "was greatly responsible for the music's early exposure to and acceptance by young whites around Los Angeles."⁷² In fact, Huggy Boy himself was introduced to African American music by Mexican Americans while working and living in East Los Angeles in the late 1940s.⁷³

By the summer of 1950, white Angelenos were getting hip to the raucous R&B of Big Jay McNeely, whose band typically included his brother, Bob, on baritone saxophone; drummer Jimmy Wright, a white hipster who cruised his customized convertible with Huntington Park car clubs; white guitarist "Porky" Harris, an ex-sailor who usually played in hillbilly bands; and, on occasion, Mexican American saxophonist Jess Rubio, from Anaheim, Orange County.

McNeely became very popular in white, working-class towns in southeast Los Angeles such as Huntington Park, Lakewood, and South Gate. McNeely was also big in Bell, which Britt Woodman, an African American trombonist from Watts, described as "prejudiced," and in Bell Gardens, which had been derisively labeled "Billy Goat Acres" because of the many "Okies" who settled there in the 1930s.⁷⁴ These communities "became bastions of rhythm and blues fever very early, thanks in part to the car clubs and the kids' growing love of honking saxophonists."⁷⁵ Apparently, any anti-Negro sentiment these white youths may have harbored was also compatible with their love of black music.

Once African American R&B caught on among working-class Mexican Americans and European Americans in east and southeast Los Angeles, it was not long before the music reached a broader, citywide audience. This process advanced apace in the early 1950s, when jazz promoter and "pop" radio disc jockey Gene Norman would throw R&B "Jubilees" featuring Wynonie Harris and Big Jay McNeely at the Shrine Auditorium. In downtown Los Angeles, Huggy Boy promoted Big Jay at the Orpheum Theater, while Hunter Hancock hosted McNeely at the Olympic Auditorium, both to mixed Anglo and Mexican American audiences. As McNeely claims, "the authorities were trying to shut me out of Los Angeles. They didn't like me playing at the high schools or the theaters, 'cause I was bringing whites and Spanish and black kids together and rilin' 'em up." During this time McNeely also played in the Orange County town of Fullerton, and in the recently developed San Fernando Valley, where "the audience would be all white."⁷⁶

Emotionally expressive African American rhythm and blues called out to white youths within a context of increasing suburbanization. After World War II, housing shortages, postwar prosperity, population growth, and white flight from the central city, among many factors, led to a suburban home-owning boom that complemented the national baby boom. Yet in the subdivisions of identical tract houses along the Los Angeles periphery, many youths were raised in a monotonous cultural environment characterized not only by racial homogeneity and social conformity, but by a profound estrangement between neighbors, and between parents and children.⁷⁷ In contrast, black music and dance, which emphasize "personal stylization" and "individual improvisation . . . within a communal tradition and collective setting," appeared very appealing, as did the "back-and-forth interaction" between spectators and performers typical of African American celebration.⁷⁸ The subliminal tonality and ecstatic crescendo of wildly hypnotic honking tenor saxophone solos in general, and Big Jay McNeely's bottom-heavy sound and full vibrato technique in particular, induced a heightened emotional state.⁷⁹ As a new genera-

tion of white Angelenos discovered how "black social dancing circulates social energy," rhythm and blues opened a new front in the culture war over virtuous citizenship and proper civil society.⁸⁰

For example, in the early 1950s, Johnny Otis hosted weekly half-hour television programs on three local stations, but in response to whites socializing with African, Mexican, and Asian Americans, police officers would "hassle the kids standing in line to get into the television show."⁸¹ Despite rumors of impending racial strife or gang violence, as Otis remembers, "We never had any trouble, the people got along great."⁸² Of course, there were still occasional inter- and intra-ethnic tensions, but Southern California's popular music and dance culture continued to bring young people together in a creative manner. For instance, by 1950, when the large record stores downtown and in Hollywood would not even stock records by black artists, a local African American entrepreneur, John Dolphin, purchased late-night airtime on a local radio station and hired a disc jockey to broadcast from his twenty-four-hour record store, Dolphin's of Hollywood. The store was actually located at East Vernon and Central avenues in South Central Los Angeles, but Dolphin reportedly reasoned, "If Negroes can't go to Hollywood, then I'll bring Hollywood to Negroes." Dolphin even built a small, Hollywood-quality recording studio in the back of his store, so that he could record new songs from local artists, press the records on his own label, then sell them right on the premises.

In late 1953, Huggy Boy began hosting a live rhythm-and-blues program from the large front window of Dolphin's establishment. Yelling "Keep alive and listen in!" over the show's blaring tenor saxophone theme song, "All Night Long," Huggy Boy would invite all of his listeners to turn their cars around and drive to "Vernon and Central, Central and Vernon."⁸³ As a result, R&B stars, actors, Mexican Americans from the east side, and whites from throughout the city and suburbs gravitated to John Dolphin's record store after hours, making it "the most happening place in Los Angeles." On weekend nights Vernon Avenue traffic would be bumper to bumper, while Huggy Boy addressed the people cruising outside the store, his voice echoing from their automobile radios. Restless white youths, some of whom traveled more than thirty miles from the suburban San Fernando Valley, ignored their parents' advice and drove to the commercial heart of black Los Angeles to buy hard-to-find R&B records.⁸⁴ Needless to say, the cultural tourism of curious Anglos was taken quite seriously by Los Angeles law enforcement.

Compared to the 1940s swing scene, R&B had crossed over to a young white audience on an unprecedented scale. This new problem required a new solution. In 1950, Chief of Police William H. Parker had begun to transform

the Los Angeles Police Department into a professional, mobile, aggressive force.⁸⁵ More than any of his predecessors, Chief Parker crusaded against race mixing and inner-city vice, to the point of using inflated crime statistics and dubious racial theories to scare up funding resources and amass political power.⁸⁶ In the name of fighting juvenile delinquency, drugs, and gangs, police officers zealously reinforced the racial status quo by patrolling the physical boundaries between areas. For instance, Newton Street Division policemen would enter John Dolphin's store, turning whites away or escorting them from the premises with the warning that "Central Avenue was too dangerous for white people." According to the Los Angeles *Sentinel*, an African American publication, one night a dozen officers formed a human chain at the front door, "terrifying Caucasian customers . . . and rousting them from the neighborhood." Huggy Boy recalls that after two o'clock in the morning when the bars closed, Dolphin's and the neighboring barbecue restaurants would be packed, but uniformed police officers "would chase away the white kids," while undercover agents would search blacks on "suspicion of" selling drugs. In late 1954, Dolphin gathered a petition of 150 black business people from the neighborhood protesting these tactics. Sergeant George Restovich countered that the gatherings violated a ten o'clock curfew, and that other businessmen complained about teenagers assembling on sidewalks while Dolphin's outside loudspeaker blared music onto the street.⁸⁷

In short, when whites joined Negroes and Mexicans in greater numbers, the rhythm-and-blues scene was deemed subversive. As the leading independent label distributors reported to *Billboard* magazine in 1952, "a major portion of the R&B sides now being sold are bought by Spanish and mixed-nationality buyers," due largely to promotion by Los Angeles disc jockeys.⁸⁸ In 1954, so many white teenagers were buying rhythm-and-blues records that it caused a national moral furor over allegedly "obscene" lyrics. In Long Beach, after a local radio station banned R&B records, the sheriff's department went even further, banning "offending" records from all area jukeboxes. In 1955, twenty-five leading Los Angeles disc jockeys bowed to censors at the Junior National Audience Board by agreeing to "avoid public airing of records which [were] believed objectionable."⁸⁹

Among the local disc jockeys, Huggy Boy played more risqué songs than his rivals, much to the delight of his young listeners, who soon began to engage in an entirely new kind of music participation. In particular, Mexican Americans, who made up a considerable part of his audience, requested songs on Huggy Boy's dedication shows, declaring their love and broken hearts, while representing their neighborhoods, during the night's broadcast.⁹⁰ An-

other white disc jockey, Art Laboe, became the first to play rock and roll in Los Angeles when he debuted in 1955. Laboe was also one of the first, along with Huggy Boy, to openly welcome Mexican Americans onto his program, playing their dedications on the air. Beginning in 1956, Laboe's live remote transmissions from local drive-in restaurants in Hollywood and midcity attracted such a legion of lowriders that a two-hundred-car capacity restaurant was built in southwestern Los Angeles to accommodate his following. Teenage Mexican American car customizers from all across the city finally found a place in which they could congregate, and a medium through which their voices could be heard, as Laboe aired thousands of dedications.⁹¹

While young people found new outlets for their self-expression, the powers that be cracked down on allegedly obscene cultural influences. For example, by 1955 Johnny Otis operated his own studio and record label, and he also had a daily radio program through which he showcased and disseminated R&B styles. Consequently, he encountered stiff opposition from "major record companies, publishing firms, radio and TV stations, ballrooms, and police departments," as well as "church and parent groups" alarmed about the negative effect of rhythm and blues on white youth.⁹² Undaunted by the arbiters of morality, Otis continued to promote the southern California dance parties he staged with business partner Hal Zeiger. According to Otis, "as the music grew in popularity, more and more white kids came to our dances, sometimes . . . even dancing with African American and Mexican American teenagers." Glaring officers who "hated to see white kids attending the dances with Black and Chicano youngsters . . . would stand around . . . harassing [the teenagers] with bullshit questions, checking their ID's." As this campaign of intimidation intensified into one of sabotage, the policemen even invoked obscure Progressive-era laws designed to restrict underage youth dancing.⁹³

In a parallel development, in 1956 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, voting on an existing law that all public dance areas must be walled, rejected a new licensing code amendment that would have allowed parks to sponsor dancing in the open. Even John Anson Ford, the longtime liberal politico, objected to liberalizing the rule, claiming that it "would lead to a lot of dancing in the darkness," and thus "might contribute to increased juvenile delinquency." Whether Ford's reservations reflected a fear of actual criminal acts by minors, or merely of youth sexuality, the board effectively outlawed dancing by young people in public parks, even as civic resources in poorer neighborhoods dwindled.⁹⁴

In Los Angeles County, laws regarding public park dances may have been strict, but laws regarding general underage dances were relatively lax. In Los

Angeles, on the other hand, all public dances within city limits needed board of education permit approval, effectively restricting them to school grounds. By 1956, this limitation on all-ages dances, along with disruptive police harassment, spurred promoters like Johnny Otis to move their events outside of Los Angeles.⁹⁵ Art Laboe, who had begun to emcee live music shows in 1957 at the Shrine Auditorium and the Orpheum, United Artists, and Paramount Theaters downtown, also looked to neighboring independent cities.⁹⁶ Nineteen miles to the south in Long Beach, three thousand to four thousand teenagers at a time would pack the Civic Municipal Auditorium to enjoy the steady backbeat and ribald lyrics of African American artists, while Otis and his partner Zeiger "often paid off the firemen and police" to avoid trouble.⁹⁷ The multicultural urban civility of the swing and R&B eras thus changed over time, adapting to new tactics in an intensifying culture clash with municipal authorities.

Art Laboe had also been renting the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium, but both he and Otis began staging the majority of their dances at the American Legion Stadium in El Monte, a blue-collar city twelve miles east of Los Angeles in the San Gabriel Valley.⁹⁸ Friday and Saturday night rhythm-and-blues dances at the El Monte Legion Stadium drew up to two thousand black, white, Asian American, and Mexican American teenagers from all over Los Angeles city and county, becoming an alternative cultural institution from the mid-1950s through the mid-1960s. Linked by radio stations and freeways, young people converged in El Monte, where, as Laboe remembers, "white kids from Beverly Hills, black kids from Compton, and local Chicano kids used to come . . . every weekend."⁹⁹ Marta Maestas recalls that, at a time when interracial dating "was unacceptable," at El Monte in the mid-1950s, "it was Latina women with a black man. It was black girls with Latino boys. But, it was kind of an easy mix."¹⁰⁰

Richard Rodriguez, who grew up in nearby Duarte, claims that by the late 1950s you would see "more blacks dating white girls and Chicana girls" at the El Monte Legion Stadium dances, and "every now and then you might see a white man with a black girl or a white man with a Mexican girl, or vice versa." Rodriguez recalls, "when I went to El Monte, I felt that I could date anybody I wanted to; I could dance with anybody I wanted to"; nevertheless, "if you dated a black girl, your parents would probably move out of the area."¹⁰¹ While racial interaction still had limits, a new generation increasingly participated in cross-cultural socializing, as well as occasional drinking and fighting in the parking lot, where young people also engaged in necking, and more, in the backseats of cars, confirming John Anson Ford's worst fears of dirty dancing and delinquent behavior after dark.¹⁰²

In 1956, the El Monte City Council revoked the dance permit they had issued to Hal Zeiger on the grounds that "rock and roll creates an unwholesome, unhealthy situation," but Otis fought back against what he called "racism, under the guise of all-American morality." Arguing that the decision was designed to prevent youth race mixing, Otis, joined by Al Jarvis and Hunter Hancock, representatives of the American Civil Liberties Union, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, and the recently integrated musicians' union Local 47, successfully pressured the council into rescinding their ban.¹⁰³ In Los Angeles, the Bureau of Music continued to promote "good citizenship through music" as late as September 1957, but the youth choruses and community sings must have been a harder sell compared to the El Monte Legion Stadium's "raw sexual energy" and lively musical participation, which included multiracial dance contests that produced popular Mexican American dance steps like the Pachuco Hop and the Corrido Rock.¹⁰⁴ In this charged atmosphere, audiences were thrilled by regular performers like The Penguins, Jesse Belvin, Don & Dewey, the Carlos Brothers, Rosie & the Originals, Sal Chico's Masked Phantom Band, the Salas Brothers, Cannibal and the Headhunters, and Thee Midnighters.

The Jaguars, an R&B vocal harmony quartet composed of two African Americans, a Mexican American, and an Italian American from Fremont High School in South Central Los Angeles, were also popular at the El Monte dances. After appearing on Hunter Hancock's R&B television program, "Rhythm and Bluesville," the Jaguars became an instant local success in 1955. Carrying popular music to all corners of the area, they played not only the El Monte Legion Stadium and the Long Beach Municipal Auditorium, but also Santa Monica's Pacific Ocean Park, and, crossing into Music Bureau territory, the Hollywood Bowl.¹⁰⁵ Another El Monte regular, Ritchie Valens, was a product of racially diverse San Fernando High School, as reflected in his first band, the Silhouettes, a rhythm-and-blues unit composed of African Americans, Mexican Americans, Italian Americans, and a Japanese American. Valens bridged cultures with his music, which incorporated black R&B, white country and western, and traditional Mexican styles, at public schools and private parties throughout the San Fernando-Pacoima area.

For instance, Valens played many house parties for the local Mexican American car club, the Lobos, and for white car clubs like the Igniters, the Drifters, and the Lost Angels, whose members, despite some initial racist reservations, were soon won over. According to Silhouettes' saxophonist Walter Takaki, "Ritchie actually got the two gangs, the Lobos and the Angels, a little bit closer together. Whenever he was playing, they would get along just fine."¹⁰⁶

Even the Silhouettes' rehearsals would often become spontaneous dances as neighborhood teens gathered outside the garage of Valens's African American neighbors, Conrad and Bill Jones.¹⁰⁷ In late 1958, as a solo artist achieving national popularity, Valens performed from Hawai'i to New York, then combined Los Angeles radio station appearances with recurring performances at Pacific Ocean Park, El Monte Legion Stadium, Long Beach Municipal Auditorium, and even Disneyland in Anaheim. With each performance, Valens sparked moments of creative connection, bringing together people from different ethnicities and backgrounds. Moreover, Valens, along with many of the era's local musicians, inspired an entire generation of Angelenos to pick up an instrument and start a rock-and-roll garage band.

The cultural practices and entrepreneurial infrastructure associated with an irrepressible R&B scene complicate pessimistic assessments of postwar Southern California that overemphasize the domination of politicians and the police. Like its swing predecessor, R&B resisted social segregation and highbrow reification by fostering contact and comprehension, as well as musical and physical expression, in public spaces. Yet the interracial tensions, and uneven rates of economic, social, and spatial mobility, between Mexican, African, Anglo, and Asian Americans complicate optimistic assessments that overemphasize the resistance of postwar subcultures and youth cultures. The simultaneity of cooperation and conflict, of fellowship and friction, qualifies both pessimistic and optimistic historical interpretations. A pragmatic reading, on the other hand, suggests that urban dance scenes brought people together without completely erasing personal prejudice or the institutional racism that privileged whites and some Mexican Americans over African Americans. Such an interpretation acknowledges internal dissension, but still recognizes that people could be bound together by music, dance, car culture, and clothing styles more than they were separated by race or class.

A pragmatic approach illuminates the full story, warts and all, but still recognizes the power of music to provide not only the soundtrack to a shared expressive culture, but an impetus to question the patronizing moral values and divisive ethnic notions of the status quo. Without romanticizing interethnic and interclass cultural sharing, scholars can gauge the transgressive potential of musical dialogues within and across community boundaries. Without overestimating the control of the elites or the opposition of the people, we can better understand the practical possibilities and limitations of popular music and dance, as well as "the ways in which audiences, through their own agency, both challenge and reproduce the dominant ideology."¹⁰⁸

For a time, postwar liberals retained the Progressive reformers' faith in the ability of social engineering to transform society, as city leaders tried to engage

with, and invest in, the life experiences of young Angelenos. Unfortunately, musical uplift went hand in hand with municipal regulation and punitive policing. In response to the legal challenges; the social, economic, and political gains; and the cultural incursions made by racial groups, local authorities attempted to maintain a sense of order by monitoring and disciplining the musicians, dancers, and listeners who navigated the topography of metropolitan Los Angeles. In contrast, from social dancing to music education, grassroots activity, and entrepreneurial production, the city's multicultural urban civility more successfully brought music participation to more people, connecting an often fragmented populace in its leisure. In other words, music teachers, record store owners, disc jockeys, concert promoters, nightclub impresarios, and professional performers more fully realized the original goal of the Los Angeles Music Bureau's programs. Ultimately, the diverse, street-oriented urban culture represented a more populist public sphere than the one envisioned by the city councilmen, county supervisors, and cultural institution apparatchiks who privileged classical symphonies and choral sings when increasing numbers of Angelenos wanted raunchy rockers, romantic ballads, and mellow instrumentals.

These competing visions of Los Angeles, from above and below, both hinged on the cultural influence of the region's two largest racial minorities. Yet due to the logical imperatives and racialized rewards of a systemic "possessive investment in whiteness," the dialectic between these two models of civil society developed without reconciliation, without a synthesis between antithetical worldviews.¹⁰⁹ And so this unresolved relationship continues, from the culture wars of the 1960s to those of the present. By studying the power struggles over public space and common values in the past, perhaps we can learn from the lessons of Los Angeles to ensure a truly democratic American culture for the future.

Notes

- * For critical feedback on earlier drafts, thanks to Danny Widener, Eric Avila, the members of the Los Angeles History Research Group at the Huntington Library, and the readers and editors at the *American Quarterly*. For funding support, thanks to the University of California, Los Angeles, where I was an Institute of American Cultures/Los Tigres Del Norte postdoctoral fellow at the Chicano Studies Research Center. Throughout this essay, "Mexican American" is used rather than "Chicano/a," although many Mexican Americans of the period simply referred to themselves as "Mexican." "Ethnic Mexican" is used to denote both Mexicans born in Mexico and Mexican Americans together. "Anglo" or "white" is used to generally describe Southern California European Americans, a population group that included white ethnics such as Italian or Jewish Americans, as well as poor white migrants from

- Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Texas, and their postwar suburban children. "African American" and the later term "black" are used, although the period term "Negro" is occasionally used in context.
1. Jack Hirshberg, "6,000 Jitterbugs Riot at Luncheon Date," *Metronome* 56 (April 1940), 10, as quoted in David W. Stowe, *Swing Changes: Big-Band Jazz in New Deal America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994), 31. For Gerald Wilson's assessment, see Clara Bryant et al., eds., *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 325–26.
 2. "Leaders Protest Dance Hall Ban," *California Eagle* (May 30, 1940), 1. Yet in 1940 the L.A.R.D. allowed twenty Ku Klux Klansmen to march uninterrupted through the streets of downtown to city hall. See Ralph Eastman, "'Pitchin' up a Boogie': African-American Musicians, Nightlife, and Music Venues in Los Angeles, 1930–1945," in *California Soul: Music of African Americans in the West*, ed. Jacqueline Cogdell DjeDje and Eddie S. Meadows (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 80.
 3. Bryant et al., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 199; *California Eagle* (May 16, 1940), B 2.
 4. My use of the term *civility* is inspired by Roger Keil, who writes about the "contradictory civility" of Los Angeles, where workers of color began "to claim spaces of alternative civility" after the 1992 uprising, building "a civil society from below" through "a network of democratic self-organization." See Roger Keil, *Los Angeles: Globalization, Urbanization and Social Struggles* (Chichester, England: John Wiley & Sons, 1998), 34–35.
 5. Soledad "Chole" Camarena Ray, interviewed by the author, Colton, California, August 19, 1999.
 6. Paul Lopez, interviewed by the author, Los Angeles, California, September 2, 1998.
 7. Carey McWilliams, *North from Mexico: The Spanish-Speaking People of the United States* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1990; originally 1948), 218.
 8. Charles Dinnijes Withers, "Problems of Mexican Boys" (master's thesis, University of Southern California, 1942), 83.
 9. Ibid.
 10. Eduardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 2003), 49.
 11. Alfred Barela, letter to the Honorable Arthur S. Guerin, May 21, 1943, as quoted in George J. Sánchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 253.
 12. Beatrice Griffith, *American Me* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1948), 18.
 13. Ibid.; Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*, 163.
 14. See Rodolfo F. Acuña, *Occupied America: A History of Chicanos*, 5th ed. (Pearson Longman, 2003), 251.
 15. Despite widespread discrimination in the war industries, Mexican Americans were often hired at places that did not hire African Americans. See Kevin Allen Leonard, "'Brothers Under the Skin?' African Americans, Mexican Americans, and World War II California," in *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second Great War*, ed. Roger W. Lotchin (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 191.
 16. Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 172; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 231; Griffith, *American Me*, 322, n 6.
 17. William Overend, "The '43 Zoot Suit Riots Reexamined," *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1978, sec. 4, 5; Mauricio Mazón, *The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1984), 75; McWilliams, *North from Mexico*, 225; "Zoot Suit Riots," VHS, directed by Joseph Tovares (PBS, *The American Experience*, 2002).
 18. C. Sharpless Hickman, "Civic Music Administration in Los Angeles," *Music Journal* 10.4 (April 1952): 21.
 19. City of Los Angeles brochure, undated, John Anson Ford Collection, Box 41, Folder 9, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
 20. City of Los Angeles brochure.
 21. Hickman, "Civic Music Administration," 34; C. Sharpless Hickman, "Community Sings in Los Angeles," *Music Journal* 10.28–29 (January 1952): 28–29.
 22. City of Los Angeles brochure. Nisei refers to the American-born, second-generation children of Japanese immigrants.
 23. Ibid.
 24. Ibid.
 25. Ibid.
 26. David Theo Goldberg, *Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 6.
 27. Hickman, "Civic Music Administration," 34.
 28. Ibid., 33.
 29. Don Tosti, interviewed by the author, Palm Springs, California, August 20, 1998; Chico Sesma, interviewed by the author, Boyle Heights, California, September 4, 1998.
 30. A handful of African American Angelenos worked in Hollywood studio orchestras in the 1940s and 1950s; Paul Lopez interview. Mexican American pianist Eddie Cano, whose uncle and grandfather were professional classical musicians, recalls that the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra was "locked up" to Mexicans, and that by the 1950s there were "one or two blacks," but they "had a hell of a time getting in there." See Steven Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 262, 156–57. By the early 1950s there was a Mexican American clarinetist in the Los Angeles Philharmonic. See David Reyes and Tom Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances: Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 23.
 31. City of Los Angeles brochure.
 32. Loza, *Barrio Rhythm*, 262.
 33. Jaime Corral, interviewed by the author, Alhambra, California, July 19, 1999.
 34. Chico Sesma interview. On *pachucos* writing *corridos* and other topical songs, see Griffith, *American Me*, 51; George Barker, "Pachuco: An American-Spanish Argot and Its Social Functions in Tucson, Arizona," *University of Arizona Social Science Bulletin* 18.1 (January 1950): 27–29.
 35. Hickman, "Civic Music Administration," 32; City of Los Angeles brochure; "Outline of Tentative Program for the Belvedere Park Lake Dedication," John Anson Ford Collection, Box 41, Folder 7, Huntington Library. The Spanish word *tipica* translates as characteristic or traditional, with rural, "roots," or folkloric connotations.
 36. City of Los Angeles brochure.
 37. Chico Sesma interview; Paul Lopez interview; Don Tosti interview; "Los Angeles Neighborhood Music School Fills Need in Community," *The Southwestern Musician* 15.7 (June 1949).
 38. Eric Porter, *What Is This Thing Called Jazz? African American Musicians as Artists, Critics, and Activists* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 62–63; Anthony Ortega, interviewed by Steven Isoardi, 1994, #300/498, Oral History Program, U.C.L.A., Department of Special Collections.
 39. Bryant et al., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 325, 327.
 40. City of Los Angeles brochure.
 41. Hickman, "Community Sings," 46.
 42. Ibid., 28.
 43. Hickman, "Civic Music Administration," 21.
 44. C. Sharpless Hickman, "Municipal Music and Money," *Music Journal* 10.5 (May 1952): 32; Hickman, "Community Sings," 29.
 45. Hickman, "Money," 23.
 46. Letter dated February 14, 1948, John Anson Ford Collection, Box 41, Folder 10, Huntington Library.
 47. "1951–52 Statement of Program," John Anson Ford Collection, Box 40, Folder 5, Huntington Library.
 48. On "blight," see Raúl H. Villa, *Barrio Logos: Space and Place in Urban Chicano Literature and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 71.
 49. Charles Emge, "L.A. Council Votes Down Anti-Discrimination Law," *Down Beat* 16.3 (November 4, 1949).
 50. On "musical miscegenation," see Michael Rogin, "Black Face, White Noise: The Jewish Jazz Singer Finds His Voice," *Critical Inquiry* 18 (spring 1992), 440; and Nelson George, *The Death of Rhythm and Blues* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1989), 86.
 51. Hickman, "Community Sings," 21.
 52. "Peace and Brotherhood and Citizenship" pamphlet, John Anson Ford Collection, Box 60, Folder 14, Huntington Library.
 53. Ibid.
 54. "Over-All Outline Plan of Recreational Services Which Should Be Offered in the Los Angeles Area," May 20, 1952, John Anson Ford Collection, Box 61, Folder 2, Huntington Library.
 55. Kelley, *Race Rebels*, 46–50.
 56. Rosa Linda Fregoso, *The Bronze Screen: Chicana and Chicano Film Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 26.
 57. Joseph P. Hill, "The Church and the Zoot-Suiter," Conference Report: Catholic Council for the Spanish Speaking, 1946, 16.

58. Anthony Ortega, interviewed by Steven Isoardi. Pomona disc jockey and club promoter Candelario Mendoza also mentions *jamaicas*; Candelario Mendoza, interviewed by the author, Pomona, California, December 10, 2003. Eduardo Pagán describes wartime Pacoima church bazaars as often flirtatious social functions. See Pagán, *Sleepy Lagoon*, 49.
59. Pagán, *Sleepy Lagoon*, 49.
60. "Twilight 'Til Dawn Dance to Benefit Boy Scout Jamboree," *California Eagle* (May 18, 1950).
61. Ed Frias and Lucie Brac Frias, interviewed by the author, Pasadena, California, August 17, 1998; Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 20, 30.
62. George, *Death of Rhythm and Blues*, 26–28.
63. Jim Dawson, "Boogie Down on Central: Los Angeles' Rhythm and Blues Revolution," in liner notes to compact disc, *Central Avenue Sounds: Jazz in Los Angeles (1921–1956)* (Rhino, 1999), 65.
64. Dawson, "Boogie Down," 64–65; Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 5; Ruben Guevara, "The View from the Sixth Street Bridge: The History of Chicano Rock," in *The First Rock & Roll Confidential Report: Inside the Real World of Rock & Roll*, ed. Dave Marsh et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 116.
65. Guevara, "View," 115.
66. George Lipsitz, "Land of a Thousand Dances: Youth, Minorities, and the Rise of Rock and Roll," in *Recasting America: Culture and Politics in the Age of Cold War*, ed. Lary May (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 274; Ed Frias interview.
67. Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 20–21.
68. Ed Frias interview.
69. Chole Camarena Ray interview.
70. Jim Dawson, *Nervous Man Nervous: Big Jay McNeely and the Rise of the Honking Tenor Sax* (Milford, New Hampshire: Big Nickel Publications, 1994), 96–97.
71. *Ibid.*, 70.
72. *Ibid.*, 76.
73. Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 49.
74. Dawson, *Nervous*, 71–72; Bryant et al., *Central Avenue Sounds*, 115. On "Billy Goat Acres," see Leonard Pitt and Dale Pitt, *Los Angeles A to Z: An Encyclopedia of the City and County* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 44–45.
75. Dawson, *Nervous*, 71.
76. Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 49; Dawson, "Boogie," 83; Dawson, *Nervous*, 60–61, 79, 68.
77. See D. J. Waldie, *Holy Land: A Suburban Memoir* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), which is about growing up during the 1950s in the Los Angeles suburb of Lakewood, California.
78. William D. Piersen, "African American Festive Style," in *Signifyin(g). Sanctifyin', & Slam Dunking: A Reader in African American Expressive Culture*, ed. Gena Dagel Caponi (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 429, 418.
79. On the ways that Big Jay McNeely used his formal music training, and the primal tension and religious fervency produced and released by the best honkers, see Dawson, *Nervous*, 73, 75, 41.
80. Guthrie P. Ramsey Jr., *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 177.
81. George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc: Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles," in *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), 141–42.
82. *Ibid.*, 142.
83. Dawson, *Nervous*, 88–89; Art Fein, *The L.A. Musical History Tour: A Guide to the Rock and Roll Landmarks of Los Angeles* (Winchester, Mass.: Faber and Faber, 1990), 43–44.
84. Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 6; Dawson, *Nervous*, 98, 92; Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 49.
85. Terry McDermott, "Behind the Bunker Mentality," *Los Angeles Times*, June 11, 2000, A 28.
86. Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), 294.
87. Dawson, *Nervous*, 92, 93, 98.
88. *Ibid.*, 75–76.
89. Michael T. Bertrand, *Race, Rock, and Elvis* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 70.
90. Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 6.
91. Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 45–46; Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 5.
92. Johnny Otis, *Upside Your Head! Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue* (Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 60–61.
93. Otis, *Upside Your Head!* 60–61. Chief Parker also used similar methods when he invoked a long-dormant statute, the Criminal Syndicalist Law, to arrest John Harris, a black Angeleno labor and civil rights activist, in 1966. Thanks to Ralph Shaffer for this information.
94. Program Study Report, May 17, 1956, John Anson Ford Collection, Box 61, Folder 5, Huntington Library.
95. Reyes and Waldman, *Land*, 45; Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 5; Otis, *Upside Your Head!* xxvi, 61.
96. Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 5.
97. Otis, *Upside Your Head!* 61–62.
98. *Ibid.*, 60–61.
99. Matt Garcia, "'Memories of El Monte': Intercultural Dance Halls in Post-World War II Greater Los Angeles," in *Generations of Youth: Youth Cultures and History in Twentieth-Century America*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael N. Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 161.
100. Matt Garcia, *A World of Its Own: Race, Labor, and Citrus in the Making of Greater Los Angeles, 1900–1970* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 208.
101. *Ibid.*, 207–8.
102. *Ibid.*, 206.
103. Otis, *Upside Your Head!* xxvii, 61.
104. R. Freese, "Good Citizenship through Music," *Choral Guide* 10.22–23 (September 1957); Garcia, *World*, 206; Guevara, "View," 118; Pagán, *Sleepy Lagoon*, 53.
105. Tom Reed, *The Black Music History of Los Angeles—Its Roots: A Classical Pictorial History of Black Music in Los Angeles from 1920–1970* (Los Angeles: Black Accent on L.A. Press, 1992), 382–83; Molina, *Barrio Guide*, 63.
106. Beverly Mendheim, *Ritchie Valens: The First Latino Rocker* (Tempe, Ariz.: Bilingual Press, 1987), 34, 36.
107. Larry Lehmer, *The Day the Music Died: The Last Tour of Buddy Holly, the "Big Bopper," and Ritchie Valens* (New York: Schirmer Books, 1997), 50.
108. Robin D. G. Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'the Folk,'" *American Historical Review* 97.5 (December 1992): 1408.
109. See George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998).