



# Zoot Suit Riots (Landmarks of the American Mosaic)

*Roger Bruns*

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Although the "zoot suit" had earlier been a black youth fashion trend identified with jazz culture, by the 1940s, the zoot suit was adopted by Mexican American teenagers in wartime Los Angeles, who wore it as their unofficial "uniform" as an act of rebellion and to establish their cultural identity. For a week in June of 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots, instigated by Anglo-American servicemen and condoned by the Los Angeles police, terrorized the Mexican American community. The events were an ugly testament to the climate of racial tension and resentment in Los Angeles—and after similar riots began across the nation, it became apparent how endemic the problem was. This book traces these important historic events and their subsequent cultural and political influences on the Mexican American experience, especially the activist and reform efforts designed to prevent similar future injustices.

General readers will gain an understanding of the challenges facing the Mexican American community in wartime Los Angeles, grasp the racial and cultural resistance of the larger Anglo-American society of the time, and see how the blatant injustices of the Sleepy Lagoon trial and the Zoot Suit Riots served to galvanize Latinos and others to fight back. Those conducting in-depth research will appreciate having access to original materials sourced from Federal and state archives as well as newspapers and other repositories of information provided in the book.

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