



# **The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory**

*Catherine S. Ramírez*

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The Mexican American woman zoot suiter, or pachuca, often wore a V-neck sweater or a long, broad-shouldered coat, a knee-length pleated skirt, fishnet stockings or bobby socks, platform heels or saddle shoes, dark lipstick, and a bouffant. Or she donned the same style of zoot suit that her male counterparts wore. With their striking attire, pachucos and pachucas represented a new generation of Mexican American youth, which arrived on the public scene in the 1940s. Yet while pachucos have often been the subject of literature, visual art, and scholarship, *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* is the first book focused on pachucas. Two events in wartime Los Angeles thrust young Mexican American zoot suiters into the media spotlight. In the Sleepy Lagoon incident, a man was murdered during a mass brawl in August 1942. Twenty-two young men, all but one of Mexican descent, were tried and convicted of the crime. In the Zoot Suit Riots of June 1943, white servicemen attacked young zoot suiters, particularly Mexican Americans, throughout Los Angeles. The Chicano movement of the 1960s–1980s cast these events as key moments in the political awakening of Mexican Americans and pachucos as exemplars of Chicano identity, resistance, and style. While pachucas and other Mexican American women figured in the two incidents, they were barely acknowledged in later Chicano movement narratives. Catherine S. Ramírez draws on interviews she conducted with Mexican American women who came of age in Los Angeles in the late 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s as she recovers the neglected stories of pachucas. Investigating their relative absence in scholarly and artistic works, she argues that both wartime U.S. culture and the Chicano movement rejected pachucas because they threatened traditional gender roles. Ramírez reveals how pachucas challenged dominant notions of Mexican American and Chicano identity, how feminists have reinterpreted la pachuca, and how attention to an overlooked figure can disclose much about history making, nationalism, and resistant identities.

## **The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory Details**

Date : Published January 16th 2009 by Duke University Press Books (first published December 26th 2008)

ISBN : 9780822343035

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Format : Paperback 256 pages

Genre : History, Nonfiction, Gender, North American Hi..., American History, Womens, Gltb, Queer



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## **From Reader Review The Woman in the Zoot Suit: Gender, Nationalism, and the Cultural Politics of Memory for online ebook**

### **Frank García says**

Bout time someone wrote a book about las chucas!

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### **Ali says**

Read this for my US Women's history class during my senior year of college. It really exposed me to a whole new culture and sparked my interest in Chicana studies.

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### **Mills College Library says**

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### **Laura says**

This book was definitely worth reading, and its project (of recuperating the lost figure of the Pachuca) has my great admiration. But I feel it kept writing around its subject, never quite confronting it directly. And the reference to the "cultural politics of memory" in the title is misleading; the book does not employ memory studies, though memory inflects it as it tacks back and forth between the 1940s and the 1970s+.

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### **Brian Herrera says**

Witty, smart and searching excavation of the gaps in popular memory.

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