

Cruising For Community: Youth Culture and Politics in Los Angeles, 1910-1970

By

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction: The Fifth Estate**

Throughout the 20th century, Los Angeles was a crucible of American youth culture. The city's social organization, commercial orientation, and spatial development consolidated policing authority and centralized youth consumer sites; adult youth experts lobbied for the management of youth culture as a way to ensure social stability and common civic identity. Alongside these modes of consolidation and centralization, local youth subcultures developed that organized the activities of thousands of young people. These subcultures were both culturally and politically potent; subcultures gave young people language to articulate challenges to adult authority and collective agency to shape the evolution of youth culture. "Cruising for Community" explores the dynamic negotiations between adults and youth that drove the growth of youth culture in metropolitan Los Angeles from the First World War and Progressive era to the Vietnam War and civil rights era.

The development of youth culture is a critical means for historians to explore the formation of youth politics, that is, the ways that young people see their lives, desires and futures as forming a distinct age identity. In youth politics, youth identity is mobilized to make claims on resources and power. Within Los Angeles and American culture, youth politics functioned as a catalyst to progressive activism, and in three distinct periods young people's collective practices restructured the city's social order. In roughly three

periods beginning around the turn of the century, youth activism and claims of autonomy crested; at these peaks, young people *en masse* made demands for greater resources, political representation and cultural recognition. In the early part of the century, young Angelinos restructured youth culture in high schools in a climate of Progressivism. During the Great Depression, youth activists petitioned government to secure greater vocational training and employment opportunities. And in the 1960s, a number of coinciding factors—including the entry of the baby boom into adolescence, the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War—made generational identity and youth culture an extremely powerful social force and the basis for transformative politics and culture. "Cruising for Community" examines the development of youth culture in the first half of the 20th century to closely interrogate the social and cultural relationships that produced the convergence of youth culture and activism during the 1960s.

Detroiter Harvey Ovshinsky's experiences in L.A. offer a window into the crest of youth culture and politics in the 1960s. In 1965, Ovshinsky, against his wishes, moved with his mother from Detroit to Los Angeles. Separated from his friends, high school peer networks, and city of birth, Ovshinsky spent lonely nights watching late-night television programs. One evening, Ovshinsky tuned in to the "Joe Pine Show" and watched an interview with Art Kunkin, the publisher of a local underground newspaper, the *Los Angeles Free Press* (LAFP). Subsequently, Ovshinsky sought Kunkin out and became an intern at the paper during the spring and summer of 1965.<sup>1</sup>

The staff of the *LAFP* provided a new and welcoming community for Ovshinsky. Moreover, the basement of The Fifth Estate Coffee House, located on the Sunset Strip in

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey Ovshinsky interview by author, July 16, 2008. The information in the next three paragraphs comes from the same interview.

Hollywood, served as the newspaper's home and gave Ovshinsky access to the area's vibrant youth and celebrity culture. In comparison to many of the other youth-oriented establishments on the Strip, The Fifth Estate stood out. Its proprietor Al Mitchell envisioned the coffee house as an alternative to university learning, a place where young people had the freedom and leisure to develop self-expression and community outside of narrowly defined commercial endeavors. At The Fifth Estate, customers broke out in spontaneous poetry and folk music sessions, watched avant-garde films of Luis Buñuel and Kenneth Anger upstairs, and contributed to the art collection featured on the walls. In addition, the Strip and the coffeehouse provided places that Ovshinsky could meet young women for a teenager dislocated from his peer networks.

In Hollywood, Ovshinsky also witnessed the weekend horde of youth that flocked to teen dance clubs, the cruising scene on the boulevard, and the police's heavy-handed traffic control techniques. The coffee house scene encouraged participation and unregulated relationships, and the energy and giddiness of the crowds of young people on the Sunset Strip washed through the front door. Within this environment, generational identity was not a theory; it was a lived experience.

Ovshinsky's exposure to the youth scene on The Sunset Strip was not only a matter of place; it was also a matter of timing. At the beginning of the 20th century, Hollywood had one hotel and its mostly agricultural community voted to outlaw cow traffic on what would become The Strip.<sup>2</sup> During this period, youth issues were dealt with at the neighborhood level. Church organizations and schools offered young people

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<sup>2</sup> Hollywood incorporated as a town in 1903 and was then annexed by Los Angeles in 1910.

education and recreation, and ministers and teachers, *in loco parentis*, had the authority to correct wayward youth through corporal punishment.

During the metropolitan boom of the 1910s and 1920s, it became apparent that neighborhood structures were no longer sufficient to manage the youth population in the city. Instead, youth experts and their political supporters began to initiate supervision strategies at the metropolitan level. Correspondingly, institutions such as the Los Angeles City School District and the Los Angeles County Youth Advisory Board consolidated power into the hands of a few public servants and these youth experts took the responsibility to create, manage and execute regional control programs.

Along with the consolidation of authority over youth, the consumer power of young people also drove the movement of youth culture from neighborhood spaces, to regional nodes, and finally, to the national stage. By the end of the 1940s, professionally organized events at regional venues trumped student dances at neighborhood schools. Concurrently, malls and leisure zones emerged that catered to the demands of young people. Young consumers created traffic, and although this pleased business owners, masses of young people made control strategies more difficult to implement. No place was the phenomenon more evident than on weekend nights on The Sunset Strip in the 1950s and the 1960s.

The Strip served as one of several places where young Angelinos cruised, parading without permit. The practice of cruising symbolized a collective resistance to the city's efforts to control the flow of goods and people in the city. Cruising originated as a subcultural practice of car clubs and by the mid 20th century thousands of teenagers and their cars nightly congested the commercial avenues of the city. Teenagers cruised as

a way to meet new people and to flirt; cruising also allowed them to compete with other young people on their own terms, whether through racing or showing off newly acquired features of their automobiles. These practices were not solely oppositional, but were expressions of young peoples' desire to participate within mainstream culture but with limited adult supervision. Like the circulation and advertisement of goods in mass consumer society, cruising prepared young Americans for competition within adult class-oriented consumer society. Unlike school or work, the rewards were not postponed but available every weekend night.<sup>3</sup>

Although many were drawn to the excitement in the street, by slowing down traffic, young cruisers created a space inside cars that allowed individuals to explore their social role by establishing relationships, friendships, clubs, and gangs. Through these associations young Angelinos discovered their developing racial, class, sexual and gender identities. Furthermore, while the city's urban design and institutions sought to organize young people into manageable and ordered segments, cruising expressed a desire of young Angelinos to integrate its dispersed population, and, through the common ownership of youth culture, establish community. Regional youth culture became a way to express generational identity and worked to synchronize the activities of young people in the creation of social networks over vast suburban landscapes—often within schools and commercial environments whose size reduced intimacy and individual agency.

Police and parents did not validate the practice of cruising, nor did many embrace the power of youth culture; the masses of young people participating legitimized practices and subcultures. In this way, cruising provides a window into the history of

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<sup>3</sup> George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990).

youth culture and the ways it served as a catalyst of social change. The articulation of youth identity in cultural practices authenticated subcultural activity as superior to adult mainstream culture; being cool or hip was not the practice of thinking about the future nor purchasing things that were advertised as modern, but the knowledge that young Angelinos were already “it” just because they were young.

Thus, Los Angeles provides a rich site to explore the history of American youth culture, consumerism and subcultures in the 20th century. L.A.’s municipal leaders in the postwar World War II period relaxed youth regulations, such as curfews and age-mixing prohibitions, to aid commercial development and emergent consumer markets; in the same period, teenagers became the new sweethearts of American businesses and the engine of American consumerism. As appropriated and mass marketed, the dominant image of the Angelino was often strictly white and middle-class; in Los Angeles, the ethnic differences of white Americans dissolved in the production of the beach bound “golden youth,” the Californian teenager.<sup>4</sup> However, this representation did not reflect the complex social reality of young people’s lives. Very few Angelinos had direct access to the beach, and even fewer touched a surfboard, and this disjuncture between depiction and social reality became a point of critique in which young Angelinos in the search of their social roles recognized the silencing of race, class, and gender differences within mass culture. The lack of cultural representation coupled with the recognition that suburban spaces, schools and public policies also failed to provide equal resources to young people generated a broad search for cultural authenticity, furthering the formation

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<sup>4</sup> Kirse Granat May, *Golden State, Golden Youth: The California Image in Popular Culture, 1955-1966* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

of racial, ethnic, and sexual identities, and stimulating the organization of both progressive cultural and political movements.

Los Angeles is also an important site for understanding youth culture because its sprawling suburban development, new to American cities in the 20th century, limited face-to-face contact among groups of young people. City leaders thought that social distancing and de facto segregation would effectively discourage the formation of street corner societies as found in New York and other Eastern cities. This would in turn alleviate the problem of juvenile delinquency and the mixing of different youth populations. These leaders saw spatial control through multiple modes of segregation, including age and race, as a deterrent to juvenile delinquency and as more cost effective than policing in the management of the regional youth population. Nonetheless, within Southern California, cross-community youth alliances, from car clubs to radical youth groups, created networks that transected suburban space. In this way, youth culture in L.A., while retaining some of the street corner traditions of older American cities, emphasized mobility and boundary crossing. Moreover, a number of sites particular to Southern California, such as suburban commercial strips and beaches, became the places in which young people gathered and collaboratively developed local youth culture.

Youth is a historically contingent category and its boundaries are neither solely biological nor cultural. Therefore, it is often hard to clearly define the age boundaries of youth, and in fact, it is often the historian's task to narrate the shifting nature of youth over time. Since youth is a historically contested category, "Cruising for Community" seeks to find how and why specific communities have sought to define youth in ways that confirm, organize and/or advance their social and political agendas. In order to better

understand how this discourse over American youth has evolved, this study will use terms such as adolescents, teenagers, and juveniles interchangeably.<sup>5</sup>

Youth is a liminal category and it marks the transition from childhood to adulthood. For most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the children of the middle class experienced a lengthening period of dependency identified as “youth.” In this way, people in their late 20s or early 30s were often placed in the category of youth. Concurrently, working-class youth was defined by legal measures; the creation of mandatory school attendance and child labor laws were important measures that shaped youth for the working class. During the time period considered in the dissertation, high school became almost universal for young Americans; in 1970, over 90 percent of 16 and 17 year-olds attended school. In addition, college attendance became more widespread in the post-Sputnik era—in 1947, 2 million students attended college and less than a quarter of these students were female. By 1970, 7.4 million students attended college and females were approximately 40 percent of the student population. For most of the 20th century, the initial age barrier to legal employment in California was 14 and the minimum age for full voting rights was 21. Although, entry into the labor force marked a departure from middle-class expectation for youth, the employment of working-class youth often provided critical resources for the development of youth subcultures. Furthermore, throughout the 20th century, the average age for first marriage, potentially marking passage into adult culture, was at its lowest in the 1950s and 1960s—approximately 23 years old for men and 20

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<sup>5</sup> Ronald D. Cohen, “The Delinquents: Censorship and Youth Culture in Recent U.S. History,” *History of Education Quarterly*, 31.3 (Fall 1997): 251.

years old for women.<sup>6</sup> While not hegemonic, these educational and legal categories worked to unify a concept of youth throughout the late 19th and 20th century.

My focus on youth culture in Los Angeles aims to uncover cross-race relationships hidden by mass culture and allows me to articulate and integrate stories that expose corroboration among black, Latino, Asian, and white youth. Young people in this period often created cross-community allegiances and networks through a shared cultural critique of mass culture and municipal policies. Furthermore, these youth policies generally stagnated and failed to evolve in response to the new economic and social opportunities of the post-World War II period. In the late 1960s, following the rise of civil rights and antiwar protests, the silencing of young activists through state coercion led to the vilification of local working-class youth subcultures. In the 1970s, a conservative critique of youth autonomy hid mid-20th century policy failures; this backlash worked to replace the progressive standard of rehabilitation with incarceration for youth who deviated from middle-class standards.<sup>7</sup>

After the summer of 1965, Ovshinsky returned to the Midwest and resumed his studies at Detroit's Samuel C. Mumford High School. Although Ovshinsky had begun publishing papers when he was eleven, his experiences in Los Angeles provided him with a new model for publishing. At Mumford and later as an undergraduate at Wayne State University, Ovshinsky produced his own underground paper called *The Fifth Estate*, modeled after the *LAFP*. Ovshinsky's first edition, in November 1965, presented a

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<sup>6</sup> In 1950 and 1960 the average age for first marriage of men was 22.8 and women was 20.3. Figure based on averages of the 1950 and 1960 U.S. Census.

<sup>7</sup> Gilmore argues that this form of incarceration can be best expressed as incapacitation because it offers no rehabilitation and only seeks to segregate offenders from the rest of society. Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag: Prisons, Surplus, Crisis, and Opposition in Globalizing California* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

review of a Bob Dylan concert, a borrowed Jules Feiffer cartoon, an events calendar, and an announcement of an anti-Vietnam War demonstration. *The Fifth Estate* became popular because it printed material often neglected in the mainstream press, including articles on sex, drugs and rock ‘n’ roll. High school and college students were the target audience, and the paper achieved a circulation between 15,000 to 20,000 copies by the late 1960s. The Fifth Estate inspired many young activists and journalists across the greater Detroit area to publish their own underground newspapers. After moving from print to public radio, Ovshinsky, “Harvey O”, continued to pioneer alternative media in the 1970s and remains an active journalist in the Detroit area today.

Ovshinsky named his paper *The Fifth Estate* in homage to the L.A. coffeehouse that offered him shelter, community and inspiration during his sojourn in Los Angeles. However the idea of the fifth estate provides more than a simple tribute, and if news media functions as the fourth estate in contemporary society, youth culture in the mid 20th century operated as a fifth estate, a social force that organized and often harmonized the activities of millions of young Americans and thereby served as a catalyst for the creation of new politics, identities and cultures. The history of this estate is not linear, and the evidence points to a convergence of historical trends that fostered, organized and energized youth activism. These trends and influences include, but are not limited to, the maturation of the Baby Boomers, the politics of anticomunism, discourses of juvenile delinquency, the evolution of progressive education, the growth of the teen consumer market, the civil rights movement, and the war in Vietnam. L.A. is a distinct space to base a historical investigation of youth culture; the conditions of its urbanity, including its

massive youth population and suburban topography, provide historians with a template to better understand the unfolding of youth culture and politics in 20th century America.

Los Angeles has been the site for many explorations of youth culture. Influenced by George Lipsitz's work on the music scene, scholars such as Matt Garcia and Antonio Macias have explored the multiracial youth music scene of mid-20th century Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup> "Cruising for Community" builds on the insights of Lipsitz, Garcia and Macias and develops a concept of youth culture that balances structure and agency by looking at its development within one city. In Los Angeles, the suburban development and the hypersegregation of the city, the legacy of progressive education, municipal youth policies, and policing strategies all structured the contours of youth culture. As policy and regulations alienated young people from full civic participation, youth culture became a means for young people to articulate relationships to authority, engender generational solidarity and develop alternatives cultural practices. The common elements of youth subcultures created an intra-generational language offering possibilities for social and political change. My research proposes that generational identity and youth cultural participation was critical for emergent subcultures and identities.

The idea of subcultures came out of the academic study of delinquency, but as the evidence in "Cruising for Community" shows, local subcultures in L.A. were not the domain of delinquents. Subcultures are groups whose social interactions create symbols and practices that provide members with identity and belonging. In this dissertation this includes Jewish radical youth groups, working-class hot rodders and Chicano rockers.

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<sup>8</sup> Matt Garcia, "'Memories of El Monte': Intercultural Dance Halls in Post-World War II Greater Los Angeles," in *Generations of Youth: Youth Culture and History in Twentieth Century History*, ed. Joe Austin and Michael Willard (New York: New York University Press, 1998); Anthony Macias, "From Pachuco Boogie to Latin Jazz," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan), 2001.

While many of the symbols may be oppositional to mainstream culture, it should almost go without saying that subcultures operate within the same political and economic institutional structures as mass consumer culture. However, subcultural membership often creates alternative values systems not singularly based on profit or power. Furthermore, subcultures often emerge from the re-alignment of relationships that occurs when young people encounter adults who share particular passions or skills that have little economic value but instead infuse practices with romantic ideals attached to representations of youth. Therefore, while outwardly subcultures present themselves as manifestations of style, “Cruising for Community” presents subcultures as critical engines of cultural change that have often played a role in historically realigning American culture and politics.

The processes of co-optation and appropriation define the relationship between subculture and mass consumer culture. Co-optation refers to the takeover of a particular subcultural product. A copyright on a particular product represents a legally defined form of co-optation. At particular moments in time, individual subcultural products are co-opted by business interests and made available to the middle class through mass consumer culture. However, co-optation is extremely fragile, and over time co-opted products become open to re-appropriation. Appropriation, as opposed to co-optation, refers to the interplay—the give-and-take—between subculture and mass culture. For example, skaters can appropriate urban forms such as street curbs and rails, and local skate shops can appropriate and market local skate clothing and board styles. Subcultural groups, the government, and local businesses together sustain the production of local youth cultures through multiple modes of appropriation. Yet, as alternatives to mass

consumer culture, these local cultures become ripe for co-optation by national business interests.<sup>9</sup>

## **Approaches to Youth Culture**

The study of youth culture is a 20th century phenomenon. At the end of the 19th century, scientific investigation became the means to understand human development, and by the mid-20th century researchers began to discuss the role of youth culture as a critical factor in social reproduction. In the last decades of the 20th century, historians also began to study the relationship between youth culture and historical change. “Cruising for Community” builds upon these earlier studies of youth and seeks to refine the discursive and physical negotiations between adults and young people that have produced youth culture. An historical exploration of these negotiations requires consideration of questions of autonomy, agency, citizenship, consumerism, identity formation, political participation, cultural innovation and subcultural emergence.

At the turn of the 20th century, two thinkers, G. Stanley Hall and John Dewey, both transformed and consolidated the ways in which Americans thought about youth; their influence on method, policy and discourse positions them as the first generation of modern youth experts. According to Hall, modern society coddled its young, and in order to better manage the future of civilization and the American nation, boys needed to be taught discipline and psychological autonomy through strenuous physical labor and

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<sup>9</sup> Stuart Hall, “Notes on Deconstructing the Popular,” in Raphael Samuel, ed., *People's History and Socialist Theory* (London: Routledge, 1981), 227-241; Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002).

character building exercises.<sup>10</sup> Hall's theories supported institutions such as the Boy Scouts and championed men such as President Theodore Roosevelt as a role model for middle-class boys.<sup>11</sup>

John Dewey sought to make education “child-centered” and his influence lay in the fact that he linked scientific inquiry, pragmatic philosophy and social reform to his view of the child. According to his analysis, formal curriculum limited the creative potentials of young people; therefore, he promoted educational environments that would protect young people from intrusive adult authority. Dewey was the champion of Progressive education whose central ideas were defined, according to historian Richard Hofstadter, as “not on the demands of society, nor on any conception of what an educated person should be, but on the developing needs and interests of the child.”<sup>12</sup> Hall and Dewey set in motion the crucial question for youth experts in the 20th century: the tension between the management of young people to encourage civility and productivity, and the education of young people to encourage autonomy and creativity.

Following Hall and Dewey, youth experts in the social sciences began to investigate thoroughly the socialization of young people into adult civil society. However, rather than seeing youth as a universal psychological and/or biological development, social scientists began to stress the economic, social and cultural conditions of young people's lives. Class, race and ethnicity became important categories of

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<sup>10</sup> Hall's theories were based on his idea of recapitulation, that the development of the individual reflected the evolution of the species; through scientific management adolescents would be guided from primitive evolutionary stages to higher levels of civilization.

<sup>11</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 77-120, 170-216.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Hofstadter, “The Child and the World,” in *The Cult of Youth in Middle-Class America*, ed. Richard L. Rapson (D.C.: Heath and Company, 1971), 71.

analysis, but because of the popularity of Hall's theories these researchers did little investigation into the socialization of women. In 1926, *The City Boy and His Problems* by Emory Bogardus, sociologist and director of social research at University of Southern California, was the first of these studies to focus on modes of socialization within L.A.

Bogardus claimed that the transition from rural to urban living failed to provide families in L.A. with strategies to help ensure the successful maturation of their boys. Furthermore, the lack of adult supervision in the modern city led to increasing levels of delinquency, as a result of young people's access to the city's entertainment and commercial zones. Because of the absence of guidance, Bogardus argued for the need for character building group programs run by elite male leaders, claiming, "The main problem is to get the proper Big Brothers. A young business man makes one of the best, providing he isn't too busy."<sup>13</sup> Bogardus identified the city's commercial elite as role models for boys, advocating leaders such as Arthur Letts; Letts owned both The Broadway and Bullock's department stores and, concurrently, served as the president of the Boy Scouts and YMCA. As the local youth expert, Bogardus feared the effects of the commercial market on young people, yet he promoted youth leaders who were financially invested in the integration of youth culture with particular commercial endeavors.

The study of girls remained peripheral to youth academic research in the first half of the 20th century. However, in the 1940s, Talcott Parsons's research led him to speculate that youth culture played a critical role in sex role socialization. Parsons argued, "at the point of emergence in adolescence that there first begins to develop a set of patterns and behavior phenomena which involve a highly complex combination of age

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<sup>13</sup> Emory S. Bogardus, *The City Boy and His Problems: A Survey of Boy Life in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Rotary Club, 1926), 114.

grading and sex role elements. These may be referred to together as the phenomena of the ‘youth culture.’”<sup>14</sup> According to Parsons occupational status and abilities limited adult society, but a broader set of humanistic values defined youth culture.<sup>15</sup>

Furthermore, Parsons did not see youth culture as solely generated by young people’s practices; rather, youth culture emerged out of the “coincidence of the emotional needs of adolescents” and the adult romanticization of youth that accompanied the tensions of adult life. In the first half of the 20th century, many Hollywood movies were driven by the romanticization of youth. In turn, young moviegoers adopted some of these cinematic representations into youth culture, and this in turn provided a new template for adult fantasies. In the late 1920s, as a reaction to the sensationalized deaths of many of Hollywood’s leading ladies, some critics began to demand government regulation of the cinema industry. In response, the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors Association developed a production movie code to censor material considered morally unfit.

By the 1950s, many parents, politicians and educators viewed excessive teenage leisure and consumerism as a threat to American social stability; movies such as *Rebel Without a Cause* and *Blackboard Jungle* exploited mid-century anxieties about the dangers of juvenile delinquency. Concurrently, scholarship focused on the elimination of juvenile delinquency identified youth subcultures as specific articulations of youth culture tied to place and group membership. Gang researcher Albert Cohen argued that:

The delinquent subculture is not only a set of rules, a design for living which is different from or indifferent to or even in conflict with the norms of the

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<sup>14</sup> Parsons, “Age and Sex in Social Structure of the United States,” 606.

<sup>15</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt refined Parson’s theories to argue that in American society, the lack of family prestige to guarantee life success combined with the unwillingness or inability to pass on wealth to the young led to the creation of peer cultures. See Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure*, (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1956).

‘respectable’ adult society. It would appear at least plausible that it is defined by its negative polarity to these norms. That is, the delinquent subculture takes its norms from the larger culture but turns them upside down.<sup>16</sup>

Initially, delinquency research proposed to rehabilitate individual young people through youth groups and the positive identification with adult role models—the 1956 public service film, *A Boy with a Knife*, demonstrated how groups established democratic impulses that could lead young people from delinquent subcultural mores to the embrace of democratic citizenship and civility.<sup>17</sup> In the mid 20th century, the Probation Department of the County of Los Angeles sponsored youth expert led group work for potentially delinquent youth. Interestingly, gang research in L.A. in the 1960s paved the way for a rejection of group work as a method to discourage delinquency. Malcolm Klein at the University of Southern California argued that any attempt to strengthen group identity facilitated gang cohesiveness and the only solution was to isolate key individuals and attempt to steer them from gangs.<sup>18</sup>

While juvenile delinquency defined research questions in the 1950s, student political activism defined academic study in the 1960s. Kenneth Keniston argued that the activities of the New Left signaled an abrupt shift in generation activism: “Rarely in history has apparent apathy been replaced so rapidly by publicized activism, silence by strident dissent.”<sup>19</sup> Youth was “defined neither by a fixed span of years nor membership in any specific group, but by a state of mind, a set of questions, and a trajectory of

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<sup>16</sup> Albert K. Cohen, *Delinquent Boys* (New York: The Free Press, 1955), 28.

<sup>17</sup> Laslo Benedek, dir., “*Boy with a Knife*,” Dudley Pictures Corp., 1956.

<sup>18</sup> Malcolm W. Klein and Lois Y. Crawford, *Groups, gangs, and Cohesiveness* (Los Angeles: Youth Studies Center, University of Southern California, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> Kenneth Keniston, *Young Radicals: Notes on Committed Youth* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 291.

psychological change.”<sup>20</sup> For Keniston the focal issue of youth was the discovery of social role and the quest to understand the individual’s relationship to the structures of established society. In mid 20th century Los Angeles, regional youth management policies, suburban spaces, segregated communities, mass culture, commercial topography, and local subcultures structured young Angelinos’ search for their place in society.

Also in the 1960s, psychologist Erik Erikson argued that adolescence is a moratorium, a space and time that provided young people with a period of leisure to develop their own personal identity.<sup>21</sup> For Erikson, generational social conflict resulted from the gap between the promises of adult society to young people and the real economic and social opportunities made available to youth; the accelerating social and technical change of modernity thwarted the easy transition from one generation of adults to the next. As soon as one generation developed modes of socialization and entered adult life, these modes became outmoded for the next generation. “Cruising for Community” shows that youth experts in Los Angeles fell into this pattern; furthermore, the rapid growth of the region quickened the pace in which youth programs became outmoded.

Many researchers were driven to the study of youth culture and subcultures by efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency or explain political activism. However, beginning in the late 1960s, British scholars, most notably researchers at the University of Birmingham’s Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS), departed from the two goals stated above and began to investigate subcultures as an indicator that revealed the

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>21</sup> Erik Erikson, *Identity, Youth, and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

relationship between popular culture and the political economy. Emanating from working-class youth, subcultures articulated radical challenges, a form of “semiotic guerilla warfare,” to capitalist social order.<sup>22</sup> CCCS work found synthesis in Dick Hebdige’s *Subculture: The Meaning of Style*.<sup>23</sup> Hebdige addressed the meanings behind the practices and styles of working-class youth subcultures in England that combined the work of Roland Barthes, the sociology of deviance and Marxism.

In 1996, Sarah Thornton’s *Club Cultures* disputed Hebdige’s oppositional subcultural categories, “avant-garde-versus-bourgeois, subordinate-versus-dominant, subculture-versus-mainstream.”<sup>24</sup> Thornton claimed that subcultural capital fuels youthful rebellion against parents and authorities, and at the same time, produces the idea that youth have access to a utopian classless fantasy world. Following Thornton, in the past decade, a number of authors have forwarded the idea of post-subcultural studies.<sup>25</sup> To these theorists subculture became shorthand to describe unconventional aspects of youth culture and in determining the boundaries of sub-cultures the theory failed to capture the experience of fragmentation, flux and fluidity that is central to contemporary and often global youth culture. However, subcultures continue to provide a theoretical construct that allows researchers to explore the relationship between the practices of young people and evolution of mass consumer culture; by reading sub-cultures as crucial historical texts that express the agency of youth, “Cruising for Community” collaborates their

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<sup>22</sup> Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, *Resistance Through Rituals: Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain* (London: Hutchinson, 1976).

<sup>23</sup> Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: The Meaning of Style* (London: Routledge, 1979).

<sup>24</sup> Sarah Thornton, *Club Cultures: Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), 93.

<sup>25</sup> David Muggleton, ed., *The Post-subcultures Reader* (New York: Berg Publishers, 2004); See also Andy Bennett, ed., *After Subculture: Critical Studies in Contemporary Youth Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

collective narratives and unearths the ways young Angelinos articulated identity, belonging, and autonomy.

In 1998, Joe Austin and Michael Willard published an edited volume titled *Generations of Youth* that brought together youth researchers from cultural studies, sociology and history.<sup>26</sup> Authors in the volume show the complicated ways that youth and youth culture has intersected with categories of race, ethnicity, sexuality, gender, class, and space. Moreover, like “Cruising for Community,” Austin and Willard define youth culture as the negotiated product of autonomy seeking young people and adult institutions of socialization. “Cruising for Community” seeks to corroborate with the types of analysis presented in *Generations* in order to unearth the history of Los Angeles’s youth culture; “Cruising for Community” argues that the topography of Los Angeles in the mid 20th century consolidated particular local subcultures and endowed them with the power to shape both local youth culture and, at times, American youth culture.

### **Approaches to the History of Youth Culture**

Synthesizing scholarship on the history of delinquency, consumerism, student activism, and popular culture, “Cruising for Community” argues that the triad of mass consumer culture, youth control policies, and sub-cultural practices, drove the development of post-World War II American youth culture. Mass consumer culture nationally distributed representations of local subcultures. Concurrently, progressive municipal leaders across the country shared youth control strategies. Because of its entertainment industry and influential municipal government, Los Angeles was central to

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<sup>26</sup> Austin and Willard, ed. *Generations of Youth*.

both the development of mass consumer youth culture and national youth policies. “Cruising for Community” relies on a municipal framework in order to closely consider the role of local youth subcultures in relationship to mass consumerism and control policies. With a local focus it seeks to understand how both local politics and the space of the city contributed to the emergent of youth subcultures.

While historians such as Lawrence Cremin and Richard Hofstadter began to write about history of youth in the 1950s, much of this research until the 1980s focused on the history of American education; the cultural turn in history invigorated the study of the history of youth. In the early 1980s, Paula Fass examined the growth of youth cultures in America’s prestigious universities, James Gilbert investigated the fears and politics of juvenile delinquency in the 1950s, and Beth Bailey narrated the changing courtship practices of American youth in the 20th century. More recently, Lisa Jacobson and Thomas Hine demonstrated how the market worked to construct the identities of boys, girls, and teenagers.<sup>27</sup> As do many of the historians mentioned above, “Cruising for Community” finds that the meaning of American youth has been a constant site of both political and cultural negotiation. “Cruising” locates youth culture as a critical product of this negotiation, and explores the collaboration and conflict between three sets of actors: subcultural participants, local authorities, and corporate middle-men.

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<sup>27</sup> Paul Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America's Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988); Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); Lisa Jacobson, *Raising Consumers: Children and the American Mass Market in the Early Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); Thomas Hine, *The Rise and Fall of the American Teenager* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2000); Kelly Schrum, *Some Wore Bobby Sox: The Emergence of Teenage Girls' Culture, 1920-1945* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004).

American historians have become increasing interested in discovering the ways in which the growth of consumerism changed public discourse and civic engagement. In order to locate a model to explore the relationship between young people and consumerism, one can turn to the work of George Sanchez, Vicki Ruiz, and Robin D.G. Kelley.<sup>28</sup> These three authors argue that consumer culture relays multiple meanings and can engender agency and the search for identity. Historians of women, including Kathy Peiss, Nan Enstad and Lizabeth Cohen, have also explored the relationship between consumerism and agency.<sup>29</sup> These authors argue that rather than simply reproducing dominate hegemonic ideas of race, class and gender, consumerism played an crucial role in providing women a mechanism in which to create alternative identities. In Southern California, youth consumers were often invested with new notions of agency, and the market's articulation of desire served as a catalyst to new forms of political action.

While many historians have framed youth culture as closely related to the development of consumerism, some historians and critics of popular culture of the post-war period have characterized the 1950s culture of rock 'n' roll as an authentic representation of the struggle of young people to recreate the nation outside of a strictly consumerist framework.<sup>30</sup> Author Jon Savage argues that the manifestations of youth culture in the 1950s were not simply products of that era but were instead powerful

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<sup>28</sup> Vicki Ruiz, *From Out of the Shadows: Mexican Women in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); George Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Robin D.G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working-class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup> Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986); Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Knopf, 2003).

<sup>30</sup> Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up: How Rock 'n' Roll Changed America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Anthony DeCurtis, *Present Tense: Rock & Roll and Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Greil Marcus, *Mystery Train: Images of America in Rock 'n' Roll* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1975).

reconfigurations of older cultural narratives.<sup>31</sup> Savage argues that since the industrial revolution young people have collectively contributed to an archive of emotions, heroes and heroines, poetry and stories, that provides material for each generation's formation of youth culture.

Issues of agency and political identity have been central to historians of youth and student activism.<sup>32</sup> Looking at political movements, these histories reveal individual motivations and intimate relationships thereby detailing issues of agency and identity formation. Furthermore, while popular narratives characterize youth and student activism in the 20th century as sporadic, the bulk of historical writing on youth political activism shows a steady chain of participation throughout the century. From the late 1920s onward, young people in Los Angeles demanded greater participation in civil society and more access to education opportunities and job training. "Cruising for Community" demonstrates that the 1950s were not a place in time in which young people simply conformed to the consensus ideals but rather activists of this generation pioneered the institutions, political strategies, and importantly, the types of personal relationships that would be identified with youth movements and cultures in the 1960s.

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<sup>31</sup> W.T. Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (1990, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth Culture* (New York: Viking, 2007); Greil Marcus, *Lipstick Traces: A Secret History of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>32</sup> Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America's First Mass Student Movement, 1929-1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Mark Edel Boren, *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Doug McAdam, *Freedom Summer*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Maurice Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, (New York: Basic Books, 1987); James Miller, *Democracy Is in the Streets: From Port Huron to the Siege of Chicago* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994); Doug Rossinow, *The Politics of Authenticity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Paul Lyons, *The People of This Generation: The Rise and Fall of the New Left in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003); Laura Pulido, *Black, Brown, Yellow, and Left: Radical Activism in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

Because of its centrality within the study of youth, it is not surprising that historians have explored the study of delinquency in order to think about relationships between generations in 20th century America. James Gilbert explains that in the mid-20th century, the politics of delinquency developed into a recurring pattern of moral panics; comic books, movies, television, rap music and video games have all been framed as corrupting youth. Furthermore, political platforms based on parental anxieties about young people's consumption skewed popular dialogues away from the structural conditions that produced juvenile delinquents. In mid 20th century L.A., progressive politicians were influenced by the idea that consumer society required less active civic participation by young people. However, concerns that consumption limited young people's autonomy and development as citizens were overshadowed by tangible fears of graphic comic book and crime movies.<sup>33</sup>

In the 1950s, white middle-class parents fought moral battles against the dangers of consumerism. In extracting promises from youth cultural industries to self-regulate and thereby honor particular standards of decency, middle-class parents inoculated their children against sources of delinquency. However, urban working-class and non-white youth were not shielded from the corrupting influence of vice and many in the middle-class began to identify both black and Latina/o communities as dangerous sources of delinquency. Michael Willard argues that after the Zoot Suit Riot young Mexican-Americans became the central focus of delinquency control programs; this focus shifted to black youth after the Watts Riot.<sup>34</sup> While consumer culture corrupted white youth, the

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*.

<sup>34</sup> Michael Willard, "Urbanization as Culture: Youth and Race in Postwar Los Angeles," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota), 2001.

“culture of poverty” thesis branded black and Latina/o youth as delinquent. Willard elucidates how local government programs failed to alleviate the conditions that produced delinquency, and instead social research on juvenile delinquency reified racial discourse. Edward Escobar’s work highlights how police attempts to contain delinquency in East Los Angeles, mostly through programs of physical coercion and intimidation, became a catalyst in spurring Chicano political consciousness.<sup>35</sup> In L.A., the heavy handedness of juvenile delinquency control measures organized the rejection of multiple forms of adult authority.<sup>36</sup>

William Graebner’s *Coming of Age in Buffalo* provides an excellent model for the type of municipally based research on youth culture found within “Cruising for Community.” *Coming of Age* describes how adult authority figures used the Hi-Teen Club, Buffalo Plan dress code, record hops, and graduation ceremonies as forms of social engineering that attempted to contain youth culture and minimize its destabilization of dominant social and economic boundaries.<sup>37</sup> In Los Angeles youth experts also tried to control youth culture, such as John Anson Ford’s promotion of jazz concerts at the Hollywood Bowl and later County sponsored Battles of the Bands. However, these programs continuously failed to meet the needs or cultural expectations of the city’s growing youth population and young people identified these programs as superficial and/or as adult manipulations of youth culture.

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<sup>35</sup> Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity: Mexican Americans and the Los Angeles Police Department, 1900–1945* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

<sup>36</sup> Kelley, *Race Rebels*.

<sup>37</sup> William Graebner, *Coming of Age in Buffalo: Youth and Authority in the Postwar Era* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993).

## **Los Angeles: The City of Youth**

As Hollywood became a dominant producer of representations of youth in American culture in the 1920s, it also became a fantasy destination for young people across the country who sought to bask within arms-reach of celebrities and with luck, become part of its utopian world where everyone was young, beautiful and talented. During this period, L.A. officials began programs to manage the thousands of young transients that came to the city. The media's sensationalized stories of delinquents, runaways and boys in the streets became the basis for Progressive politics and programs. From the first decades of the 20th century onward, youth policy was a key element of civic discourse in L.A.

A fair number of historians have studied the history of young people in L.A. and the ways in which youth issues were central to municipal politics and local Progressivism. Marlou Belyea explained how Progressive reformers sought to first regulate boys' participation in commercial leisure, but then realizing the futility of the exercise, began to use commercial leisure as a tool to control gang activities.<sup>38</sup> Mark Wild showed how early 20th century Progressive religious leaders promoted racially and ethnically integrated leisure programs that sought to develop communal belonging. In the 1930s, according to Wild, the Communist Party, labor organizers and organizations of the unemployed, brought together multiethnic groups of young people for street demonstrations to demand greater governmental resources and programs.<sup>39</sup> Judith Raftery's *Land of Fair Promise* identifies school reform in early 20th century L.A. as the

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<sup>38</sup> Marlou Belyea, "The Joy Ride and the Silver Screen: Commercial Leisure, Delinquency and Play Reform in Los Angeles, 1900-1980," (Ph.D. dissertation, Boston University), 1983.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Wild, *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

centerpiece of local Progressivism; Progressive school administrators saw vocational training and IQ testing as modern methods that could organize students into efficient learning groups.<sup>40</sup>

Furthering the work of historians like Belyea, Wild, and Raftery, “Cruising for Community” shows that authorities promoted civil instruction and communal belonging through school programs and other agencies aimed at young people. However, I find that even Progressive city leaders trusted the city’s development to interest groups bent on maximizing capital returns, such as the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce. At the same time, resources to develop civic programs for young people never materialized to support the area’s burgeoning youth population. Instead, young people inherited a highly commercial topography that provided few models for socialization; although not a *tabula rasa*, this commercial frontier allowed young people to develop subcultures that were distinct in their practices and orientation to the city.

Automobiles centrally defined the development of youth subcultures in the region, just as researchers Mark Foster and Scott Bottles have shown how automobiles critically defined the development of the city of Los Angeles.<sup>41</sup> Consumer sites such as the drive-in, supermarket, and regional mall also show the centrality of the automobile to the topography of Southern California. Along with schools, these places became the landmarks of youth culture in the 1950s. Bonnie Morris’s personal interviews show an adult nostalgia for the teenage years of the 1950s; interviewees romanticize their favorite

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<sup>40</sup> Judith Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise: Politics and Reform in Los Angeles Schools* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>41</sup> Robert M. Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968); Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile: The Making of the Modern City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); Mark S. Foster, *A Nation on Wheels: The Automobile Culture in America Since 1945* (Belmont, CA: Thomson, Wadsworth, 2003).

commercial sites described in detail by location, directions, hours, owners, employees and products.<sup>42</sup> This topography re-oriented youth spaces outside of school away from the city center and its older entertainment zone. Young people's social and cultural practices were critical in what Richard Longstreth argues was a rerouting of American cities, defined by the decline of urban centers, the growth of local suburban commercial zones, and the rise of regional malls on the tax friendly periphery of the city.<sup>43</sup>

"Cruising for Community" argues that the dominance of automobiles also hid forms of youth subcultural activity; although street corner cultures as found in older American cities existed in Los Angeles, they went largely unrecognized because they often represented the activities of working-class and nonwhite youth. After the Watts Riot, many city leaders argued that they failed to predict the event because they assumed that the absence of corner cultures safeguarded the city from social unrest. It is telling that both the Watts Riot (1965) and the Rodney King Riot (1992) were sparked by the police's abusive treatment of black motorists but both incidents resulted in massive street protests.

Much of the history of race and ethnicity in L.A. has been based on the stories of young Angelinos. A common race-based historical narrative outlines the ways in which nonwhite youth participated in a shared urban culture, experienced police abuse, and in turn began to form distinct racial and ethnic subcultures and identities. In the 1970s,

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<sup>42</sup> See Bonnie J. Morris, *The High School Scene in the Fifties: Voices From West L.A.* (Westport, CN: Bergin & Garvey, 1997). The tenor and themes of Morris' interviews were confirmed by interviews, formal and informal, conducted for the dissertation.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Longstreth, *The Drive-In, the Supermarket, and the Transformation of Commercial Space in Los Angeles, 1914-1941* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999); Richard Longstreth, *City Center to Regional Mall: Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

historians of L.A.’s Mexican-American population began to question the white ethnocentric basis of the city’s historical record. As a part of this revision, Solomon Jones, Maurico Mazon and Edward Escobar independently argued that the 1943 Zoot Suit Riots were fostered by the media’s demonization of the culture of young Chicana/os during a period of wartime xenophobia.<sup>44</sup> These authors explain how local military leaders encouraged their sailors to attack Zoot Suits as a way to undermine the power of the local Mexican youth subculture.

Eduardo Obregon Pagan’s examination of the Zoot Suit Riots and the Sleepy Lagoon Murder Trial (1942-1943) furthers the story of youth culture, race, and wartime race relations in Los Angeles.<sup>45</sup> In the 1940s, young working-class Chicana/os who, in appropriating and transforming idioms of the jazz culture of the day, knowingly crossed racial boundaries and challenged the social order of Los Angeles and American culture. The adoption of the Zoot Suit gave young Mexican Americans a form of cultural authority that subverted their position of oppression. According to Pagan, the Sleepy Lagoon case represents the transformative moment in which the fear of youth gangs congealed around the figure of the subcultural racial other, and this led to the opening salvo of the war on juvenile delinquency.

Moreover, the scale of the Zoot Suit Riots led to the further consolidation of the mechanisms of authority. The city’s neighborhood-based community coordinating councils, groups that sought to provide for the needs of young people at a neighborhood

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<sup>44</sup> Solomon James Jones, “The Government Riots of Los Angeles, June 1943,” M.A. Thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1969; Maurio Mazón, *The Zoot Suit Riots: The Psychology of Symbolic Annihilation* (Austin; University of Texas Press, 1984).

<sup>45</sup> Edwardo Obregón Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.* (Chappel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

level, failed to develop because of a lack of funding and support. Instead, local law enforcement strove to coordinate its juvenile delinquency activities through Los Angeles County's Central Juvenile Index and later, the Los Angeles County Human Relations Committee.<sup>46</sup>

"Cruising for Community" explores how, during the 1950s, politicians, the police and social workers encouraged young Angelinos in working-class neighborhoods to establish youth groups in order to learn both social skills and democratic participation. These programs were not a return to the support of coordinating councils of the Great Depression, but rather, they centralized the leadership of youth and put it in the hands of professional youth authorities, many of who were trained at the University of California's Youth Study Center. This consolidation allowed a small number of individuals to shape the regulatory environment of youth culture in Los Angeles. In the 1970s, these professionals abandoned the encouragement of group belonging and rehabilitation through youth culture in favor of law enforcement strategies that sought to isolate young people and thereby severely limit their freedom of association. Judith Kafka's work also supports a narrative of consolidation, in that in the late 1960s, because of local activism, school discipline moved from the duty of teachers, then to principals, and finally to regional administrators.<sup>47</sup> However, the evidence in "Cruising for Community" shows that this consolidation of authority also had the effect of developing youth leaders.

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<sup>46</sup> For a discussion of the city's Coordinating Councils see, Janis Appier, "We're Blocking Youth's Path to Crime," *Journal of Urban History* 31.2 (January 2005): 190-218.

<sup>47</sup> Jeanne Theoharis, "W-A-L-K-O-U-T: High School Students and the Development of Black and Brown Power in Los Angeles," in *Neighborhood Rebels: Black Power at the Local Level*, ed. Peniel Joseph, (New York: Palgrave, forthcoming); Judith Kafka, "'Sitting on a Tinderbox': Racial Conflict, Teacher Discretion, and the Centralization of Disciplinary Authority," *American Journal of Education* 114.3 (May 2008): 247-270.

Alumni of the Los Angeles County sponsored Mexican-American Youth Leadership Conference (MAYLC), a program that sought develop elite ethnic youth leaders, became the student leaders of the 1968 East Los Angeles Walkouts. Carlos Muñoz Jr. translated his experiences as a Chicano youth leader into a book titled *Youth, Identity, Power*; in which Muñoz argued that generational consciousness stimulated political activism and the evolution of Chicano culture.<sup>48</sup>

The antagonistic relationship between the police and black and Chicana/o youth continued to escalate in the 1970s and 1980s as outlined by Mike Davis' *City of Quartz*. Davis argued that former City Attorney James Hahn sought to criminalize gang members, their families and their communities, by outlawing basic forms of public association. The depiction of inner-city youth in *City of Quartz* is bleak, and young Angelinos deal with a police force whose primary directive is to contain populations by any means necessary.<sup>49</sup> Davis suggested that there was once hope in youth culture but that public policies shut down funding of youth training and leisure centers and shifted these resources to law enforcement. "Cruising for Community" examines the history of youth in L.A. leading up to this shift away from progressive youth programs.

Cultural historians Anthony Macias and Michael Willard have begun the project of synthesizing the multiple narratives that play a part of L.A.'s youth history. Macias' research describes how young blacks and Chicana/os developed an urban youth culture in Los Angeles with particular rules of decorum and practices of civility; these practices challenged the cultural hegemony of the Anglo middle-class and thereby became a threat

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<sup>48</sup> Carlos Muñoz, Jr., *Youth Identity, Power: The Chicano Movement* (New York: Verso, 1989).

<sup>49</sup> Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (New York: Vintage, 1992); Ruth Wilson Gilmore, *Golden Gulag*.

to the city's social order. Willard, on the other hand, examines how moral panics played a role in developing institutions that codified racial identity in the city. Both scholars have shown that youth was not ancillary to the city's development but rather, served as a core engine of social and cultural change.<sup>50</sup>

### **Outline of “Cruising for Community”**

This object of this study is to describe the ways in which young people in Los Angeles developed particular youth subcultures, participated in politics, and sought to build communities. As stated above, city authorities worked to manage the metropolitan youth population through multiple modes of segregation. However, although these regulations contributed to communal fragmentation and lack of a commonly held civic identity, they also stimulated generational consciousness and collective youth identity. Young Angelinos sought to establish community primarily through subcultural participation on the margins of the commercial topography. It was within this topography that young people's freedom to associate was least regulated. Youth authorities saw the unfettered activities and associations of young people in the commercial market as potentially dangerous because the freedom accorded to young people as consumers was in constant tension with the fear that the consumption of too much or inappropriate material could transform young people into juvenile delinquents. Invariably, progressive organizations attempted to reorient this consumer youth paradigm, but job training programs and other non-commercial outlets that attempted to offer alternatives could not retain support to counter the growing influence of American consumerism.

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<sup>50</sup> Anthony Macias, “From Panchuco Boogie to Latin Jazz,”; Michael Willard, “Urbanization as Culture.”

The core time period considered in this dissertation spans from 1910 to 1970. The time period between LA's founding in 1848 and 1910 plays an important role in configuring the racial, class and ethnic narratives of the city, but the 1910s marks a departure from this earlier period because of the establishment of physical and institutional structures that would determine the character of the modern metropolis.<sup>51</sup> This includes the building of regional high schools and junior high schools; in this period, administrators, teachers and students expanded the institutional culture of the newly built high schools. Students during the Progressive era reorganized school life through the formation of student government, athletic teams, and drama and debate clubs. These institutions became key components of the social, cultural and political life of high schools and youth culture by the mid-20th century. The translation of progressive education experiments into the schools had the contradictory effects of giving some students greater choice in elective studies and extra-curricular pursuits, but simultaneously routed students deemed with less potential into commercial and vocational education tracks. Furthermore, this period also marked the adoption of the automobile in American culture and the ascendance of Hollywood's cinema industry. The silver screen and the auto became central facets of L.A.'s youth culture by the mid-20th century; after World War II this regional culture influenced youth scenes across the country. Chapter Two outlines the development of progressive school cultures, youth policy and youth culture in L.A. during the first four decades of the 20th century.

L.A. national influence was based on the fact that population and economic growth over the course of early 20th century transformed Los Angeles from a regional

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<sup>51</sup> William Deverell and Tom Sitton, *Metropolis in the Making: Los Angeles in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

center to an international metropolis and entertainment capital. During this period, the youth population of the city expanded exponentially, and city authorities faced crisis after crisis in attempts to provide young people with opportunities and resources, and at the same time, manage the city's young. Although politicians manufactured some of the representations of youth crisis in order to drum up political support, the core issue of crisis was that the government could not materially provide equal services to all its young. Instead, local government sought to ensure civil understanding and citizenship through the school and sought to control delinquency by controlling leisure opportunities through its police power. However, because of the continuously expanding youth population, the city was only able to achieve short moments of stasis before returning to narratives of youth crisis.

World War II and the Servicemen's Readjustment Act created a historical rupture in the history of the city's youth culture, and GI benefits provided an economic stimulus to masculine subcultural pursuits such as hotrodding and surfing. Additionally, in the 1950s, television, magazines and radio developed powerful images of the all-American white and middle-class teenager/citizen/consumer. While transient youth had been the city's major concern throughout the Depression, in the early 1940s, the Zoot Suit Riot, the Sleepy Lagoon Incident and Japanese Internment refocused the city efforts on generating intra-ethnic youth cooperation through the work of organizations such as the County's Human Relations Commission.<sup>52</sup> Chapter Three shows how the GI Bill funded the transference of hotrodding from subculture to mass culture and how movement

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<sup>52</sup> For a similar turning point in the mid-1960s, see May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*; this timeframe is roughly parallel to Scott Kurashige's periodization of the postwar period in regard to race relations in the city.

transformed the multiracial working-class hotrodder into a middle-class white American teenager. Chapter Four argues that the 1950s Cold War consensus culture worked to severely limit youth political activism but that youth activists in this period provided organizational models and new cultures of participation for the generation of activists in the 1960s.

Paradoxically, during the growth of the civil rights movement, increasing black, Asian and Latino migration into the central city and white flight from the core decreased the proximity of racial groups. By the 1960s, older high schools that were once racially diverse became increasingly racially homogeneous. Nonetheless, most youth leisure practices in this period, including rock ‘n’ roll, cruising and dances, encouraged boundary crossing and racial integration through culture. In this way, many young people resisted the spatial effects of segregation, although increasing hypersegregation and later fears of the urban core by suburban whites made these racial crossing more difficult and less conceivable by the late 1960s. This steadily led to the development, and later demonization, of youth subcultures that were racially coded. The Watts Riot of 1965 and the East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 serve as explosive examples of young people expressing the frustration of living in communities without employment and leisure opportunities, going to schools with severely limited resources, and growing up in a mass culture that did not represent their everyday experiences, or validate their participation within mass culture.

Beginning in the early 1960s, youth groups and students organized to challenge the racial and class inequities within their communities, the regional colleges and universities, and the Los Angeles City Schools. Students in the civil rights era formed a

vanguard of social change, and generational consciousness provided these young activists with a potent transformative radicalism that articulated the need for immediate action. In the late 1960s, minority student activists demonstrated for multicultural and bilingual education, improvement of classroom resources, removal of racist teachers and administrators, and greater autonomy for teachers and students in developing new cultures of education.

The second half of the dissertation begins in the late 1950s and builds towards the East Los Angeles Walkouts in 1968. Chapter Five argues that commercial co-optation of the Southern California music scene largely erased the contributions of nonwhite participants. Chapter Six investigates the commonalities between the Watts and Sunset Strip Riots and how they together allow for interrogation of the relationship of youth culture, politics and consumer society. Chapter Seven proposes that the East Los Angeles Blowouts and Vietnam protests, rather than serving as a testament to youth and democracy in action, were both bittersweet episodes that mark a crest in youth autonomy and activism in the late 1960s—a crest subsequently followed by a period of repression and general lack of interest in the public's duties towards young people.

“Cruising for Community” ends in the early 1970s because these years mark a high point of youth activism. This high point was followed by a period in which conservative politicians demanded a return to traditional values and the need for young people to respect the authority of adults. In this later period, many service agencies for young working-class youth were reduced or cut. Although 11 million youth from 18 to 20 years of age voted for the first time in 1972, in the late 1960s, challenges to authority articulated through youth culture were framed as symbolic representations of the

breakdown of civil society. Californian Presidents Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan, in response to late 1960s urban riots and student campus activism, promised a return to the authority of age and to a society of law and order. In the late 1970s, these policies culminated in the war on drugs, which in turn, resulted in the increasing criminalization of black and Latino youth.

Furthermore, the development of colorblind cultural politics further alienated nonwhite working-class youth cultures from mainstream culture, thereby further eliding nonwhite youth subcultures as deviant. Delinquency fears in the 1970s and 1980s led to the devaluation of the promise of youth in American culture, and many began to demand that young people be punished as adults within the justice system. American society digressed from the progressive belief in the potential of youth and rehabilitation for all. Instead, punishment and later incapacitation became the ways in which society dealt with juvenile delinquents.

## Chapter Two

### The ‘Boy Problem’: The Commercial City and the Governmental Roots of Youth Culture

The character of a community is largely molded by the school and, if the community is to have a soul, that is supplied largely through the participation in local community affairs by the youth who, semester after semester, leave the classroom to take the place in community life.<sup>1</sup>

On Monday, June 10, 1910, the Los Angeles Board of Education elected 43-year-old John H. Francis as the new superintendent of schools.<sup>2</sup> The *Los Angeles Times* generously described Francis as a unique educator and administrator, a “strongman” whose “efficiency” was coupled with a “modern conception of education that today leads the world.”<sup>3</sup> The institutional changes to the Los Angeles School District during Francis’ tenure, including the creation of the junior high school, implementation of vocational training, and development of student government, established structures that shaped the evolution of youth culture in Los Angeles throughout the 20th century. In the first decades of the 20th century, educational structures engendered peer culture, however, as shown in this chapter, by the mid-1920s, these innovations became ways to both assimilate new immigrants into American culture and guarantee limited class mobility. During the Great Depression, the Los Angeles Probation Department also began to create mass programs to deal with the problem of transient boys in Los Angeles. The

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<sup>1</sup> Fletcher Bowron, “Forward,” *Los Angeles High School Semi-Annual Blue and White* (Winter 1940): 2.

<sup>2</sup> “Francis New School Head.” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1910, II1.

<sup>3</sup> “Strong Man Takes Hold.” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1910, II2.

educational and legal institutions created to address Los Angeles's "boy problem" led to the consolidation of adult authority, heightening juvenile delinquency discourse in the city and fueling Hollywood's representations of youth as delinquent. At the same time, these developments motivated emergent subcultures and local youth culture.

### **The 20th Century High School: Student Bodies, Fraternities and Junior High**

Francis was indeed unique for an educator of his generation; he had never taught in a grammar school in his 18-years of professional experience and had risen through the ranks on his successes as an administrator. From 1896 to 1901, Francis served as the head of Los Angeles High School's new Commercial Department.<sup>4</sup> Students flocked to the commercial classes and as a result of their popularity, Francis successfully convinced the Board of Education to turn Los Angeles High School's Commercial Department into its own high school, adjacent to the current Los Angeles High School, with accommodations for two thousand students. Soon it was discovered that more students wanted to attend the school than the school could hold. On the day before registration in 1901, "a line began to form which grew in length as the day wore on, until nightfall it extended four squares from the school. All that night the boys and girls camped in their places, waiting for the morning which would bring an opportunity to attend the technical high school."<sup>5</sup>

In the fall of 1904, Francis became the principal of Los Angeles's second high school campus, Polytechnic High School. One of Francis' earliest acts at "Poly" was to

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<sup>4</sup> *John H. Francis: Leader, Teacher, Friend* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Polytechnic High School, 1931), California State Library, Sacramento, California.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Nearing, *The New Education: A Review of Progressive Educational Movements of the Day* (New York: Row, Peterson & Co., 1915), 106.

place “the whole discipline of the big school in the hands of the students themselves.”<sup>6</sup>

During his time at Los Angeles High School, Francis witnessed the costs and benefits of the Star and Crescent Society, and when he became principal he sought to democratize student government.<sup>7</sup> According to a *Times* author, the administration and faculty under Francis abdicated all disciplinary measures to a student judiciary and during the first Student Body election “one of the worst boys in school was elected, sardonically, by one of the classes, the faculty accepted him without a sign of concern.” As principal, Francis oversaw the organization of the first “Student Body” government in Los Angeles with powers to “incorporate and manage the athletic, musical societies, etc; in fact, regulate the whole of the school life outside of studies.” Students would each contribute 50 cents a year to fund student body activities.<sup>8</sup>

Following “Poly’s” lead, in 1905, the students of Los Angeles High School voted to transform the athletic association into a student body with expanded duties and powers. In 1912, the student body adopted a Senior Board of Control that acted as a judiciary and heard complaints about individual student behavior. At Francis’ Polytechnic High School student representatives were also welcomed to vote in academic discussions. According to one Poly teacher, “It seemed to us a good plan since these young people are so soon to be placed upon their own responsibility in the outside world, to give them some practice in it here.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Discipline by the Pupils: Striking Innovation for the Local High School. Committee of Student Body Does the Governing,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 27, 1904, A1.

<sup>7</sup> The Star and Crescent Society at Los Angeles High School was first a nature club, then an honorary society, and during Francis’ career, a *de facto* student government. Nonetheless, Star and Crescent was not an elected group and remained closely connected to the goals of the school’s administration.

<sup>8</sup> “Discipline by the Pupils,” *Los Angeles Times*.

<sup>9</sup> “In and about the Public Schools,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1910, III21.

The opening of a progressive and commercially oriented high school was not free from controversy as some educators worried that the school would fail to inculcate its students in “literary attainment.” William Harvey Housh, principal of Los Angeles High School, argued that the move towards vocational training diminished the importance of the high school as an institution of elite learning. Housh was first hired as an instructor of physics at Los Angeles High School’s original location in the heart of the city and became the headmaster of the school when it moved to its new grounds on top of Pound Cake Hill, the former site of Fort Moore, overlooking downtown. Heard throughout downtown, the brass bell of the red brick building on Pound Cake Hill sounded each morning signaling the beginning of its four courses of culture: classics, English, history, and mathematics. For Housh, the mastery of Greek and Latin and classical texts, or at least competency in these subjects, was, in his estimation, central to a high school education not solely for the discipline the mastery of these subjects required, but how the uniform study of classical texts created a means to create a public with a shared conceptual and discursive base.<sup>10</sup> At Los Angeles High School, the schools’ activities were directed by the Star and Crescent Society, an organization made up of elite seniors not dissimilar from the elite fraternal clubs on Eastern College campuses. As principal of Los Angeles High School, Housh sought to train networked elite leaders who were expected to participate fully in the affairs of the city.

While both Housh and Francis held equal qualification to become superintendent in 1910, Housh’s philosophy of classical education also carried with it the defense of

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<sup>10</sup> “Alumni Honor Two Great Principles,” *Roman-iscing* 1.3 (Summer 1947): 4, Box 53, Los Angeles High School Folder, Papers of Fletcher Bowron, 1934-1970, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California [hereinafter FB-Huntington].

secret societies, fraternities and sororities within the schools. Around the turn of the 20th century, many Angelinos began to criticize the role of secret fraternities within the public schools. In 1896, Los Angeles had two fraternities and two sororities that purportedly organized “dances and other social events” that were “attended by the elite of both the city and the school.”<sup>11</sup> In 1900, an editorial in the *Times* characterized fraternities as undemocratic institutions in which, “the members of a fraternity having been chosen, imagine themselves possessed of some superiority over their fellows, and at once constitute themselves into a select aristocracy.” The author argued that the overall good of fraternities needed to be thoroughly questioned because “a spirit of class distinction must be absolutely foreign to republican institutions, and therefore foreign to our public school system, which is the corner-stone of our government.”<sup>12</sup> Housh, a member of the Gamma Eta Kappa fraternity, was initially a defender of high school fraternities but the changing public perception that fraternities were undemocratic wore down his support of the Greeks. By the mid-1910s, young peoples’ rejection of fraternities was largely a result of the fact that the fraternities had been pushed underground, into pool halls and cafes, and therefore the frats no longer had the power to organize large social or cultural events.<sup>13</sup>

Local events hastened the elimination of fraternities in the Los Angeles public schools. In the spring of 1906, a hazing prank in Long Beach that included branding pledges with silver nitrate became public; this local event coincided with a national move against fraternities, including the elimination of high school fraternities in the Chicago

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<sup>11</sup> Chas White, “Fraternities,” *Los Angeles High School Lyceum*, 1896, Alumni Association Archive, Los Angeles High School, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter AAA-LAHS].

<sup>12</sup> “Schools from the Social Side,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 18, 1900, I8.

<sup>13</sup> “Students Flay Frats,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1916, 19.

and Boston public schools.<sup>14</sup> At the beginning of the 1906 school year, the discovery of election tampering by fraternities at San Bernardino High School confirmed the suspicions of those who thought the Greeks were undemocratic. In San Bernardino, fraternities attempted to take over student government by paying student body fees for students who would elect representatives of the fraternity.<sup>15</sup> In this case, San Bernardino High School students outside of the fraternity system had banded together to expose the election tampering. In 1907, the National Education Association declared secret organizations to be “subversive of the principles of democracy”; with a unanimous vote on January 28, 1907, the Los Angeles Board of Education outlawed all “snob-fostering” fraternities.<sup>16</sup> Later that year the State Legislature passed a law that outlawed all secret societies within California’s public schools.<sup>17</sup>

The changes began to erode the power of even the most privileged institutions, and in 1910, Los Angeles High School began electing members of the Star and Crescent Society. By the mid-1910s, fraternities had been pushed to the margins and therefore could no longer maintain a broad based middle-class support or attract new members.<sup>18</sup> High school students were threatened with expulsion and exclusion from extra-circular activities if they were found to be involved with a fraternity.<sup>19</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>14</sup> “Foolish Fun, Lasting Scars: Student at Long Beach Is Badly Disfigured,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1906, IV12.

<sup>15</sup> “South of the Tehachepi’- Neighboring Counties: Frat Fight Breaks Afresh,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 7, 1906, p II11; “Frats in Trouble: San Bernardino High School Boys Are Subjects of Drastic Discipline,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 13, 1906, II11.

<sup>16</sup> “Doom’s Roar for ‘Frats’: Los Angeles High School Is Deeply Stirred,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1906, II1; “Knocked Out Are ‘Frats,’” *Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1907, II1.

<sup>17</sup> “Against School ‘Frats’: Blow to Kill Them,” *Los Angeles Times*, Feb 5, 1907, 15.

<sup>18</sup> “Students Flay Frats,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1916, 19.

<sup>19</sup> *Los Angeles High School Student Handbook* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles High School Student Body, 1935), 21, AAA-LAHS.

Los Angeles schools attempted to encourage open democratic participation and through proper management, channel student participation into the regulation and operation of the school.

As superintendent of the Los Angeles Schools, Francis continued to pursue education reforms including a sweeping restructuring of the school system. Influenced by the work of researchers in adolescence like G. Stanley Hall and educators such as Harvard President Charles Elliot, and after a trip to Europe in which he surveyed educational programs, Francis announced the creation of junior high schools in 1911. According educator to Ernest Moore, Francis was the single originator of the junior high model in American education.<sup>20</sup> Reformers approved of the junior high school model because it allowed students to be introduced to a departmental and self-directed structure of education and provided a sanctuary for students of “intermediate” age to create clubs, and to participate in student government and sports. Initially primary schools in Los Angeles went from first to eighth grade and secondary schools consisted of ninth through twelfth grades. However, during the classical versus commercial debates, the high school curriculum had expanded, gaining an additional two years in order to accommodate the conflicting educational ideals. As superintendent, Francis announced that grades seven, eight and nine would be given their own campuses and that high school campuses would become like universities, providing five years of education. As stated by one educator the move towards a junior high model was pedagogically sound because “pupils do not know how to take hold of study when left to themselves, as they are more or less, when they enter the high school, is quite a natural result, since the close relationship of the teacher

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<sup>20</sup> Ernest C. Moore, “John H. Francis: Inventor and Father of the Junior High School,” *California Quarterly of Secondary Education* 4 (October 1928): 9-14.

and pupil in the grades is much like that of a mother's sheltering care, and to come into the High School is like going out from home into the great world. The student is rather overwhelmed.”<sup>21</sup>

Historians of education such as David Tyack have identified educators such as Francis as progressives who pursued scientific methods of administration but not genuine social reform.<sup>22</sup> During his tenure as superintendent, Francis cautioned against turning the schools into settlement houses or social work centers, ideas championed by socially progressive educators. However, while on the surface the characterizations of Francis as a conservative and scientific manager may be fair, his championing of student government suggests that he sought to pragmatically encourage youth autonomy within the economic limitations of the school district. His efforts to create schools that scientifically organized and age segregated students also helped to catalyze the autonomous peer culture of high schools in the 20th century.<sup>23</sup> According to Talcott Parsons, “the most distinctive phenomenon was the crystallization of American identity with the “tension, sometimes of direct conflict, between the youth culture patterns of college and school life, and the ‘serious’ interests in and obligations towards curricular work.”<sup>24</sup>

Francis’s promotion of the junior high school model ultimately led to his dismissal. The introduction of junior high schools eroded the grammar school’s place within the system, and the increased salary of junior high school teachers created an

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<sup>21</sup> “In and about the Public Schools,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1910, III21.

<sup>22</sup> David Tyack, *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Jane Hunter, *How Young Ladies Became Girls: The Victorian Origins of Girlhood in the United States* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2002). Hunter argues that the peer culture formed in high school setting created new standards of femininity that led to the formation of the New Woman.

<sup>24</sup> Talcott Parsons, “Age and sex in the Social Structure of the United States,” *American Sociological Review* 7.5 (October 1942): 604-616.

additional financial burden on the schools. Francis did not play politics well and in the creation of the junior high model placed teachers into new administration positions without the approval of the Board of Education. Francis's autocratic tendencies eventually jeopardized his tenure as superintendent, and in 1914 the three Board members began urging his removal.<sup>25</sup> He resigned in 1916 and became the Superintendent of Schools in Columbus Ohio, and then the National Director of School Gardens, a national Liberty Gardens project organized through the school during the World War I

Dr. Albert Shiels, a New Yorker, became the new superintendent in 1916. By the time of Shiels's takeover, however, students' role in the political culture of the high school had been set. Nonetheless, forms of tracking and segregation increased during Shiels's administration; IQ tests became the basis for educational tracking, partially in response to the increasing need to manage the Mexican immigrant population within the schools, and Reserve Officer Training Core units were merged into the schools as a result of the militarism of World War I.<sup>26</sup>

The structural organization of Los Angeles's high schools in the early 20th century made them central institutions in the life of the city. From 1907 to 1909, James Gilbert of the Los Angeles High School zoology department led student excavations of the La Brea tar pits; until 1912, visits to Los Angeles High School provided the curious with the only exhibition of Los Angeles's Pleistocene skeletal treasures.<sup>27</sup> In the 1910s, local high school teams played and defeated football, rugby and track teams fielded by

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<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of the Superintendent/Board fight see, Raftery, *Land of Fair Promise*, 48-62.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 62-67.

<sup>27</sup> Laurance L. Hill, *La Reina, Los Angeles in Three Centuries* (Los Angeles: Security Trust & Savings Bank, 1929), 132.

the University of Southern California, Occidental College, Pasadena College and the State Normal School, which would become the University of California, Los Angeles.<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, by the mid-1910s the Los Angeles student governments were far from typical intra-scholastic institutions. Before the expansion of college attendance and the lengthening period of dependency on parental support, middle-class students were expected to become active civic participants following their high school graduation. For this reason, student governments often rivaled local city councils in their power and effectiveness. In 1922, for example, the student body of Los Angeles High School voted to buy acreage across the street to build a park to honor WWI veterans. With an initial investment of \$15,000 from the student body fund, students raised an additional \$6,000 to buy the property. The purchase of the property created a logistical problem, in that it was unclear whether a student body had the right to own property. Eventually the Los Angeles City Council decided that, "because a student body (nor Board of Education) cannot legally hold ground as a park, the land was turned over to the city of Los Angeles on condition that it be kept in perpetuity as a park."<sup>29</sup> Also during this period, the Los Angeles High student body developed projects that enhanced their school, including the construction of sports facilities and the Deagon Chimes. Completed in 1932, the school pool was financed with \$65,000 from Student Body funds.

While high schools offered expanding opportunities to middle-class youth in the first decades of the 20th century, as social control mechanisms, high schools failed to

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<sup>28</sup> "Three Track Meets Today," *Los Angeles Times*, February 10, 1912, p I13; Owen R. Bird, "U.S.C. Freshies Beat Mauals," *Los Angeles Times*, October 6, 1912, VII1.

<sup>29</sup> *Los Angeles High School Student Handbook* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Study Body, 1961), AAA-LAHS. Los Angeles's Memorial Park and Library is located across the street from Los Angeles High School on Olympic Boulevard.

organize the activities of working-class youth. During the turn of the century, the city's poorer citizens lived in an area situated between the Los Angeles River and the railroad tracks on the city's east side called "The Neighborhood," the city's old 8th Ward.<sup>30</sup> However, with increasing immigration new pockets of poverty began to develop, including a multiethnic enclave adjacent to Pound Cake Hill. With funds from local bonds, the Board of Education decided to move Los Angeles High School from its central city location to a new campus on the Westside in 1916. Pound Cake Hill no longer provided a buffer for the program of elite education offered at Los Angeles High School, and the growth of ethnic and working-class neighborhoods nearby threatened its educational program. Education of the young was no longer a noble goal. Rather, it was the focal point of crises.

The formation of the modern age-segmented high school was a key component to the development of generational consciousness, peer groups, and moreover, 20th century youth culture. Youth policy such as the formation of commercial high schools, implemented at an urban level, dynamically shaped the lives of young Angelinos and thereby provided structures through which young people could articulate identity, group consciousness and citizenship. Furthermore, questions initiated during the first two decades of the century, including debating the value of commercial training and militarism in the schools, became central to 20th century youth culture. During the late 1920s, community efforts to socialize young people included the mechanisms of schooling and the growth of new neighborhood organizations that sought to limit

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<sup>30</sup> "An Overview of NYA: 1906 - 1981," Neighborhood Youth Association Papers, California Social Welfare Archive, Special Collections, University of Southern California, Los Angeles [hereinafter CSWA-USC].

delinquency through the scientific management of youth leisure. However, policies and programs designed to control young people provided the means to organize alternative cultural orders and at a regional level engendered a youth culture that nurtured resistance and autonomy.

### **The Emerging Perception of Juvenile Delinquency**

By 1920, Los Angeles was no longer a turn-of-the-century tourist town, but a growing metropolis of industry and commerce. With a population of over a half million residents, Los Angeles now had 233 public schools with an enrollment of 141,674 students. Moreover, the classic model of liberal education grounded in civic participation gave way to new realities.

Foreshadowing times to come, in the period after the World War I, the city faced its first school-housing crisis as migration to Los Angeles in the early 1920s surpassed the Gold Rush migration of the previous century. Administrators of the Los Angeles City Schools hoped that bonds would sustain school growth equal to the growing youth population, but during the beginning of the school year in 1922, 20,000 students were placed on half-day sessions as a result of the lack of both classroom space and staffing. The language of “averting a bread-line” became the driving rhetoric of school bond proponents, which included the *Times*, the Chamber of Commerce, the president of the board of education Charles E. Seaman, and superintendent of schools Susan M. Dorsey. “The saturation point has been reached,” reported Dorsey. “To cope with such accessions by any ordinary methods is as impossible as to stem a flood with straw barriers. Only the most extraordinary efforts of an aroused community can save the schools of Los Angeles

from positive disaster.”<sup>31</sup> In May, high school leaders formed the Boost-forBonds Club to organize support for the bond measure. Members of this club stumped for the bonds at meetings of civic associations and clubs, brought voters to the polls, and gathered much of the data that became central debate points for adult bond proponents.<sup>32</sup> On June 6, residents passed the \$17.5 million dollar school bond by an overwhelming margin of fifteen to one, and plans for the construction of fifty elementary schools and five high schools began almost immediately.<sup>33</sup>

In addition, dislocation as a result of the Mexican Revolution (1910-20) increased the immigrant Mexican population in Los Angeles, which led to concerns about “Alien School Enrollment.”<sup>34</sup> These concerns dovetailed with the school bond issue and during the campaign for the bond, assistant superintendent Bruce A. Finley argued that “The children are here—many of them foreigners. We must make Americans out of them: not only Americans, but good Americans for if we do not Americanize then they will certainly make foreigners out of us.”<sup>35</sup> The conjoining of vocational training and English based IQ testing tracked many young Latinos into the laboring professions, and in effect created a separate class of students. Commercial education and vocational training had been a choice for students in the 1910s, but assimilation programs dictated that vocational training would become a virtual requirement of first generation Mexican-American

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<sup>31</sup> “Urges Vote for School Bond Issue,” *The Los Angeles Times*, June 3, 1922, p II10; “Educational Disaster if School Bonds Fail: City Tomorrow Will Vote on Large Issue Declared Necessary to Avert ‘Bread Line’,” *The Los Angeles Times*, Jun 5, 1922, II1.

<sup>32</sup> “High School Editors to Map Bond Pleas,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 22, 1922, 12; “Young Orators to Urge Bonds,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1922, II3.

<sup>33</sup> “School Bonds Carried by Fifteen to One,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1922, III1; “Building Program Enormous,” *Los Angeles Times*, Nov 22, 1922, 16.

<sup>34</sup> “Los Angeles is the Mecca of Mexican Refugees,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 17, 1920, B1.

<sup>35</sup> “Plea Made for School Bond Issue,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1922, III1.

students. These programs were widely accepted by white middle-class families, and sociologist Emory Bogardus argued that many Anglo parents objected “to the presence of Mexican children in the schools that their children attend, for fear that the latter will catch a contagious disease. A relatively permanent form of racial antipathy is the result.”<sup>36</sup>

While vocational training had begun to effectively segregate students into isolated racial and class groups, the streets of the downtown entertainment zone and Venice Beach remained sites of unregulated youth activity. In the era of Prohibition, pool rooms—many of them Japanese owned—became a favorite place for young men of all classes to congregate, create clubs and gamble. And although Los Angeles mandated a midnight closing to all public dances in this period, young Angelinos thwarted these efforts by visiting dances halls just outside of the city limits.

To early 20th century progressives, unsupervised street play for small children and the unregulated consumption of commercial leisure for adolescents were central causes of deviance and social disorder. “Play” reformers, with the support of religious charities, sought to address the roots of delinquency by offering supervised sports and dances for working-class children. Bessie Stoddart, a proponent of the play movement, argued that it was the responsibility of the city to offer these amusements because “where the children are concerned is the fact that in playtime rather than in working hours is character formed; and here on the playground fair play must be consistently practiced, self-control constantly maintained. This is the very essence of democracy. For to know

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<sup>36</sup> Emory Bogardus, quoted from George Sanchez, “‘Go After the Women’: Americanization and the Mexican Immigrant Woman, 1915-1929,” in *Unequal Sisters: A Multicultural Reader in U.S. Women’s History*, ed. Ellen DuBios and Vicki Ruiz (New York: Routledge, 1990), 258.

how to associate, how to cooperate with one's fellows is the foundation of our national form of government." However, the play movement did not substantially increase opportunities for working-class youth but instead had the effect of clearly defining street play as delinquent, which fed fears of youthful deviance.<sup>37</sup>

In 1924, Fred C. Nelles, Superintendent of the Whittier State School, a reform school for juvenile offenders, reported to the meeting of the Academy of Criminology at USC, "It isn't the hardened criminals that society and police bodies fear, but it is the children—the boys under 21 years of age—often times urged by girls of their own age, that commit the major portion of criminal acts in the world today." Nelles pointed out that Los Angeles had surpassed England, Scotland and Wales in the number of murders and burglaries.<sup>38</sup> Sixteen-year-olds were the "greatest offenders" and it became commonplace in any analysis of crime for critics to note that half of all crimes in the city were committed by those less than 21. Nonetheless, the majority of crimes juveniles committed in this period were not serious offenses—running away, petty theft and vandalism are three examples of these types of crimes. As the city grew, community control of youth through the church and neighborhood dwindled and policing techniques developed to take the slack, and this put once minor offenses into statistics that buoyed a perception of rampant youth. Although the city's papers sensationalized juvenile crime as early as the 1890s, by the 1920s they sought to outline the causes of delinquency within the language of social science. As reported in the news, juvenile delinquency was as a result of the social upheaval created by the shift of families from rural to urban lives. The

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<sup>37</sup> Belyea, "The Joy Ride and the Silver Screen," 95.

<sup>38</sup> "Crime Cure is Demonstrated," *Los Angeles Times*, December 3, 1924, A23.

*Los Angeles Times* argued numerous causes of delinquency including the lack and commercialization of play spaces, failure of parents to inculcate their children with moral standards, the dangers of the cars and the growth of apartment buildings.<sup>39</sup> However, reformers viewed delinquency as a containable disease caused by youth whose morals were lacking because of environmental circumstances or whose “feeble mindedness” made them prone to criminal activity. These youth posed a threat to the rest of the community but a curable one for environmental causes.

In 1923, following a trend begun in New York City, a movement to institute a “Boys’ Week” took root. The next year, Mayor George Cryer issued a proclamation accepting that proposal. Annually, the city’s two commercial schools, Polytechnic and Manual Arts celebrated May Day with processions and drills; by instituting Boys’ Week, Cryer channeled these exhibitions of youthful spirit and skilled labor to celebrate and perpetuate the dominance of male and middle-class elites.<sup>40</sup> In his proclamation, he explained that the “greatest need of the nation today is men. Men in every department of our national activities. Real red-blooded men of intelligence, who know the right, and who dare to do the right because it is right.” Mayor Cryer argued that “the observance of Boys’ Week will prove a most effective medium in focusing the attention of yours on the boys, the future leaders of this nation.”<sup>41</sup> On May 1, 1924, at 3 p.m., a Boys’ Week parade began with an auto cavalcade featuring first three city fathers, followed by the mayor, the city council and the Board of Education. Behind the cars, 20,000 young men

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<sup>39</sup> “Delinquency is Laid to Autos,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 7, 1923, II24; “Urges Play as a Solution,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1923.

<sup>40</sup> “Students Stage May Day Fiesta,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 5, 1922, II1.

<sup>41</sup> “Mayor Issues Proclamation on Boys’ Week,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 16, 1924, A13. The Boys’ Week Movement began in New York in 1920 and became International Boys Week in 1932.

and 25 bands representing each public high school and junior high, private school and military academy, as well as, the Boy Scouts and YMCA, marched in a measured and military fashion through downtown towards the Biltmore Hotel.<sup>42</sup> While the Mayor framed Boys' Week as a celebration of all boys, in effect, the procession of youth revealed the ways in which civic culture organized the city's boys into regimented racial and class groups.

Cryer, a mayor with close ties to the city's commercial leaders, sought to forge an alternative elite culture for the city's youth. In the 1910s and 1920s, Polytechnic and Manual's May parades became a part of labor celebrations and through the creation of Boys' Week Cryer shifted this youthful energy away from labor. While working-class youth could rally with their parents and neighborhood on May Day, separated out, middle-class boys paraded through the streets for enjoyment of their parents and city fathers. Its ceremonies, parades and activities, such as placing select young men into managerial positions in city government, created a counter-narrative to the working-class May Day celebrations. Boys' Week provided a forum in which middle-class ideals could take main-stage and in which parading youth were separated from the working-class demonstrations. The week framed boys as resources or assets to be controlled and cultivated for the future, not as active participants in the creation of the present. This was quite different from the model of civic participation promoted as part of the curriculum of the original Los Angeles High School. During the same period, the Chamber of Commerce instituted a Junior Chamber of Commerce to sponsor masculine, middle-class leisure activities including the annual Los Angeles Open Golf Tournament, polo,

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<sup>42</sup> "Boys Will Parade Today," *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1924, A1.

yachting, swimming, diving and tennis matches. These activities supported a class based subcultural for the community's elite youth.

While conservatives worked to fashion new networks of elite alliances, Emory Borgardus' work, *The City Boy and His Problems*, provided a more inclusive glimpse into the lives and needs of young Angelinos. In 1925, with a grant from the Rotary Foundation, Borgardus and a horde of assistants from the University of California sought to catalogue, describe, and analyze the life and growing experiences of boys in Los Angeles.<sup>43</sup> *The City Boy and His Problems* was the culmination of hundreds of man-hours and resulted in a 2,000 page document.

Borgardus, like G. Stanley Hall, argued that modern, urban society was a poor environment for the upbringing of young men.<sup>44</sup> Nonetheless, rather than echoing Hall's theories of emasculation, Borgardus viewed the urban environment as characterized by the absence of parents and other forms of authority to guide boys into adulthood. Moreover, the commercial nature of the city created the ground on which young people, who had not developed the ability to resist temptation, could be exploited. In Borgardus' view, the problem was not class-based. Misuse of wealth and status was as much a form of delinquency as blue-collar crime. Both were products of the urban environment. In his analysis, the urban setting provided stimulation and entertainment that, when allowed to proceed unchecked, produced delinquency and potential deviance. Succinctly put, the environment of the city fostered delinquency, and young people needed protection from the city.

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<sup>43</sup> "Boy Problems Surveyed," *Los Angeles Times*, October 11, 1925, B1; Bogardus, *The City Boy and His Problems*.

<sup>44</sup> Granville Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relations to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion and Education* (New York: Appleton, 1904).

Bogardus' solutions were spatial in nature. Among other things, he proposed all-hour youth centers and open schools to provide young people alternatives to the public, and adult, marketplace of the city. If the working life of urban families could no longer provide the authority to check the activities of young boys, government could attempt to enact discipline through spatial order.<sup>45</sup> In essence, the absence of effective parental control required a physical separation from the temptations of the city.

Concurrently, the new medium of film translated social theory of delinquency into popular culture. Early film and radio exploited fears of urban delinquency. Nonetheless, Hollywood often challenged the narrative of the transformation of the communal village to urban jungle and provided a counter narrative to the politics and hysteria around delinquency. Although these films portrayed the city as dangerous and cruel, the Hollywood touch allowed youth to find, produce, and represent redemption and beauty within the urban landscape. In fact, the cinema industry's growth, like that of the city, revolved around the exploitation of young actors. Hollywood's promotion of a redeemable youth fit with middle-class ideals and simultaneously protected the economic value of the industry's most profitable and vulnerable asset, young actors. The entertainment industry solidified this cinematic representation of youth during the Depression and it was then made indelible by the adoption of the Movie Productions Code in the 1930s.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Driven by his fear of the effects of the city on boys, Bogardus also argued for the creation of private spaces for boys within the home in order to allow for greater surveillance. As most homes could not accommodate the activities of boys, and private bedrooms and garages were only recently added to homes, Bogardus suggests that boys be allowed to dig caves in their backyards.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Munby, *Public Enemies, Public Heroes: Screening the Gangster from Little Caesar to Touch of Evil* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 154.

One of the central actors in promoting a redemptive vision of city and youth was writer, producer and studio boss Darryl Zanuck. At the age of 17, Zanuck came to Los Angeles after serving in the Great War, and without any family connections or formal education he began working in Mack Sennett's early movies. In 1925, after co-writing the *Rin Tin Tin* series for Warner Brothers, Zanuck became head of the studio at the age of 23. His movies such as *The First Auto* (1926), *The Jazz Singer* (1927), and *The Public Enemy* (1931), dealt with issues of young people in the urban environment and covered the transition from silent films to the first "talkies."

*The First Auto* detailed how the unrealistic desire for the familial structures of the agricultural past could divide a family. In the film, the only son of a horse breeder decides to become a mechanic, and because of his choice his father disinherits him. However, after a fire in which the auto plays an important role in saving the lives of the family, the father's attitude changes. Instead of fearing the social changes the auto announced, the protagonist's father transformed his horse livery into a mechanics shop.<sup>47</sup> In letting go of a rural past, father and son joined together to create a new modern industry.

*The Jazz Singer* developed these themes and explored the distance between father and son created by opportunities of city life. It portrayed the son as victim of a father's need to hold close to tradition and inability to understand the city's blossoming culture. Again Zanuck sought to show the redemption of the city and youth by allowing the protagonist and audience to have it both ways; Jackie sings on Yom Kippur for his father but also opens "April Follies" the next night to critical acclaim. The film *The Jazz Singer*

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<sup>47</sup> Zanucks' fictional narrative in *The First Auto* closely resembles the true story of designer Earl Harley that is described in Chapter 2.

is also significant because, while young people were able to adopt the clothing and styles of stars of the silent era, with recorded dialogue begun with the *Jazz Singer* young moviegoers could mimic the language of celebrities. Interestingly, many of Zanuck's movies featured an ethnic element, albeit it Jewish, Irish or Italian, and within these movies actors attempted to recreate the language of the urban children of immigrants.<sup>48</sup>

Lastly, *The Public Enemy*, *Little Caesar* and *Scarface* provided pre-code movies in which young people could experience the thrill and danger of the urban underworld.

*The Public Enemy* examined the life story of two mischievous young boys and the manner in which the urban environment transformed one of the pair into a ruthless gangster. From street play to his violent death, James Cagney's volatile portrayal of Tom Powers, the protagonist who notoriously pushed a grapefruit into the face of his cheating girlfriend, was a popular hit with young audiences. *The Public Enemy* departed from the redemptive messages in Zanuck's earlier films, and in the end as the audience pondered Cagney's bullet ridden corpse this message was revealed: "The END of Tom Powers is the end of every hoodlum. 'The Public Enemy' is, not a man, nor is it a character—it is a problem that sooner or later WE, the public, must solve."<sup>49</sup>

In general, Zanuck's films reflected the popular perception of the urban landscape as a delinquent environment. His narratives did suggest that some exceptional young people could transcend that inherent delinquency. While Zanuck did not propose an unremitting pathology of the city, his representations of the exceptional few who were able to resist condemned the rest to something worse than failure, anonymity. Although

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<sup>48</sup> Donald Crafton, *The Talkies: American Cinema's Transition to Sound, 1926-1931* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 23.

<sup>49</sup> William A. Wellman, dir., *The Public Enemy*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1931.

*The Public Enemy* ended with the censure of Tom Powers, it was his exploits and attitude that attracted young audiences.

Not all boys coming to Los Angeles had the same combination of luck and drive as Darryl Zanuck or of his exceptional characters. By the start of the Great Depression, the problem of transient youth had become the focus of a national debate over delinquency and its sources. As the Western terminus of the railroad, Los Angeles became the preferred destination for detached young men from all over the nation looking for work and pleasure. The potential of being the next Rudolph Valentino attracted some, while others looked to vacation and indulge in the sites and sounds of the booming metropolis. Even when jobs where plentiful, few transients had luck finding employment without local connections. The Great Depression only made matters worse.

### **The 1930s: Transient Boys, Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Policy**

During the Great Depression, two types of “youth problems” confronted the Los Angeles community. The first was the physical reality of a growing transient population of boys who had migrated to the city, and the second involved issues pertaining to the activities of non-transient youth, including the problem of juvenile delinquency. The solutions, although somewhat overlapping, were also distinct and based on a growing public perception that the respective populations should be segmented from one another. More important, the civic and governmental response to these new realities legitimized the creation of youth policy as an integral party of community life.

In the late 1920s and early 1930s, in comparison to most Eastern cities with large immigrant and working-class families, Los Angeles had a smaller and less densely

populated cohort of young boys and girls. Migrants to Los Angeles, many of whom had small nuclear families, did not locate in the center of the city but rather chose a type of residential development that spread communities across Los Angeles County.<sup>50</sup> In addition, while the 1920s had brought a growth in the city's youth population, the Depression curtailed some of that demographic change. Nonetheless, by 1930 there were 387 schools and 237, 411 students in the Los Angeles district. But the slowly growing population of enrolled students was not the source of youth-oriented problem that confronted the city during the Great Depression.

By 1931, transient boys were arriving in the city at the rate of over 100 a week.<sup>51</sup> While the lives and stories of young Hollywood celebrities promoted Los Angeles as a place of unlimited opportunity, most of these young transients found a very different, less welcoming city. Indeed, the city they experienced differed significantly from one experienced by most middle-class youth. The Los Angeles River and train yards were road kids' playground and home, and they cohabitated with hobos and bums. Hobos were itinerant workers, and bums were self-defined "professional" wanderers. These youth roamed the street hustling for day labor. Dinner could be purchases at tin shack beaneries and many local bakeries would allow young people to purchase old goods for cheap.<sup>52</sup>

According to one time road kid Charles Willeford, "the only time the bums were bothered by the law is when they first arrived by freight in Los Angeles. If they were

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<sup>50</sup> Real estate development interests and a haphazard regional plan perpetuated this type of growth in the first half of the 20th century. Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1999); Fogelson, *The Fragmented Metropolis*.

<sup>51</sup> R.H. Disterick transcribed interview, "History of Forestry Camps," July 6, 1956, Box 35, Probation Camps, 1937-1958, Papers of John Anson Ford, 1928-1971, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California [hereinafter JAF-Huntington].

<sup>52</sup> Charles Willeford, *Looking for a Street* (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1988).

leaving L.A. by freight train, the cops were glad to see them go, so catching a train out of the yards was a simple matter. Incoming trains were watched however, and the bums were rounded up frequently by cops as they detrained.<sup>53</sup> In October of 1933, the LAPD apprehended 1009 boys, including 102 girls dressed in boys' clothing; the tramp's world was reserved for men, and women who sought to ride the rails conformed to gendered expectations.<sup>54</sup> The experiences of Barney Kenard, "a youth who crossed the ocean to make his fortune in the new world," were not atypical. Arriving in Los Angeles by rail, he was immediately jailed for vagrancy. Within six months of his arrival, he had been jailed six times, and the county had been billed \$1,019 in mileage fees to constables in the county who had arrested him.<sup>55</sup>

While the fate of Kenard is unknown, the mass effects of thousands of homeless "boys" in the county began to demand solution. In a letter to the *Times*, a resident of Santa Monica wrote:

Now for boys the proper occupation is studying in school. Why can we not work out a solution of the wandering-boy problem along that line? Why not some scheme by which the authorities shall get hold of all such wandering boys and put them into schools, supporting them at the States' expense? By this plan, instead of being educated for criminals as now, this vacant period will be the means of making them better citizens.<sup>56</sup>

In response, another reader suggested that that the boys should be sent home, "at their parent's expense, or their State's if their parents are not financially able to meet it. Ninety per cent of them are out for a lark at some one else's expense and to escape

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>54</sup> "Judge Tells Problem of Night Court," *Los Angeles Times*, March 25, 1934, B6.

<sup>55</sup> "Irish youth travels globe to find jail," *Los Angeles Times*, May 10, 1933, II1.

<sup>56</sup> D.A. Murray, "Letter to the Times: Schools for Homeless Boys," *Los Angeles Times*, August 24, 1933, A4.

parental control.”<sup>57</sup> During the first years of the Depression, the progressive ethos of communal responsibility for youth dictated that local taxpayers would argue over who would carry the burden for the upkeep of transient boys. But as the numbers of the transient boy population grew, rather than allowing a growing mass of homeless boys to wander the streets, the option of upkeep gave way to the practice of paying the rail fare for the return trip home. Charities such as the American Red Cross also promoted this practice and paid rail fare for young men with confirmed home addresses.<sup>58</sup> Some thought, however, that this short-term fix attracted even more boys with the promise of a free trip back home. Hence, a more comprehensive, long-term solution was needed to redress this particular “boy problem.”

Beginning in the late 19th century, social scientists suggested that the effete life style of middle-class domesticity had robbed young men of their masculinity. Jackson Lears explains that Americans in this period responded by adopting a consumer oriented therapeutic ethos, and this ethos, as applied to the perceived boy problem in middle-class Los Angeles, prescribed doses of strenuous activity to discipline boys into men.<sup>59</sup> The Boy Scouts and sports created organizations that provided this manliness tonic.<sup>60</sup> These institutions promoted a form of group therapy centered upon outdoors activities in which manhood would be rediscovered. By the 1920s, this therapeutic manhood cure had

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<sup>57</sup> B.T.P., “Letter to the Times: Wandering Boys,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 25, 1933, A4.

<sup>58</sup> Willeford, *Looking for a Street*, 82-83.

<sup>59</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, “From Salvation to Self-Realization: Advertising and the Therapeutic Roots of the Consumer Culture, 1880-1930,” in *The Culture of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 1-38.

<sup>60</sup> David MacLeod, *Building Character in the American Boy: The Boy Scouts, YMCA, and Their Forerunners, 1870-1920* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Jeffrey P. Hantover, “The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity,” *Journal of Social Issues* 34:1 (1978): 184-95.

embedded itself within the ideal of the boy consumer described by Lisa Jacobson.<sup>61</sup> For middle-class young men, the ability to frame their consumer desires in the language of strength, speed, precision and durability became marker and maker of masculinity.

Los Angeles County offered its own type of group therapy as a solution to its transient boy problem. In 1931, Kenyon Scudder, the county probation officer, along with a judge of the juvenile court, the chief forester and the fire warden, developed a cost effective solution that combined fiscal frugality with the ethos of manliness. It also provided a cheap work force for public projects. Scudder argued that transient youth needed to be removed from the vices of the city and put to work in county forestry and fire camps. Work outdoors would civilize the boys, teach them the value of labor, and through work and discipline, help them develop the traits of successful manhood. This idea fared well with county sheriff Eugene Biscalluiz, who also thought that physical labor was the surest way to mold boys into men. The wage was set at 50 cents a day for work. However, the authority held this wage to pay for train fares out of Los Angeles, which remained the ultimate solution to the transient boy problem. In essence, the boys would work until they had earned enough money to leave.<sup>62</sup>

At the experimental fire camp, young men from the ages of 16-21 cleared land of brush and built fire roads and fire breaks. These young men were also employed as reserve fire fighters and performed the backbreaking ditch work required to defend Los Angeles County property from fire. After a year of operation in which the County had saw savings from the project, the board of supervisors and the local media hailed the

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<sup>61</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*.

<sup>62</sup> John Anson Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County* (San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1961), 141; Harold Leon Stallings and David Dressler, *Juvenile Officer* (New York: Crowell, 1954).

camp as a success.<sup>63</sup> When the Federal Transient Bureau was established in 1934, it adopted the model of the Los Angeles County camps. In 1937, county probation officer Karl Holton reported that the camps had saved \$200,000 a year. Holton concluded, "the forestry department tells us that the boys do as much work as is done by any of the crews in the adult camps. Their work has been most valuable in providing motor roads, firebreaks and in reforestation projects. From every standpoint these camps have been most successful."<sup>64</sup>

### **The Emergence of Youth Policy in a Commercial City**

While the Los Angeles County government pursued rehabilitative group therapy through the enlistment of transient youth on public works projects, the middle-class pursued its own rehabilitative ethos through the creation of a variety of youth organizations designed to separate youth from the dangers of the city, an approach that was in accord with the prescriptions offered by Bogardus in the previous decade. By the 1930s, Los Angeles had a plethora of school service clubs that organized the social and cultural life of high school and junior high students. These social clubs were different from the turn of the century fraternities in three ways. First, their membership roles were public. Second, clubs limited themselves to youth membership—adults were not allowed to participate. Last, clubs could only associate themselves with one campus. This policy strongly discouraged the formation of multi-campus social organizations. While the restrictions on fraternities succeeded in preventing the growth of national fraternities in

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<sup>63</sup> "Vagabond Youths' Camp Solves Grave Problem," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1993, A16; "Boys' Camp Show Worth," *Los Angeles Times*, February 11, 1935, A3.

<sup>64</sup> Karl Holton to John Anson Ford, April 14, 1937, Box 35, Probation Camps, 1937-1958, JAF-Huntington. In actual cost the camps became less expensive per diem throughout the 1930s.

the school, in the end, local social clubs evolved that in effect replicated the activities and practices of sororities and fraternities, that is creating a social hierarchy in the school that identified elite and non-elite students. As elite clubs developed, they created their own cultural and class order and structured the social life of the school around club activities. These clubs provided a venue for students to organize and consume middle-class entertainment, and although they reproduced many of the class distinctions generated by fraternities, social club dances and parties provided a safe alternative to the dangers of the public dancehalls and other commercial leisure.<sup>65</sup>

In 1935, on the heels of Upton Sinclair's End Poverty in California campaign, voters elected John Anson Ford, a liberal and Christian reformer from Wisconsin, to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors. From the beginning, Ford articulated a vision of good government through which he challenged graft within the county's departments. As Ford's politics evolved, he became increasingly convinced that the county needed to protect its youth from the exploitative nature of the commercial city. On a weekly radio program broadcast on KFI and in a local column "Straight from the Shoulder," Ford championed the fight against vice in the name of the county's youth. As expressed in 1936, Ford's politics was a mixture of Christian spiritualism, civic responsibility, and good government.<sup>66</sup> His paternalistic approach stemmed from experiences as a young man in Chicago; "Ignorance and greed on the part of many industrialists plus ignorance

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<sup>65</sup> Morris, *The High School Scene in the Fifties*; Martin Hodell interview by author, February 2006.

<sup>66</sup> Seen as one of his greatest personal successes, Ford created a Toy-Loan program that employed WPA workers to refurbished old toys and make them available to county children—after 6 weeks of good care any doll could be adopted by a wanting mother.

and lack of guidance on the part of hundreds of thousands of immigrants in Chicago have almost wrecked democracy in that city.”<sup>67</sup>

In the first years of his tenure as supervisor, Ford fought for the elimination of pin marble games and the sale of liquor in dance halls. He also promoted stricter sanctions and enforcement of underage drinking, lobbied for standards in the film industry and supported the local Parent Teachers Associations and local coordinating councils in their fight against juvenile delinquency.<sup>68</sup> In the mid-1930s, the PTA became responsible for distributing free lunches to children on County Relief.<sup>69</sup> With the repeal of Prohibition, Ford became concerned about the availability of alcohol in public places and attended conferences that focused on the effects of alcohol on youth.<sup>70</sup> In 1935, Ford proclaimed that “the proposed separation of liquor and dance halls in unincorporated areas should be decided on the basis of the young people's welfare. The liquor interests have always claimed they welcomed sane regulation.”<sup>71</sup>

Ford’s philosophies and work led to the creation of the Los Angeles County Morals Education Committee on October 6, 1937. This committee, chaired by Dr. George Gleason, would become the Committee on Church and Community Co-operation, 1937-1949, and assumed the task of harmonizing the work of churches and county government in the battle against juvenile delinquency. Gleason noted that “the heart of delinquency is outside of the church. The church, therefore, must plan to move aggressively into

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<sup>67</sup> John Anson Ford interview by Mr. Styles, KMTR Radio, February 21, 1936, Box 55, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>68</sup> Minutes of the Pasadena Parents Teachers Association, April 3rd, 1935, Box 13, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>69</sup> L.S. Rounsville to John Anson Ford, June 6, 1935, Box 13, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>70</sup> Allied Youth Conference, Program and Discussion, May 18, 1935, Box 33, Juvenile Delinquency, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>71</sup> John Anson Ford, Press Release, June 5, 1935, Box 52, Weekly Newsletter, 1935, JAF-Huntington.

unoccupied areas, both geographical and moral.<sup>72</sup> As churches were no longer central to young people's social experience, the committee saw as its duty to help local schools develop programs that would cultivate the moral character of young Angelinos. This committee also served as a watchdog of the county's juvenile corrections facilities and participated in creating new programs together with the County Probation Department. The Committee on Church and Community Co-operation became the template of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Committee, created in response to the Zoot Suit Riot in 1943. Civic activists such as rabbis, ministers and humanitarians served on both committees.

By the late 1930s, the County Probation Department had begun to offer middle-class leisure experiences to its wards. In trying to develop a rehabilitative program and better relationships between clients and probation officers, the department's Youth Activities Committee offered trips to county museums, the Lincoln Park Zoo, and the Griffith Park Planetarium. However, these trips also included places of "real interest" that is privately owned and operated leisure establishments such as the Gilmore Stadium Midget Auto Races and the Wrigley Baseball Field. These programs, while sounding harmless, were often a source of political conflict. Conservative county supervisors argued that these programs were outside of probationary work and had little impact on clients. In addition, some like John Anson Ford thought that visits to races and sporting events could potentially enhance deviance rather than offer leisure free from market temptations. Ford's more specific objections aside, the negative response to this effort to

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<sup>72</sup> *The Responsibility of the Schools for the Character of Youth* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Committee for Church and Community Cooperation, 1937), Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission Archive, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter LACHRCA].

integrate delinquent youth into the non-deviant leisure activities of the city was markedly consistent with a broadly held middle-class desire to ensure that their children remained segregated from deviant working-class leisure practices.<sup>73</sup>

In 1938, Ford found a partner in the fight against questionable commercial interests and juvenile delinquency with the election of Mayor Fletcher Bowron. In the mid-1930s, as a judge, Bowron directed the Los Angeles County Grand Jury to investigate graft and corruption within local government. Following the first mayoral recall campaign in the nation, Bowron replaced ousted Mayor Frank Shaw. A diverse set of political actors, including well-connected businessman and radio voice Clifford Clinton, championed Bowron as the reform candidate without ties to special interests. Fletcher Bowron graduated from Los Angeles High School, and his politics reflected a mix of mild progressive reforms, civic participation and elite alliances; this politics was a reflection of the political socialization learned as a student at Los Angeles High School during the turn of the century.<sup>74</sup>

Bowron and Ford saw young people and their families as exploited by gambling interests and fought hard to rid the city and county of pin-games and other amusements operated by the California Amusement Machine Operators' Association ("CAMOA"). Almost immediately Bowron began a campaign to protect good government from "powerful" interest groups and his first target was CAMOA. On November 10, 1939, the Mayor claimed that "The profits from operation of pin marble machines in a city of a

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<sup>73</sup> Elizabeth Alice Clement, *Love for Sale: Courting, Treating, and Prostitution in New York City, 1900-1945* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 228; Michael Trask, *Cruising Modernism: Class and Sexuality in American Literature and Social Thought* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 2003).

<sup>74</sup> Fletcher Bowron to Claude Reeves, April 8, 1948, Box 35, Fletcher Bowron Collection, 1934-1970, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California [hereinafter FB-Huntington]; Fletcher Bowron, Meeting of the Ephebian Society, January 31, 1948, Box 35, FB-Huntington.

million and a half residents are so great that the forces of good government cannot compete in the game of practical politics.”<sup>75</sup> While Bowron was able to steamroll a referendum banning pinball and other amusement games in the city, John Anson Ford had a much harder time passing a similar county ordinance. The fight over amusement games on the county board of supervisors revealed that the proponents of pinball were not sinister Mafiosos but rather small business owners, including drugstores, ice cream parlors, cigar stands, and liquor stores and cafes. These small business owners insisted that the amusements provided a margin of profit to keep their business going by attracting a broad base of customers. These arguments did not fair well with the Congress of the Parent’s Teachers Association or the Federation of Protestant Churches, a local association of church leaders that like Clifford Clinton sought to stamp out vice, but they could not convince a majority of the Board of Supervisors to implement a total ban on amusement games.<sup>76</sup>

### **Community Coordinating and National Youth Organization in the Protection of Youth**

Another product of the campaign against juvenile delinquency was the creation of community coordinating councils in the 1930s. A model of self-representation and a response to the social isolation experienced in the growing metropolis, the coordinating councils were neighborhood based. Progressive social workers, juvenile court officers and concerned citizens promoted the coordinating committee as a means to address

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<sup>75</sup> Fletcher Bowron, Mayoral Press Release, November 10, 1939, Box 33, FB-Huntington.

<sup>76</sup> Meeting of the Board of Supervisors, Tuesday April 9, 1940, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

multiple social problems at the most local level of government.<sup>77</sup> At the height of the Depression, these coordinating councils were effective in helping organize relief programs.<sup>78</sup> Nonetheless, the primary mission of the coordinating councils in Los Angeles was to create a self-policing community that sought to limit potential youth deviance through the study of local conditions. These councils, organized through a county committee, could advise local and state policy makers during legislative sessions.

Beginning in 1932, the Information Division of the Los Angeles County Coordinating Councils maintained a case record of every juvenile offender recorded by the Los Angeles City Police Department or the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Office. In 1937, the Information Division released a report that indicated that poor housing was the number one predictor in determining cases of juvenile delinquency. The report identified high-density areas such as Angels Flight, Lincoln Heights, and the Russian Flats as representative of sub-standard housing in Los Angeles and centers of juvenile delinquency.<sup>79</sup> The report also proposed that "the effect of poor housing on the delinquency rate is greatest when the area is in a district of substantially homogeneous racial character, and is least when the area and its surrounding district is of heterogeneous

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<sup>77</sup> Charles B. Cranford and Julius Yourman, "Community Coordination," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 10.1 (Sep., 1936): 1-8; Francis J. Brown, "Report of Panel on Problems in Community Coordination," *Journal of Educational Sociology* 11.2 (Oct., 1937): 117-121.

<sup>78</sup> Appier, "We're Blocking Youth's Path to Crime,"; Erle Fiske Young, "The Coordinating Council Plan in Los Angeles County," *Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology* 26.1 (May, 1935): 34-40.

<sup>79</sup> *Juvenile Delinquency and Poor Housing in Los Angeles Metropolitan Area* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Coordinating Council, 1937), Los Angeles County Coordinating Councils, CSWA-USC. In 1935, the American Law Institute began its study of juvenile delinquency. The Institute's findings provided a basis for the California's Youth Correction Authority Act of 1941. Psychiatrist Harvie Dej. Coghill, Chairman of the American Psychiatric Association's Committee on Youth Correction Act, described the act as a "model law" to prevent repeat offenses. Harvie Dej., Coghill, "The Proposed Youth Authority Act," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 99.6 (May 1943): 890. Although concern for deterring repeat crimes increased during the 1940s, the rate of juvenile recidivism in California dropped during the Depression; in 1934, 34 percent were repeat offenders and in 1937, 21 percent were repeat offenders.

racial composition.”<sup>80</sup> The County Coordinating Councils began to talk of delinquency as the first symptom of a cycle of poverty and its findings suggested the need for greater racial integration, or in the least, the elimination of high-density, single race and impoverished neighborhoods.<sup>81</sup> Thus progressive demands for policies that encouraged integration began to emerge from the research of coordinated neighborhood councils in the late 1930s.

The spatial nature of the Coordinating Council’s (CC) research also led to the observation that delinquency frequently occurred at times and places between school and home. J.P. McEvoy observed that the council meetings revealed “that while the police were arresting boys for playing on the streets, the school playgrounds were closed at 3:00 o’clock in the afternoon; that church auditoriums were locked up evenings by the same ministers who complained about the young boys and girls going to road houses to drink and dance.”<sup>82</sup> McEvoy emphasized the need for the organization of community resources so that boys would become more familiar with neighborhood institutions than with the juvenile justice system. The CC’s successfully interfaced neighborhood citizens with social welfare experts and policy makers, and by 1934 there were forty-seven operating Coordinating Councils in Los Angeles County, each assigned to work with an existing high school district.<sup>83</sup>

While the Councils reflected the local community’s attempt to organize community resources to combat juvenile delinquency, the federal government entered the

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<sup>80</sup> “Juvenile Delinquency and Poor Housing,” 8.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>82</sup> J.R. McEvoy, “Move Over Please,” *Saturday Evening Post*, May 1, 1937.

<sup>83</sup> Frances T. Cahn and Helen Valeska Bary, *Welfare Activities of Federal, State, and Local Governments in California, 1850-1934* (Manchester, NH: Ayer Publishing, 1976), 95-96.

fray with the development of National Youth Administration (NYA) projects in the city. By 1938, the NYA had funded 600 Los Angeles County jobs for young people and was in the process of training almost five thousand youth in Los Angeles County.<sup>84</sup> NYA training centers also provided low cost goods for the county, and workers at a site on Antonia Street made hospital uniforms, boats, draperies, print material, ceramics and furniture.<sup>85</sup>

The most ambitious of the NYA's projects was the development of a residential project in Hermosa Beach, California. The NYA proposed to rehabilitate the Surf and Sand Club of Hermosa and turn it into housing for four hundred to five hundred NYA workers. NYA project administration saw two benefits of the Hermosa site: the small town atmosphere would be a good environment for its youth workers and for many nonwhite and working-class youth, it would provide unrestricted access to the beach that would have otherwise been off-limits.<sup>86</sup>

Residents of Hermosa Beach vigorously opposed the development of the NYA project. They argued that the town was too small to absorb the increase in youth population. Local resistance was anchored upon the argument that the project violated their rights as property owners. Residents had chosen to live in Hermosa Beach because they preferred the small town environment to the city, and an influx of working youth would violate their rights as a community. Most of the opposition's logic was wrapped in racist and class rhetoric; the club was "too luxurious" for the class of young people, the

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<sup>84</sup> Anne de G. Treadwell to John Anson Ford, November 22, 1939, Box 33, Juvenile Delinquency 1932-1939, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>85</sup> John Anson Ford to Wayne Allen, February 16, 1942, Box 34, Juvenile Delinquency, 1940-1949, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>86</sup> Josh Sides, *L.A. City Limits, African American Los Angeles from the Great Depression to the Present*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 21.

low economic levels of the youth would hurt real-estate values, and youths of “Spanish and Latin blood” would cause trouble in the community. While the opposition to the project did not cancel the NYA’s plans outright, they did succeed in stalling the project until the NYA was de-funded during the mobilization for war.

While the record of the NYA was mixed in Los Angeles, it represented a brand of progressive politics that regarded youth policy as a crucial arm of good government. During the 1910s and 1920s, administrators encouraged the formation of high school governments for many of the same reasons the NYA purportedly created programs for working-class youth, that is, the idea that society needed to provide young people the opportunity and skills to build their own communities and through these communities develop personal autonomy and citizenship.

This attention to youth policy, youth groups and autonomy was directly related to the growth of the political and consumer power of young people in the 1920s and 1930s. In the mid-1930s, the most vocal youth group, the American Youth Congress (AYC), lobbied for the adoption of a California Youth Act. The proposed CYA guaranteed vocational training and employment for young people between the ages of 16 and 25, offered additional educational opportunities for high school and college students, established neighborhood youth centers and a California Youth Commission.<sup>87</sup> This act also proposed to “demand funds for youth, irrespective of race or creed.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Heman Stark to Board of Supervisors, 1942, Box 34, Juvenile Delinquency, 1940-1949, JAF-Huntington. The California Youth Act failed to become law at the same time the legislature supported the creation of the California Youth Authority.

<sup>88</sup> “Presidents’ Civic Group Receives Warning,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 19, 1937.

The County Board of Supervisors reacted to the programs of the NYA and AYC by establishing a Youth County Commission (YCC) in 1937.<sup>89</sup> The commission, composed of 15 members less than 30 years of age, met twice a month and served in an advisory capacity to the Board.<sup>90</sup> From the start the YCC was hampered by the Board's failure to assign any jurisdiction, projects or administrative duties to the YCC. Underfunded and practically powerless, YCC's work was organized around individual research projects.<sup>91</sup> Nonetheless, by the end of 1939, the YCC completed research on youth employment prospects and established a youth employment bureau and vocational guidance program. YCC researchers found that in 1939, there were 22,000 unemployed youth out of 332,000 youths between the ages of 16 and 24 in the County.

In total, social programs in L.A. during the 1930s focused much of their resources on young people. During this period, rates of juvenile delinquency declined.<sup>92</sup> While no one agency or policy can be identified as a source of this decline, the cumulative weight of social programs in this era and the successful organizing of young people contributed to the change in the delinquency rate. In this period, the networks that provided services to youth moved from strictly religious charity to progressive government programs. Within this shift, young Angelinos often became the direct advocates for new programs or policy ideas. Nonetheless, the coalition of progressive youth forces would diminish in

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<sup>89</sup> To the chagrin of John Anson Ford, conservative members of the Youth Commission that he appointed lobbied against the California Youth Act because they deemed it inspired by communists. John Anson Ford to Carroll Parish, December 18, 1939, Box 33, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>90</sup> John Anson Ford to Al Murray, Nov 22, 1937, Box 33, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>91</sup> The YCC was given \$1,015 as an operating budget in 1938-39.

<sup>92</sup> Los Angeles County Probation Department, *Annual Report Los Angeles Probation Department Juvenile Division*, Los Angeles, 1941, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

the postwar period, leaving the care of the young to a system fractured by political and economic pressures.

### **Fears of Urban Subcultures and the Cycle of Cultural Transmission**

The Great Depression transformed the youth culture of the city. As described by historian Mark Wild, the progressive social programs developed in the 1910s and 1920s were inadequate to deal with the mass of poverty stricken children during the Great Depression.<sup>93</sup> As the safety net of these programs disappeared and economic opportunities lessened, the streets of Los Angeles became the site of mass demonstrations demanding assistance from both the local and national government. The county Within the environment of “black top activism,” working-class youth in the city developed their own unique youth cultures that embraced mobility, autonomy, resistance and fashion.

By the mid-1930s, Hollywood cinema was a dominant producer of the styles and vernacular adopted and transformed by young Angelinos. Rudolph Valentino was admired for his stylistic flare; trying to assume his charismatic allure, many young people copied his hairstyle and clothing. While white middle-class critics saw Valentino as ostentatious and not properly masculine, working-class youth understood his fashion as a way to distance themselves from middle-class mores. Early gangster films also provided a crucial fashion template for working-class youth cultures, and James Cagney in *The*

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<sup>93</sup> Wild, *Street Meeting*.

*Public Enemy* provide the first mass-produced vocal inflection of the gangster; from the beginning, the deviant was both marked as urban and ethnic<sup>94</sup>.

The adoption of the Hays' Movie Production Code in the mid-1930s created an impetus to the development of youth subcultures in L.A. Developed in the period after the introduction of the code, *Angels with Dirty Faces* (1938) begins with a plot that closely resembled *The Public Enemy*. However, a change in the plot occurs when one of the pair of delinquent boys is captured. The boy who remains free becomes a priest, while Rocky Sullivan, again played by James Cagney, is trained to be a career criminal in juvenile hall. However, the code forbade a romantic death for criminals, and in the 1938 film Cagney's Rocky ends up in the electric chair.<sup>95</sup> Ironically, as crime and street life could no longer be romanticized, young people looked to the older set of pre-code movies as representations of freedom and excitement. Borrowing from these texts, young Angelinos created their own subcultural language, heroes and fashions.

In 1940, reflecting on the changing leisure opportunities for young Angelinos, Mayor Bowron argued that a shift had taken place in American culture in which “the overwhelming majority of our people are spectators, not participants.”<sup>96</sup> Instead of making their own amusements, Angelinos bought entertainment. The mayor framed this shift as a loss of “national virility.” In response to this shift the Mayor returned to discussions in the 1910s and proposed turning schools into neighborhood centers. By invigorating the cultural life of the neighborhood schools, Bowron sought to re-center

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<sup>94</sup> Douglas Monroy, “‘Our Children get so Different Here’: Film, Fashion, Popular Culture, and the Process of Cultural Syncretization in Mexican Los Angeles, 1900-1935,” *Aztlan: A Journal of Chicano Studies*, 19.1 (Spring 1990).

<sup>95</sup> Michael Curtiz, dir., *Angels With Dirty Faces*, Warner Bros. Pictures, 1938.

<sup>96</sup> Fletcher Bowron, “Introduction,” *Semi-Annual Blue and White*, December 13, 1940, Box 53, Los Angeles High School, FB-Huntington.

“amusement and recreational activities” away from the commercial market and into neighborhood centers. Schools would serve as network points in Bowron’s proposed and yet never realized borough organization of Los Angeles.

Bowron’s nostalgia for his youth played a large role in his vision of the city, and central to this vision was the proper roles of young Angelinos. While the community school model was an attempt to recreate this past, the success of his administration’s programs to defeat vice in the city further segregated middle-class youth from participating in the nightlife of the city. Bowron’s anxieties were those of a white Protestant middle-class middle-aged man. His programs to stem vice directly affected both the leisure and employment opportunities of working-class youth, and separated them from middle-class youth. While historians have identified the period of post-World War II as a turning point in the decline of the city’s central entertainment zones, the increasing policing of young peoples’ participation in city life that began in the late 1930s had set the stage.<sup>97</sup>

In 1940, Los Angeles City Schools had an enrollment of 251,965 students in 407 schools. At the start of the decade, the fledgling teachers organization, the Associated Teachers of Los Angeles, could look back on ten years of reduced educational resources.<sup>98</sup> While the number of students had not increased significantly during the 1930s, as a consequence of financial restrictions, the city was unable to make any major improvements. The property caps on assessments put into place to curtail bank

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<sup>97</sup> Roger Lotchin ed., *The Way We Really Were: The Golden State in the Second World War* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000). Clora Bryant, Buddy Collette, William Green, Steve Isoardi, Jack Kelson, Horace Tapscott, Gerald Wilson, and Marl Young, eds., *Central Avenue Sounds, Jazz in Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>98</sup> W. Harold Kingsley to John Ford, April 25, 1940, Box 13, Los Angeles Public Schools, 1935-1958, JAF-Huntington.

foreclosures during the Depression had reduced the overall funding for schools. Additionally, Los Angeles schools had gradually become more focused on vocational training, and these programs were significantly enhanced by Federal government subsidies in mid-1930s. Within the curriculum of the high schools the study of Greek and Latin was dropped in favor of classes focusing on manufacturing professions. Worried by the increasing demands for vocational training in California, University of California President Robert Gordon Sproul deployed a circus metaphor: “We are not training trick fleas for the sideshows of life, but men and women for roles in the big tent.”<sup>99</sup>

As Los Angeles struggled to finance its schools, a new “boy problem” emerged. While railway transients had been dealt with by the policing of rail stations and a system of forced labor for return travel, the movement of hitchhikers into and within the city demanded a different solution. The overall embrace of the private automobile played a large role in thwarting policies and practices that segregated young people from adults. By the spring of 1939, juvenile hitchhikers were a major concern for politicians and relief agencies, as the processing of juvenile hitchhikers had become an increasing financial burden on the county. John Anson Ford looked to involve the federal government in controlling the chaotic movement of young people because the problem was “too big and far-reaching a problem for the cities, counties and states to handle.”<sup>100</sup> Ford’s lobbying of the federal government reveals a subsequent attempt to consolidate youth authority, albeit on a national scale. The campaign to control hitchhikers aligned both those who sought to protect youth from the vices of the city and those who sought to protect their

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<sup>99</sup> “Vocational Training Hit,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 11, 1937.

<sup>100</sup> John Anson Ford to James Reece, March 1, 1939, Box 33, Juvenile Delinquency, 1932-1939, JAF-Huntington.

communities from delinquent youth; these two goals became key components of a suburban-based youth policy in the post-World War II period. However, questions about the mobility of youth in the city were postponed in order to refocus efforts on war preparation and civilian defense.

While the increased mobility of youth confounded progressive efforts to contain them, local government concentrated in regulating the most visible sites of vice. After years of advocating for a dance hall ordinance, in 1939, John Anson Ford succeeded in passing an ordinance that restricted minors from attending dance halls that served alcohol. This ordinance stipulated that minors could only attend dances that were for charity purposes, and all such dances required approval from the Los Angeles County Probation Department. In the spring of 1940, the board of supervisors increased dance halls permits from \$50 to \$120 a year. These policies, while on the surface seemingly harmless, shaped particular entertainment opportunities and the spaces of sociability for young people during the war. Moreover, these policies played a direct role in focusing the conflict between local working-class youth and servicemen stationed in Los Angeles.

Furthermore, in this period, national media outlets began to report the developments of urban youth subcultures. By the spring of 1938, the word “jitterbug,” and its many derivatives, was in popular usage in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Los Angeles Times*.<sup>101</sup> As a term that lumped together youth who participated in urban and public jazz dance culture, jitterbugs were initially characterized as frenzied and

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<sup>101</sup> Anthony F. Macias, “Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004); “Jitterbugs Invading City Hall Practice in Mayor’s Quarters,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 14, 1939, A10; “Jitterbugs Warned Dances Peril All But Athletes,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 28, 1938, 5; “Theory Tested by Swing Band,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1938, A10.

frivolous youth, but not dangerous degenerates. Articles about jitterbugs explained the medical dangers of the strenuous dancing and how jazz music degraded classical music. Nonetheless, commercial manufacturers began to exploit the cultural innovations of jitterbugs such as clothing styles, jackets with large collars, flowing pants and synthetic material. Ironically, these innovations were quickly incorporated into middle-class styles such as the housewife's pantsuit. As commerce soaked in urban jazz culture threatened the legitimacy of an older cultural order, reactionary voices seeking to protect the vaulted status of white middle-class culture began to promote policies of extermination, including the desire to "snap the necks of the bugs." In the midst of a growing resentment of the urban youth subculture, the church editor of the *Times*, Jack Warner, spoke for young jitterbugs and suggested, "Maybe we're not crazy. Maybe we're just young. Neither individuals nor nations suffering from senility and decadence can be accused of overtension and jitterism. We're simply in love with life and freedom and we have to express ourselves."<sup>102</sup>

Warner's defense of subcultural activity was soon overwhelmed by news reports that connected jitterbugs with the racial bugbear of white slavery. Newsmen sensationalized the story of dancer Bristol Barrett who admitted working with a group of "white slavers," one identified as a "Negro-Portuguese," to seduce young white women into prostitution.<sup>103</sup> The employment of white slavery to describe the dangers of the urban youth subculture intensified white middle-class fears of inter-age mixing and interracial dating in public dancehalls. Nonetheless, the term jitterbug and its embrace by marketers

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<sup>102</sup> James Warnack, "Are We So Crazy or Merely Young?" *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1941, A4.

<sup>103</sup> "Indicted Woman in Vice Ring Inquiry Gives Herself Up," *Los Angeles Times*, May 3, 1940, 15.

and, moreover, middle-class youth buttressed the culture from total prohibition, and the media began to discuss a new term, the Zoot Suit, to racially segregate the urban subculture of the war years, and foreshadowed the attempted division of urban working-class and suburban middle-class youth cultures in the postwar moment.

### **Youth Policy and the Dawn of War**

Late in 1941, in search of healthy activities for young people at night, the Los Angeles City Council passed an ordinance that allowed bowling alleys to remain open after 2 a.m. Mayor Bowron vetoed this ordinance and argued that the bowling alleys “would no longer be recognized as places of clean, wholesome sport and recreation, but as hang-out of crowds from public dances, taxi dances, cocktail bars, and public spaces where liquor is dispensed.”<sup>104</sup> Young people who were over 18 could stay out past the 11pm curfew, but could not legally attend places that served alcohol. Bowron’s defense of the 2 o’clock closing hour sustained the segregation of young people from public spaces at night and in effect perpetuated policing in which youth out after 11 p.m. would be automatically identified as suspects. In this period, the commercial interests of entrepreneurs seeking to exploit young consumers and their desires to participate in a vibrant urban culture were increasing at odds with youth control policies.

Despite city leaders’ attempts to control the participation of young people in the night culture of the city, youth played an important role in creating Los Angeles’s nightlife. Located near the commercial center of the city’s black community, Thomas Jefferson High School’s music program became a training spot for the hottest jazz

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<sup>104</sup> Fletcher Bowron to Los Angeles City Council, September 5, 1941, Box 1, Letters 1941, FB-Huntington.

musicians on Central Avenue.<sup>105</sup> Even Los Angeles High School students, although removed from the core music centers, had begun to embrace a youth culture that was separate from the elite culture promoted by the city fathers. The student newspaper offered definitions of a “jam session” and explained the libratory experience of listening to jazz music. While not every student could attend a “real” jam session, student clubs adopted commercialized jazz orchestras as the preferred form of entertainment at school dances. On December 5, 1941, the Titan’s Club of Los Angeles High School held a dance at the Brentwood Country Club.<sup>106</sup> Featuring the smooth music of Jack Gregg & His Orchestra, the dance cost \$1.38 and was held from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m., a period clearly beyond the 11 p.m. curfew.

Less than two months later a competing club asked Los Angeles High School students to “Remember, the Alamo, the Maine, Pearl Harbor and the Earls’ Dance.” While the youth culture of the Great Depression had begun to merge local urban and suburban, elite and working-class cultures, the initial surge of patriotism following the attack on Pearl Harbor segregated young people into new camps on a national level. In Los Angeles, this was clearly racially encoded in that the national media embraced the young male white soldier as an upstanding young American citizen while young laboring Latinos and blacks were identified as subversive, foreign, and deviant.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> 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).

<sup>106</sup> “Advertisement,” *Blue and White*, December 2, 1941, AAA-LAHS

<sup>107</sup> Mazón, *The Zoot Suit Riots*, 54-66.

In addition, World War II initiated the greatest round of capital investments in the history of Los Angeles.<sup>108</sup> Industry expanded throughout the city to match the demand for war products, and this growth increased the flow of immigrants to the city. Although migrants came to Los Angeles from all over, one characteristic identified them as unique in comparison to earlier settlers. These new Angelinos were on the whole young. In general there were two categories of young migrants: servicemen and war industry workers. Both groups were important to the nation's virility, and the city sought to participate in the war effort by celebrating the character of young servicemen and workers. However, in opening up the city to workers, soldiers and sailors, city leaders forfeited their tenuous control of the city's youth population.

Servicemen in transit to the Pacific Front were stationed near San Pedro, the harbor of Los Angeles. L.A. was the last American city many soldiers would visit before deployment to the war in the Pacific. Whether it was their last chance or in their first days back home, servicemen looked to purchase local entertainment with their government paychecks. In addition, greater employment opportunities allowed working-class youth to participate more thoroughly in the vibrant nightlife of the city. Both servicemen and workers frequented entertainment zones such as Venice Pier, Central Avenue, and Bronzeville.<sup>109</sup>

While most city leaders welcomed the young servicemen, a few feared the results of the influx of a large youth population without adult supervision. In this period, county supervisors sponsored "clandestine" missions to investigate the activities of servicemen

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<sup>108</sup> 1941 was a watershed year for new investments in Los Angeles. In 1941, Los Angeles gained 40,000 new employees. In 1942 capital investments were \$63 million. Charles Elliot and Cecil Letts Dunn, *Jobs and Security after Victory* (Los Angeles: Haynes Foundation, 1944).

<sup>109</sup> Lotchin, *The Way We Really Were*.

during curfew hours; these investigations were secret because the board did not want to appear unpatriotic. County “government spies” noted that nighttime accommodations for servicemen on leave were severely limited and often only 25 cent to 35 cent “flop houses,” identified as places of degeneracy, were available.<sup>110</sup> Confidentially, many hotels clerks admitted refusing service to soldiers because of their reputation of damaging rooms. The overall effect of these practices created packs of on-leave servicemen without anywhere to go after 2 a.m. Many would congregate near the public transportation terminals in order to wait for the resumption of train service at 6 a.m. in the morning. As recalled Robert Eng, whose parents operated a corner store in downtown Los Angeles, the influx of servicemen to the downtown put them into direct contact with working-class Zoot Suiters and jitterbuggers who had previously been labeled delinquent by the newspapers.<sup>111</sup>

Although the supervisors were careful not to identity servicemen or the war as causes of social instability, within a year of the war’s commencement, local newspapers began associating the war with cases of delinquency. The *Daily News* ran an article that reported the rise of high school street-fighting and argued that these acts of violence were a result of familial dislocations perpetuated by war.<sup>112</sup> The wartime atmosphere helped substantiate the call for vigorous social projects in the fight against juvenile delinquency. Slum clearance programs and public housing were two related war programs justified on the basis of fighting delinquency and creating better soldiers.

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<sup>110</sup> John Anson Ford, “March 5th, 1941,” *Straight From the Shoulder* (unpublished), Box 2, “Straight from the Shoulder,” 1940-1942, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>111</sup> Robert Eng interview by author, May 5, 2006.

<sup>112</sup> Eddie Vermeiren, “Juvenile Delinquency Trend up During Wartime,” *Los Angeles Daily News*, March 9, 1942.

Nonetheless, reformers such as Carmen J. Boyle, a social worker and youth advocate, argued that the increase of fighting was directly related to emergency closure of libraries, parks and playgrounds.<sup>113</sup> Within this framework, Boyle argued that racial discrimination, in the forms of cuts and curtailment of programs in Black and Latino neighborhoods, played a large role in the increase of juvenile delinquency, as the first programs to be eliminated were ones that sought to offer healthy recreational and educational activities to the city's heterogeneous working-class neighborhoods. Along with the reduction in services was the simultaneous transgression of neighborhood boundaries by new migrants. War workers and soldiers disrupted a fragile social balance that had sustained practices of working-class urban decorum in the prewar period.<sup>114</sup>

The lack of police officers, probation officers, and youth service workers as a result of wartime mobilization exacerbated the public fear of juvenile delinquents.<sup>115</sup> Already small for the city the size of L.A., the 2,500 officers that made up the LAPD was reduced by 26 percent. While a smaller police department had to deal with an increasing wartime population, the Los Angeles County Probation Department faced staffing reductions and administrative changes that severely restricted its services. In 1941, juvenile cases consisted of about a third of the total probationary casework. The Department's analysis suggested that delinquency was a result of the stress of war on the family; employment of mothers, irregular parental work hours, increase in separations

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<sup>113</sup> Carmen Boyle, "The Causes of Delinquency in Wartime," *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1942.

<sup>114</sup> Western swing dancing conformed to strategies of urban civility as it restricted couples dance spaces to allow greater numbers of participants in smaller spaces. Anthony Macias describes this multi-ethnic urbanity in, Macias, "Bringing Music to the People."

<sup>115</sup> In 1940 federal funds were made available for delinquency projects through joint co-operation of the WPA and L.A. County, but the "cream" of WPA workers were absorbed by private industry and not public agencies.

and divorces, and the increased consumption of liquor. Probation officers in 1941 were working twice the number of cases as in 1936 because of staffing shortages. This led to the consolidation of adult authority and lessened intimacy between clients and youth workers.<sup>116</sup>

The probation department looked to the 1930s as a time of efficiency and success because the juvenile delinquency rate had steadily fallen in the previous decade. However, by early 1941, the LACPD struggled to find placement for the increasing number of youth offenders, which was made more difficult because the LACPD could not find placement and services for the greater number of poor nonwhite youth. While private institutions had once played a role in placement, a County report showed that it was “futile” to find funding or space in private camps for Black and Latino boys.<sup>117</sup> In light of this, County Probation Officer Karl Holton agreed with the assessment of the 1940 Grand Jury Recommendations that argued for the opening of a forestry camp for boys aged 13 to 15. However, the County’s Forest Warden argued that this arrangement would not be as cost effective as the older boys’ camp because the younger wards required more schooling, and thereby the number of daily work hours for this age group would be limited.<sup>118</sup> While the intervention of the WPA and NYA provided some relief to this problem in the late 1930s and early 1940s, World War II phased out federal projects

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<sup>116</sup> *Annual Report Los Angeles Probation Department - Juvenile Division* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Probation Department, 1941).

<sup>117</sup> Karl Holton to John Anson Ford, June 2, 1941, 2, Box 34, JAF-Huntington,

<sup>118</sup> Spence D. Turner to Karl Holton, April 19, 1941, Box 34, JAF-Huntington; Wayne Allen to Board of Supervisors, April 21, 1941, Box 34, JAF-Huntington; Robert H. Scott to Board of Supervisors, February 19, 1941, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

and the County was left with the task of finding placement for its nonwhite wards.<sup>119</sup> In the spring of 1942 the NYA budget was slashed, student work programs eliminated and state offices closed.<sup>120</sup>

## **From Zoot Suit to Human Relations**

On February 3, 1942, Mayor Fletcher Bowron wrote to the Office of Civil Defense noting that, “On the whole, morale in Los Angeles and Southern California is excellent. There is no hysteria, there is no fear generally indicated.”<sup>121</sup> In the letter, Bowron regretted the cancellation of the Rose Bowl, horseracing and sporting matches, and warned the rupture in entertainment offerings might lead to social unrest. Two weeks later, Franklin Roosevelt issued Executive Order No. 9066, which authorized the internment of over 120,000 people of Japanese ancestry. With this event, Los Angeles entered a year in which it was host to not one but three bouts of xenophobic hysteria, initiated by Japanese Internment, sustained by the Sleepy Lagoon Trial, and culminating in the Zoot Suit Riots.

On March 2, 1942, General J. L. DeWitt ordered the detainment of all person of Japanese descent on the West Coast. Japanese in Los Angeles were required to come to processing centers on May 4th and 5th. Los Angeles High School students were shocked to learn that some of their classmates would not be able finish the school year and

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<sup>119</sup> Aubrey Williams, “Report of Nation Youth Administration,” December 15 1941, Box 34, JAF-Huntington. Karl Holton and Karl Scudder tried to get WPA to continue a Los Angeles Delinquency Prevention project because the WPA programs reduced the wards of the County Juvenile Hall by 6500. Karl Holton to John Anson Ford, May 12, 1939, Box 33, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>120</sup> John Anson Ford to Jerry Voorhis, May, 8, 1942, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>121</sup> Fletcher Bowron to the Honorable James M. Landis, February 3, 1942, Box 1, FB-Huntington.

participate in graduation ceremonies.<sup>122</sup> One overture made to students in city schools was that most were allowed to graduate before internment and receive their diplomas. Los Angeles High School was the only school within the city district schools to deny its Japanese students their rightful diplomas; recently appointed principal Paul E. Webb determined that students unable to finish the year would not receive their diplomas.<sup>123</sup>

The Sleepy Lagoon Incident and trial furthered the racist and ethnic divisions brought by war, and revealed how in the patriotic conscription rush, Los Angeles's Latino youth were subject to increasing mistreatment by the authorities and the press. Most public and private pool operators in the 1940s did not admit Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. An unregulated swimming hole, popularly known as the Sleepy Lagoon, provided an alternative leisure space for those barred from community pools.<sup>124</sup> On August 1, 1942, a young man who was about to be inducted into the Army was found dead near the lagoon following a fight between two rival barrio groups. While this event may have gone unnoticed in peacetime, the state and local governments, that had collaborated in suppressing the reported rise in juvenile delinquency made this episode a cause célèbre and insinuated that the incident was the result of the activities of unsupervised, unpatriotic and bloodthirsty Mexican youth. In response the police rounded up over 300 hundred Mexican youth and out of these twenty-two were indicted for Diaz's murder.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Board of Directors, Los Angeles High School Alumni Association, interview by author, June 20, 2006.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Hector Gonzalez interview by author, August 16, 2006. Gonzalez tells of how in the 1940s the Lincoln Heights pool was only open to Mexican children one day each month in the summer, the day before county workers re-chlorinated the pool.

<sup>125</sup> "Boys to Face 'Showup' Test," *Los Angeles Times*, August 11, 1942, A2; "Showup of 200 Boy Gangster Suspects Held," *Los Angeles Times*, August 12, A1;

While the initial response to the death of Diaz was unprecedented, the trial further showed the ways in which Anglo elites actively amplified and perpetuated the stereotype of degenerate Mexican youth. In the first two weeks of the Sleepy Lagoon Trial, the defendants were not permitted to get haircuts or receive clean clothing. Therefore, the defendants appeared unkempt in newspapers photographs and this confirmed the racist “greaser” image of young Mexicans. During the trial, Lieutenant Duran Ayres argued that Mexicans were genetically inferior and that a culture of blood-rituals had been passed on from the Aztecs. Moreover, in the trial Ayers claimed that “all those under 18 who will not attend school should work, and even if they do work, if they resort to such criminal acts as evidenced lately by these gangs, then they should be incarcerated where they must work under supervision and strict discipline.”<sup>126</sup> The media coverage of the trial exposed the racist discourse of the Anglo elite, publicized its methods of maintaining class and racial boundaries, and circulated its rhetoric in the mass media. In doing so, it made its hegemonic logic available to new immigrants to the city, including the young servicemen stationed throughout Southern California.

In response to racist and reactionary media image, representatives of Los Angeles’s progressive community formed a defense committee for the Sleepy Lagoon defendants. The youths’ supporters included Hollywood notables such as Rita Hayworth, Will Rodgers, Anthony Quinn, and Bert Corona. In its efforts to create a counter-narrative to the media’s portrayal of the trial based within the politics of World War II, a pamphlet by playwright Guy Endore argued that the rights abridged in the trial indicated that America was on the road to becoming like totalitarian Germany. La Rue

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<sup>126</sup> Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots*, 18.

McCormick, organizer of the Sleepy Lagoon Defense Committee, took the argument further and advanced the idea that the Zoot Suits were themselves innocent youth who had been duped by Mexican Fascists and Sinarquistas, and that these groups were responsible for the rise in juvenile delinquency.<sup>127</sup> Although not playing directly into the Anglo-elite's hand, many in the progressive community also saw the youth subculture of Zoot Suits as foreign and threatening.

In response to the Sleepy Lagoon incident, Bowron recommended the formation of a Special Committee of the Grand Jury to study the problems of Mexican youth. Although the committee supported the trial against the accused and failed to criticize the blatant racism evidenced in the proceedings, the committee made a broad sweep of recommendations to end inequalities suffered by Mexican youth. These included the end of segregation in public recreation including parks, playgrounds, and swimming pools; the employment of teachers of “Spanish speaking descent”; the removal of prejudiced teachers; and a compulsory vocational program for all incarcerated youth offenders. The Grand Jury found that although the media reported a rise in crimes by Mexican youth, overall there were fewer offenses in the first six months of 1942 than in the previous year. The committee also found that police brutality was the central source of antagonism between authorities and the Mexican community, but it was unable to offer a solution to this problem. Instead, the report argued for the greater co-operation of the LAPD and Sheriff’s Department in developing positive public relations with the Mexican community. Lastly, the committee recommended that the County fund recreational

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<sup>127</sup> Guy Endore, *The Sleepy Lagoon Mystery, with a Foreword by Orson Welles* (Los Angeles: Citizens' Committee for the Defense of Mexican American Youth, 1942).

programs over weekends and holidays, as the highest rates of offenses occurred in these periods.<sup>128</sup>

While the Grand Jury rearticulated progressive notions that juvenile delinquency stemmed from the lack of physical spaces and opportunities in the city, the Los Angeles Bar Association's committee, made up of lawyers and judges, found administrative rather than social causes in the rise of delinquency. This committee found that the LACPD was completely understaffed and its officers underpaid. In addition, the juvenile hall facilities were woefully inadequate. The budget for juvenile hall was less in 1943 than it had been in 1929, although the dollar had remained nearly constant and the number of wards had significantly increased. Only 25 beds had been added in that period, most stays were limited to two weeks because of demand for space, and the site did not segregate serious offenders from the overall population of wards.<sup>129</sup> This report made clear that the conditions were not a result of war but rather the year-to-year failure of the board of supervisors to both maintain and enhance services at juvenile hall. Instead, as juvenile wards had no powerful advocate, County Manager A. H. Campion had slowly bled juvenile services in the name of tax relief.<sup>130</sup>

The Bar Association's report also argued that the lack of funding created the conditions for "spot" justice. Because of unclear regulations, local police ended up deciding about 40 percent of all juvenile apprehensions. Acute testimonial evidence showed that police officers saw themselves as "the first court of law" in relation to

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<sup>128</sup> E.W. Oliver, *Los Angeles County Grand Jury Recommendations, 1942* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County, 1942), 41.

<sup>129</sup> *Report of Juvenile Crime Prevention Committee* (Los Angeles: Board of Trustees, Los Angeles Bar Association, 1943), 4, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

juveniles. The report concluded that “the Los Angeles City Police, the sheriff of LAC and citizen's committees including those set up under the Altadena Juvenile Council Plan, are illegally and improperly assuming and performing judicial functions, with the knowledge of the Juvenile Court Judges of Los Angeles County.”<sup>131</sup>

All in all, the Bar Association’s findings indicated that the failure of juvenile justice contributed to juvenile delinquency. The report insisted that young people’s knowledge of the juvenile justice system left no clear picture of punishment or rehabilitation. The chaotic administration of justice created a street peer culture in which the “gangster and criminal tendencies of predelinquent youth and with whom they associate, are developed and enhanced by these flaunted examples of the failure of the law to prescribe definite and certain corrective treatment.”<sup>132</sup> In short, the system of juvenile justice in Los Angeles had contributed to the creation of a working-class youth subculture that saw authority as predatory, capricious and arbitrary.

The jitterbugging youth of Los Angeles may have worried about run-ins with the police, but dancing and dating came first and foremost in the lives of many young Angelinos. As shown by Beth Bailey, dances were key to courtship in the interwar period.<sup>133</sup> In wartime L.A., participation in and knowledge of dances and contemporary clothing styles were keys to young people’s reputation and membership within youth culture.<sup>134</sup> As this culture became more diffuse, middle-class youth began mixing more frequently with nonwhite working-class youth. According to musician and event

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<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>133</sup> Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*.

<sup>134</sup> As discussed in Macias, “Bringing Music to the People,” 693-717.

promoter Johnny Otis, only when groups began to mix did police officers begin to hassle and threaten jitterbugging youth.<sup>135</sup> Anthony Macias argued that clashes between the police and participants in this youth dance culture were directly tied to maintaining racial containment and the conflicts increased in intensity as the dances became increasingly popular; embedded within these conflicts were fears of both interracial and cross-class dating.<sup>136</sup>

The Zoot Suit Riot of 1943 was an extension of the cultural conflict between the jitterbugging youth, the national media and local authorities. Young servicemen tipped the scales in this conflict, weighing in on the side of the police and Anglo elite. While on the surface, the Zoot Suit Riots began with small skirmishes between local youth and soldiers, both marketers and journalists prepared the cultural battleground between servicemen and young Latinos. In the tabloids, journalists described these street fights as turf battles between a deviant working-class youth culture and a patriotic white American youth culture. However, while the Hearst papers promoted an ethno-racist view of the conflict, they also sensationalized the culture by detailing the deviancy of working-class youth, and described the ostentatious fashion of the jitterbuggers as proof of their deviance. In the spring of 1943, Al Capps's *Lil'Abner*, a cartoon strip with an estimated circulation of 50 million readers a day, featured the transformation of the popular cartoon character Abner into the hero "Zoot-Suit Yukom."<sup>137</sup> Mocking the fashion industry and the frenzied activities of the growing consumer society, the *Lil' Abner* strip also marked the jazz style as valueless and apart from the core values of American society. Whether

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<sup>135</sup> Johnny Otis, *Upside Your Head!: Rhythm and Blues on Central Avenue* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1993), 60.

<sup>136</sup> Macias, "Bringing Music to the People."

<sup>137</sup> Mazón, *The Zoot-Suit Riots*, 34.

intentional or not, Capps's critique of the zoot suit worked to silence style as a integral part of youth culture and ridiculed the culture of urban working-class youth.

Absent from public discussion were the ways in which the local working-class culture was barely distinct from middle-class youth culture. For the most part, these two groups listened to the same music, danced the same dances, and wore similar clothing. The rules of the dance floor bonded local working-class and middle-class youth, and were a direct representation of local decorum. In fact, it was servicemen who were new to the youth cultural terrain, and they were ignorant of established social etiquette. The clothing, hairstyles and dances of the locals were foreign to the invading youth, and as cultural symbols were not immediately accessible.<sup>138</sup> Furthermore, the military provided a unifying cultural experience and acted as a midwife to the consumer culture of the white middle class. Additionally, soldiers began developing new notions of propriety and ownership in their relationships to women—many soldiers secured marital insurance before they were shipped off to battle. Mazon notes that these manly white youth became the heroes of the period, and their first test before being shipped off would be to make sure that the working-class youth of Los Angeles conformed to their ideals.<sup>139</sup>

On June 5-7, 1943, servicemen on leave from their base hunted down Mexican “Zoot Suiters” with the cooperation of the local police. Initially, a conflict between a seaman and a Latino youth after a dance led to fights between sailors and Mexican youth, but newspaper and radio reports of “zoot” crime fueled the mob. At first servicemen attacked young Latinos wearing jazz attire but this led to the indiscriminate attacks on

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<sup>138</sup> Steven Joseph Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993); Linda N. España-Maram, “Brown ‘Hordes’ in MacIntosh Suits,” in Austin and Willard, *Generations of Youth*, 118-135.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 6.

many different groups of nonwhite youth. While Mexican Americans were the primary targets of military servicemen, African American and Filipino American youth were also targeted. Police did not intervene in these attacks and instead arrested over three hundred “Zoot Suiters” during the three days of rioting. As a commemoration of their victory over the local subculture, a year afterwards, on June 12, 1944, servicemen with tanks and artillery staged a mock invasion and occupation of downtown Los Angeles, which was fully supported by the government of the city.<sup>140</sup>

In the summer of 1943, both the City Council and County Board of Supervisors attempted to come up with a solution to the conflict the media framed as a “Zoot Suit Problem.” The City eventually banned the sale of “freak suits” but made clear to define the forbidden jazz influenced styles as those worn by working-class youth and not the feminine pantsuits of Anglo middle-class housewives.<sup>141</sup> Although, the media and local government’s response produced a strong rejection of subcultural jazz fashion, the repressive and moralizing publicity also helped crystallize the culture of working-class resistance. As the style became demonized, many working-class youth from outside of the center city adopted the dress and style of the zoot, which became identified with the pacucho subculture, a precursor to Chicano identity. Around Los Angeles’s periphery, from San Fernando to Montebello to Long Beach, working-class youth, including white, Latino, Asian and black youth, copied the style and demeanor of the pacucho. In a contest

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<sup>140</sup> “Six Armored ‘Invasion’ Cavalcades to Usher Bond Drive into Los Angeles,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 4, 1944, A1.

<sup>141</sup> “City Bans Freak Suits,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 10, 1943.

for cultural authority, the subculture of the pachuco and zoot suit offered an alternative to mainstream white middle-class culture.<sup>142</sup>

The zoot suit hysteria brought the campaign against juvenile delinquency to the attention of the 1943 Los Angeles County Grand Jury. The Grand Jury findings confirmed the lack of facilities in Juvenile Hall and the need for more police officers. The report also demanded the elimination of the practice of moving large groups of juveniles on foot handcuffed to a chain through the city streets. In addition, the report found that young people in zoot suits committed very few crimes before January 1st 1943.<sup>143</sup>

In the first sixth months of 1943, there were 23 reported assaults of servicemen by zoot suiters. Less than 20 percent of the total population, Mexican and black youth accounted for half of the juvenile arrests, and yet, the statistics do not reveal which party instigated the assaults. The Grand Jury report argued that Mexican delinquency was a consequence of the nature of youth caught between Mexican and American worlds; the gang was the primary mode of assimilation and cultural translation for the sons and daughters of immigrants. This argument framed the children of immigrants as naturally prone to delinquency, and hid the commonalities between different groups of working-class youth and the fact that white youth were also participants in the zoot subculture. While more sympathetic than arguments in the mass media, the Grand Jury's findings

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<sup>142</sup> Bruce Tyler, "Zoot-Suit Culture and the Black Press," *The Journal of American Culture* 17.2: 21-33; Shane White and Graham J. White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Cornell: Cornell University Press, 1998); Douglas Henry Daniels, "Los Angeles Zoot: Race 'Riot,' the Pachuco, and Black Music Culture," *The Journal of African American History* 87 (Winter 2002): 98-118.

<sup>143</sup> *Los Angeles County Grand Jury Recommendations, 1943* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County, 1943), 26, Box 34, JAF-Huntington.

supported a xenophobic mentality that fueled the arrest and harassment of Mexican youth.

Mexican-American newspaper publisher Ignacio Lopez argued that, “out of the guilt of the dominant group, arose a faddism for the Mexican-American. Committees gave birth to committeees. Co-ordinator battle co-ordinator. There was a new set of resolutions every morning. Still, when the emotional fever and the defensiveness subsuded, few real gains had been made for or by the Mexican-American group.” Nonetheless, Lopez also saw the riots as “blessing, even tragically disguised” because Mexican-Americans could no longer be a hidden minority and instead they had begun to realize the power of cultural politics in the American society.<sup>144</sup>

In order to promote and protect the image of the nation’s “white-spot,” Mayor Bowron created the Deputy Auxiliary Police in order to highlight that not all Los Angeles youth were criminal. On September 9, 1943, Mayor Fletcher Bowron introduced the DAPs, a city-sponsored youth organization that would encourage the respect of law and cooperation with police officers.<sup>145</sup> The DAPs wore uniforms, performed drills and were schooled in crime fighting techniques. By the summer of 1945 there were 5,000 DAPs, and by 1948 the DAP membership had doubled.<sup>146</sup> In that year, DAP members participated in over 2,000 sponsored athletic events. DAP membership included girls and nonwhite youth, providing a diverse set of young people access to a host of leisure

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<sup>144</sup> Ignacio L. Lopez, “Foreword,” in Ruth D. Tuck, *Not With the Fist: Mexican-Americans in a Southwest City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1946), vii-viii.

<sup>145</sup> DAPs in many ways resembled a merger of the Boy Scouts with contemporary DARE programs.

<sup>146</sup> *The City of Los Angeles Yearbook, 1948* (Los Angeles: Police Printing Bureau, 1949), 10, LACA.

pursuits. In the game to mark youth as either disciplined or deviant, the DAP and its uniforms provided clear symbols of the former.<sup>147</sup>

## Conclusion

Through the first half of the 20th century, politicians, pundits and policy makers in Los Angeles debated the often competing means through which to control youth deviance, encourage autonomy, and civic participation. In this period, Los Angeles forged the foundations of modern public schools and youth corrections, and these institutions centralized and consolidated adult authority. As places for young people, schools, juvenile halls and forestry camps became sites in which new youth cultures developed within social engineering projects aimed to control their activities. Moreover, owing to the incessant flow of young people to Southern California and the reciprocal nature of youth culture, in which the promotion of autonomous model citizens for elite youth conversely encouraged alternative working-class subcultures, Los Angeles's adult authorities failed to realize the management of its young.

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<sup>147</sup> William Parker cut funding for the DAP program when he became the chief of police in 1950.

## **Chapter Three**

### **From Hot Rods to Lowriders: The Vehicles of an Emerging Youth Culture**

For Abel Perez and many other young residents of the San Fernando Valley in the mid-1960s, cruising Van Nuys Boulevard was a regular Wednesday night event. On the boulevard, hot rodders, surfers and lowriders would circulate, comparing rides, offering compliments and criticisms about style and cars. In their daily lives, between the worlds of home, school and work, the spatial boundaries of neighborhoods segregated Angelinos by class, race and ethnicity. However, as they cruised Los Angeles's neon lit boulevards, visiting hamburger stands and ice cream shops, young Angelinos of all types shared a youth car culture.<sup>1</sup> The rasp of the exhaust signaled a core component of this culture, the search for individual and group recognition.

The experience of cruising the block and “turning heads” was the highlight of Perez’s week. The City’s grand boulevards, including Van Nuys, Colorado, Sunset, and Whittier, were the main stages, uncompromising public levelers of talent and resource. On the weekend, Perez would cruise farther from home to the town of San Fernando. Passing the Tom Carroll Chevrolet dealership, he would throw his ride into a U-turn and frame the reflection of car and riders in the dealership’s mirrored front windows. In a prismatic moment, the harmonies of chrome, gleaming flaked paint and sparkling rims would blend the teens, the car and the street front. Revealing the need for recognition in a

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<sup>1</sup> As most teenagers did not own an automobile, many relied on family and peer networks to participate within this youth car culture, thereby enhancing the intimate group dynamic of the culture.

segregated city whose media representation of youth was dominated by middle-class whiteness, Perez remarked, "We don't have a lot of money, we've got a 9-to-5 job. But dammit, we've got nice cars."<sup>2</sup> For young Angelinos, the constructed environment, the city of quartz, was the backdrop upon which to reflect the radiant aspirations, the cool and the capabilities, of their generation.

In 1956, Judge William McKesson, a juvenile justice and delinquency expert, noted that 9th graders "asked to rank the leisure interests said, 'girls, cars, then sports.'"<sup>3</sup> He then added, "the car is almost an obsession with junior-high age boys."<sup>4</sup> For young Angelinos, cars promised mobility, freedom and power. In cars, young people could explore both the natural and cultural offerings of the Southland and interact with people outside of their neighborhood. Furthermore, cars provided a space in which young Angelinos had sex—or for many, created an environment in which sex could be discussed with friends and flirting could be contained by the ability to make a quick departure.<sup>4</sup> Young people cruised the city's strips as they looked for parties and attempted to get numbers of potential dates.<sup>5</sup> In spite of the fact that cruising offered greater freedom of mobility to youth, automobiles also exposed young people to risks, including harassment by authorities and physical injury caused by accidents.

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<sup>2</sup> Brent Hopkins, "Lowriders: A Love Affair That Begins with Family," *Daily News*, May 10, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Metropolitan Recreation and Youth Services Council (MRYSC) Meeting, April 26, 1956, 2, MRYSC Agency Papers, CSWA-USC.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions of flirting on the Sunset Strip in the 1950s see, Morris, *The High School Scene in the Fifties*.

<sup>5</sup> Hodell interview by author. Hodell remembers cruising Sunset Strip in the mid-1950s with friends with the goal of getting as many phone numbers from girls as possible.

Young people and their misadventures in cars were front-page news in Los Angeles.<sup>6</sup> For example, on the same day in 1955, a fourteen-year-old led police on a high-speed chase through downtown and a 15-year was caught driving on the wrong side of the freeway at 100 miles per hour.<sup>7</sup> The sensationalized treatment of these incidents worked to further a discourse on delinquency that focused on the uncontrolled movement of young people throughout the city. However, with increasing access of youth to fast cars, the growth of delinquency appeared unlimited and unstoppable. The symbolic combination of youth and automobiles invoked the specter of cultural collapse. Sam Katzman's 1967 B-movie *Hot Rods to Hell* exploited this specter to the fullest: the father of a family on the move, played by Dana Andrews, has to fight off a pack of wild hot rodders threatening his wife and children. Not until Andrews closes down a rowdy hotel bar does he succeed in protecting his family from the dangerous hot rodders.<sup>8</sup>

After World War II, young Angelinos inherited a city with practically unlimited streetscapes and a youth culture that promised mobility and freedom through the use of automobiles. Los Angeles's growth in this period was spectacular, and new commercial establishments adopted the eye-popping Googie architecture that beacons cruisers from blocks away.<sup>9</sup> Cruising became the primary expression of Los Angeles's youth car culture, and although young Americans around the nation cruised from malt shop to sock hop in the 1950s, in Los Angeles cruising was intimately connected to the sub-cultural

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<sup>6</sup> From 1915 to 1949 the minimum driving age in California was fourteen. In 1949, it was raised to sixteen. "Many Changes in Motor Laws Due Saturday," *Los Angeles Times*, September 28, 1949, A1.

<sup>7</sup> "Wrongway Youth," *Venice Vanguard*, May 12, 1955.

<sup>8</sup> *Hot Rods to Hell*, VHS, dir. Sam Katzman (1967: UCLA Film and Television Archive, 2005), Film and Television Archive, University of California, Los Angeles [hereinafter FTA-UCLA]. In the same year they appeared in *Hot Rods to Hell*, teen actors Mimsy Farmer and Laurie Mock appeared in *Riot on Sunset Strip*.

<sup>9</sup> Googie is an architectural style that sought to attract drivers with extremely peaked roofs, arches and neon, named after a coffee shop on Sunset.

developments of hot rodding, lowriding and customizing.<sup>10</sup> Cruising became the platform on which hot rodders, lowriders and customizers could promote their styles, compete with other practitioners and attract new participants to youth car culture.

Young people's embrace of the car and the growth of youth car culture extends back to the beginning of the 20th century. The automobile was a technological celebrity, and young people flocked to witness races between cars and horses, hill climbs, and the early speed trials. The manufacturing innovations of the 1920s made cars available for a broad base of middle-class owners, and by the mid-1920s, the supply of used cars was great enough to support the personal ownership of autos by young people. In the late 1920s, the first car clubs appeared in Southern California. By the 1930s, many of these clubs had been amalgamated into officially sanctioned racing and timing associations. War rationing and troop deployment delayed the development of the hot rod community, but postwar benefits to veterans created the grounds on which Southern Californian hot rodding could be promoted nationally and enter the mainstream of American culture. In addition, the cessation of hot rodding during World War II promoted an apprentice culture in which hot rod enthusiasts from the prewar period tutored new teenaged participants. While "old timers" provided the technical knowledge to sustain the development of the culture, teenagers became the mass participants who encouraged its growth and continuing evolution.<sup>11</sup>

From 1945 to 1965, many of the practices of car culture remained the same: young Angelinos cruised, raced, flirted and paraded in their cars. However, during these

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<sup>10</sup> For discussion of car culture, youth and sexuality, see Bailey, *Front Porch*; Trask, *Cruising Modernism*; Jeremy Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem: Safety, Cars, and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>11</sup> Albert Drake, *Hot Rodder! From Lake to Street: An Oral History* (Portland, OR: Flat Out Press, 1993).

two decades, a transformation occurred as the hot rodding practices of young Angelinos were brought under the auspices of various community and corporate organizations. Homologation and control of this otherwise independent behavior was essential to trump the delinquency discourse that connected cars and youth. It also helped pave the way for the commercialization of youth culture. Through popular magazines and advertisements, hot rods and custom cars entered into teenage consumer culture. The manufacturing interests behind these consumer goods sought greater adult approval, and these efforts collaborated with the work of middle-class car enthusiasts seeking respect and sanction for their cultural practices. The collaborations between corporations, small businesses and enthusiasts created the advertising potential for magazines such as *Hot Rod* and provided the combination of capital and labor that could organize increasingly popular events. A similar process of homologation would transform the local subcultures of surfing and skateboarding.<sup>12</sup>

The grassroots, or more accurately street-level, negotiations between young car enthusiasts, local politicians and the police further shaped how youth and car culture collaborated to develop unique subcultures in Los Angeles—hot rodders, customizers and lowriders. In order to establish social control, Los Angeles politicians promoted car clubs to harmonize youth and car culture with the dominant cultural order of the city. This colonial strategy sought to pacify and organize local youth cultures into sanctioned clubs. Although youth car clubs had preceded World War II, the “democratization” of consumption in the early postwar period provided for car ownership for a greater number of young people and spurred the growth of youth car clubs. In the mid-20th century, the

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<sup>12</sup> Michael Brooke, *The Concrete Wave: The History of Skateboarding* (Toronto: Warwick Publishing, 1999).

club was the key organizational unit for American youth; clubs were found in schools, churches, and neighborhoods. In Los Angeles, youth car clubs organized a mobile, competitive, and vibrant youth culture. Within this culture of racing and cruising, young people could explore relationships and identities in spaces less restrained by tradition and adult authority.

This chapter examines the relationship between young people and cars in Los Angeles from the mid 1910s to the late 1960s. For the most part, hot rodding refers to the practice of improving cars to increase their speed and performance, and lowridding refers to the stylistic customization of cars. However, the practice of cruising was not exclusive, and both hot rodders and lowriders cruised to present work on their automobiles. The first section of the chapter argues that this relationship gave young people a new basis on which to make claims of autonomy and cultural authority, and then elaborates on how the spatial and cultural developments of Southern California became the stage on which a youth car culture unfolded. The chapter continues with an examination of the pioneers of youth car culture in Southern California and explores how hot rodding was initially an expression of class resistance to the privilege of speed by the wealthy. The third section examines the effect of World War II on hot rod culture and the ways in which hot rodding moved from a subcultural practice to a mass consumer identity. Concurrently, cruising and car clubs became central facets of American youth culture. The fourth section elaborates on the practices of cruising, arguing that cruising was a youth practice that challenged segregation in the city. Lowrider culture articulated a critique of the class and racial exclusion embedded within the city's spatial arrangement, its culture of speed and consumer hot rodding and sought to valorize cruising over racing.

## Cars and Culture: A Los Angeles Story

By the late 1940s, Los Angeles was nationally known as a city of cars, traffic and freeways. Newsreels nationally distributed by the Hearst Company sensationalized the dangers of driving and problems of traffic in the core of Los Angeles, but also trumpeted safe driving and freeways as a graceful solution to the problems of accidents and congestion. These newsreels presented freeways and automobiles as markers of the American city of the future, with Los Angeles as a model.<sup>13</sup>

America's cultural and economic embrace of the automobile and the metropolitan development of Los Angeles occurred simultaneously and worked together to transform Southern California into a region bounded by pavement. The infamous "de-centered" nature of Southern California was the product of the collaboration between the practices of driving and visions of a city both connected yet divided by a series of roads and highways.<sup>14</sup> This collaboration also became central to the city's emerging youth culture.

Angelininos were positively attracted to the thrill of driving and to the endless economic and leisure opportunities that automobiles offered. They championed the automobile as the replacement of the horse and thus transfigured the romantic, mythological chivalry of man and horse to the automobile and driver. The resulting ascendancy of the automobile as essential to Los Angeles culture was rapid and transformative. From 1917 to 1927, automobile registrations in the city increased 128

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<sup>13</sup> "Drive to reduce traffic death toll, Los Angeles, Calif., Boston and Brookline, Mass." Hearst Newsreel Footage, 1946, tape 2, CS4, FTA-UCLA.

<sup>14</sup> Estelle Gershoren Novak, *Poets of the Non-existent City: Los Angeles in the McCarthy Era* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2002); Fogelson, *Fragmented Metropolis*.

percent and traffic officers increased 475 percent.<sup>15</sup> With the lowest registration fees and taxes per automobile in the nation, California had nearly two million cars and trucks in 1930.<sup>16</sup> Over the next two decades the numbers continued to skyrocket. In 1949 alone, Los Angeles registered over 70,000 new cars. This exceeded all new registrations in the entire State of California in the year 1932.<sup>17</sup> By 1955, Los Angeles was home to more than three million registered cars, accounting for 47 percent of all vehicles registered in the state and surpassing the registrations of 41 individual states.<sup>18</sup>

As families settled into the baby boomer bedroom suburbs of Los Angeles in the late 1940s and early 1950s, talk about freeways, cars and traffic was common currency in the everyday language of Angelinos. In the local papers, the Automobile Club of Southern California published daily safety reports and offered advice for the proper and economic maintenance of one's vehicle, and auto news slowly replaced sections of papers that had once been devoted to religious groups and social clubs. Local retailers lured customers with promises of "Acres of Free Paved Parking!" and "Easy Highway Access." A yearly highlight was the Los Angeles Auto Show, an "autopia" held at the Pan Pacific auditorium and which featured both new cars and Hollywood actors as celebrity guests.<sup>19</sup>

Visitors to Los Angeles auto shows were guaranteed sunshine on every street corner because ordinance forbade the construction of any building greater in height than city hall. Nonetheless, the city's history of corruption and vice suggested a darker side to

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<sup>15</sup> "City Leads in Auto Gains," *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1928, 1.

<sup>16</sup> "California Sets Record," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1930, F2.

<sup>17</sup> High Mark Set by Auto Sales in California, *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 1950, 5.

<sup>18</sup> "LA Tops 41 States, In Car Registration" *Los Angeles Times*, February 22, 1957, 1.

<sup>19</sup> "First Auto Show Since 1940 Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1952, A1; Lynn Rogers, "Automotive Highlights," *Los Angeles Times*, November 11, 1956, A19.

the city. Automobiles were an integral part of the sunshine/noir narratives of Los Angeles. In the detective novels of Ross Macdonald and Raymond Chandler, driving became the clearest way of understanding the city, from the wonder of the sunsets off the Pacific Coast Highway to the dark world of vice and violence that connected red-light districts to the hilly enclaves of the elite. In the world of noir, to understand Los Angeles was to understand its highways and roads.<sup>20</sup>

Cars were both the salvation and curse of the city, and consistent with this dichotomy, Angelinos both cherished their own automobiles and damned those of their neighbors for the inevitable ill effects of this brave new world. Private transportation offered freedom from the physical closeness associated with public transportation as well as the ability to set one's own route and schedule, and yet the ubiquitous automobiles mired each Angelino in often unpredictable chains of traffic and thick, burning smog. And for drivers, a fine line of "quick thinking" or "good reactions" often separated heroes from victims. As documented in newspapers as diverse as the *Los Angeles Times*, the *California Eagle* and *La Opinion*, cars and other motor vehicles provided the implements for a vast majority of daily deaths and injuries within the city—trucks running over toddlers, autos derailing trains and cars driving the wrong way down the freeway.

The dark side of car culture was not limited to the street and, like the region's suburbs, spiraled around stories of domestic tragedy. On September 16, 1952, eighteen-year-old Robert Blake Jr. stepped into his backyard and spied his father brushing his teeth in the bathroom window in their well-to-do Upland home. Lowering his 22-caliber rifle, Blake let off a single shot. The bullet tore through the window and into the head of Blake,

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<sup>20</sup> William Alexander McClung, *Landscapes of Desire: Anglo Mythologies of Los Angeles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

Sr., killing him instantly. Later, Blake confessed to the police that he killed his father because he had been denied a new car. His father had told him that he was not “ready yet” for a new car, leading to a bitter argument, a fistfight and the subsequent murder. The *Los Angeles Times*’ reporting of the Blake murder exhibits how the refusal of a car provided a totalizing, albeit not socially acceptable, explanation of a complicated family tragedy. In any event, headlines that connected youth, cars and murder were sure to sell papers.<sup>21</sup>

While Robert Blake’s story is extreme and no doubt an exploitation of the everyday fears of Angelinos, it reveals how cars became central to the most intimate fantasies and dangerous moments within the lives of families in Los Angeles. But these gruesome stories did little to stem Angelinos’ desire for automobiles. In *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, Scott Bottles argues that the continual failure to integrate the city’s rail system created a demand for public buses and private automobiles. Rather than the machinations of the auto industry, it was this demand for independent and convenient transportation, as well as the city’s refusal to make the transportation utilities public, that slowly choked the profits of the rail companies and led to the ascendancy of the car.<sup>22</sup>

Los Angeles planners, developers and politicians also saw automobiles as a key to developing the ideal city—a city that could support a diverse and growing population and economy and simultaneously offer an extended spatial arrangement that allowed for segregation and separation between the city’s parts. By promoting this arrangement, city planners believed that the traffic circulation would flow unblocked, increasing the growth

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<sup>21</sup> “Denied New Car, Youth Kills Father,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 17, 1952, 1.

<sup>22</sup> Scott Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*.

of the city's economy and culture. They also believed that this special model of suburban sprawl would allow the city to remain free from the urban antagonism of riot, pollution and congestion—or at least that these frictions would be contained in “delinquent areas.”<sup>23</sup> Hence, while Angelinos associated automobiles with freedom and the future, they also associated automobiles with segregation and social distance from the congested multiethnic urban core.<sup>24</sup>

### **Agitate the Gravel: Southern California Youth Car Culture**

In 1963, Tom Wolfe visited Los Angeles in search of new directions in American culture. While there, Wolfe spent time with Kustom King George Barris at his garage in North Hollywood and with maverick customizer “Big Daddy” Roth at his studio in Maywood. Barris told Wolfe of his roots in the Hot Rod culture of the mid-to-late 1940s and how large groups of young people in cars would meet at places like the Piccadilly Drive-in near Sepulveda Boulevard.<sup>25</sup> In those days, after appraising each other’s cars, racers issued challenges to cars they thought to be in the same class as their own. Drivers and observers would then travel to an industrial stretch of Sepulveda in Culver City dubbed “Thunder Alley” or to an unimproved road in the San Fernando Valley or East Los Angeles County. Eldon Snapp remembered participating in this period in races on a stretch of road in La Habra Heights.

And we’d run out there on Sunday mornings when all the farmers and their wives went to church. Nobody would bother us. It was a good place to be by yourself. It was just a two-lane road, just a nice road to run on. Some of the guys got going

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<sup>23</sup> Bottles, *Los Angeles and the Automobile*, 19.

<sup>24</sup> Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles*.

<sup>25</sup> Tom Wolfe, *Kandy Kolored, Tangerine Flake, Streamlined Baby* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965).

pretty good there. We ran two cars at a time. I don't think we ever fooled with a stopwatch. We just liked to see how fast we could go.<sup>26</sup>

This highly competitive and unsanctioned teenage car culture of the early postwar period became the template for William Wyler's *Rebel Without a Cause*. The hot rodder became the iconic angst-driven teen. But as we will see, this icon was not the final apotheosis of the youth car culture.

From the early 20th century onward, cars and youth culture forged a mutually reinforcing relationship. Changes in automotive technology and design led to changes in youth culture, and the new directions of youth culture were then embodied in the next wave of technology and design. By the late 1920s, in movies, songs and novels, cars had become the technological innovation most identified with young people. More than any other product, cars heralded the mass consumer society. Advertisers promoted the automobile as the ultimate lifestyle object, a verifiable cornerstone of modern consumer desires and status. In pictures in the 1950s and photographs in the early 1960s, young couples were most often the unspoken subjects of car advertisements and were depicted using cars to enjoy leisure pursuits and travel. In 1966, Ford sought to market the Mustang, a small and sleek "hot rod" type car, to young women and in television ads insinuated that popularity and marriage were just around the corner for future owners.<sup>27</sup>

Automobiles were, however, more than cultural icons. They gave young people a new form of authority; the symbolic ownership of car culture by youth rather than adults

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<sup>26</sup> Albert Drake, *Hot Rodder!*, 12.

<sup>27</sup> Cynthia Dettelbach's *In the Driver's Seat* argues that youth is a major component of American car culture as expressed through American literature such as Steinbeck and Kerouac. Cynthia Dettelbach, *In the Driver's Seat: The Automobile in American Literature and Popular Culture* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1976).

reversed the conventional paternalistic transmission of cultural authority. In this period, cruising became an American leisure pastime and the youthful language of the automobile reshaped a host of social relationships. One could even argue that postwar youth culture itself was a product of the harmonization of the automobile within young American's lives.<sup>28</sup> Cars allowed young people to have a world of their own outside of home, school, and work. Indeed, like no other means, the automobile allowed young people to experience the freedoms of the adult world without succumbing to its domestic responsibilities. From the 1950s onward, auto designers and advertisers co-opted and integrated "youthfulness" into the mass-produced cars intended for the general public. Factory produced hot rods like the AMC Rebel, first released in 1955, and later the Pontiac GTO had powerful engines and light bodies allowing drivers to purchase a street racer and forego months of work in the garage.<sup>29</sup>

Young Americans cherished their automobiles, and by the 1950s the relationship between cars and teens had created a wealth of new words and phrases. Youthful slang terms for cars included the "screamer," "rocket," "rod," "chariot," "bomb," the sexually suggestive "struggle-buggy," and the hoppy "brew-wagon." Drivers could "agitate the gravel" (leave), "blow off" (defeat in a race), and "burn rubber" (drive very fast). In order to make it home by curfew, teens could "haul ass," "goose-it," or "floor-it." Late in the night, couples could play "back-seat bingo" or "make-out" in the "passion pit," the back seat. If a couple decided to go steady a "mirror warmer," a piece of pastel fabric (often cashmere), would be given to hang on the rear review mirror, and a "necker's knob,"

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<sup>28</sup> In *Deliberate Speed*, W. T. Lhamon argues that the postwar period initiated a new lore cycle in American Culture, and the culture of hot rodding fits well within Lhamon's temporal framework.

<sup>29</sup> Larry G. Mitchell, *AMC Muscle Cars* (MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2000), 11.

allowing drivers to operate the auto with one hand, might be placed on the steering wheel.<sup>30</sup>

Beginning in 1951, Don Mansell and Joseph Hall, two academics at Pasadena colleges, began to investigate the language of hot rodders. According to the two, the jargon of rodders represented the “startling, raw, picturesque language of adolescents” with a world “considerably influenced by the automobile industry.” From the 1930s onward, automobile advertisements made appeals to the technological and masculine expertise of buyers by promoting the comparisons between particular parts and models.<sup>31</sup> This type of advertising created a common lexicon for car enthusiasts. A majority of terms included in Mansell and Hall’s glossary are specific to working on cars and auto-racing. Another category of terms rated rods. Teens called good cars “rods,” “bombs,” “deuces,” and “hotties,” new cars “Detroit Iron” or “stock,” and old cars “has beens” and “junkers.” In the sexualized discourse of male adolescence, unadulterated cars were “cherry” and “virgin.” Thus, the subcultural language of hot rodders fused youthful notions of male sexuality with corporate definitions of consumer expertise.<sup>32</sup>

Through the practices of cruising and thinking in the language of the automobile, the youth car culture of the postwar period—not far removed from the race riots of World War II—was a place in which teens altered the relationship of race, gender, and sexuality. As heard in the lyrics of Arkie Shibley’s 1950 song *Hot Rod Race*, the “civilized” quest

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<sup>30</sup> Joseph S. Hall and Don Mansell, “Hot Rod Terms in the Pasadena Area,” *American Speech* 29.2 (May 1954): 89-110; Levette J. Davidson, “Hot Rodders Jargon Again,” *American Speech* 31.4 (December 1956): 304-305; “Slang of the 1905s,” [www.fiftiesweb.com/fashion/slang.htm](http://www.fiftiesweb.com/fashion/slang.htm) (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> Hall and Mansell, “Hot Rod Terms in the Pasadena Area.”; Davidson, “Hot Rodders Jargon Again.”

for speed, “rippin’ along like white folks might,” was a racial privilege.<sup>33</sup> While the original hot rodders had a liberal attitude towards integration, postwar car culture centered on club activities became entrenched in a world of exclusions and segregation. Many of the initial clubs were drawn from the interracial working-class neighborhoods of the pre-war period and had white, black, Latino and Asian members. However, post-World War II programs and FHA loans created racially homogenous neighborhoods, and most clubs began to resemble this homogeneity. In addition, in this period an expansive white identity that privileged color over ethnicity transferred opportunities once reserved for Anglos to young white ethnics including Greek, Italian, Irish, Jewish and German-Americans.<sup>34</sup> The racially charged undercurrents of the postwar hot rod culture were reflected in the jargon of the hot rodders. In the white youth culture of Pasadena, teens called cars that were “stock,” but which had an abundance of “cheap accessories” such as flapping skirts and “Mexican Chrome,” Gomez or Gook Wagons.<sup>35</sup>

The move of many families from multiethnic working-class communities such as East Los Angeles to peripheral white suburbs in places such as the San Fernando Valley catalyzed the transformation of race in which color and not ethnicity became the central racial marker. Throughout all hot rod activities, races on dry lakes, streets and drags, these new “white ethnics” established themselves as master drivers and mechanics. In addition to the realignment of racial categories, as car culture became acceptable to

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<sup>33</sup> Angelino, Jazzman and Tenor Saxophonist Illinois Jacquet also recorded titled “Hot Rod” in 1950. Nonetheless, the Central Avenue Jazz scene was in postwar decline and Rhythm ‘n’ Blues and later Rock would become the music of youth culture.

<sup>34</sup> Thomas Guglielmo, “‘No Color Barrier’: Italians, Race, and Power in the United States,” in *Are Italians White? How Race is Made in America*, eds. Jennifer Guglielmo and Salvatore Salerno (New York: Routledge, 2003), 29-43.

<sup>35</sup> Hall and Mansell, “Hot Rod Terms in the Pasadena Area”; Packer, *Mobility Without Mayhem*. Packer shows how Ralph Ellison explored the racialization of automobiles in his short story *Cadillac Flambé*.

middle-class mores, promising to teach boys the skills to become successful and virile men, it also became more expensive and this in turn created numerous economic barriers to full participation. Thus the barriers of race and class realigned to exclude Latinos, blacks and Asians from full participation, and most importantly full recognition of their contributions within the region's youth culture and American mass culture in general.

Consistent with this racial mapping, the early centers of hot rod culture in the region, Glendale, Pomona, South Pasadena, and South Gate, were white communities that at the neighborhood level struggled to prevent integration.<sup>36</sup> Young Blacks and Latinos were not welcome in many of these areas, nor did they receive sponsorship from the car manufacturing industries located in the white peripheral communities of Los Angeles. Nonwhite teenagers also suffered from the fact that most job opportunities for teens were to be found within the white middle and working-class communities of the city, for it was here that most small manufacturing concerns found it most profitable to locate.

The segregated social orders of the city and the policing of nonwhite, "delinquent" communities further exacerbated this racial divide. In the eyes of the Anglo majority, speed and mobility were privileges of whiteness and, consistent with this perception, the Los Angeles Police Department sought to regulate the mobility of the nonwhite youth population. Beginning with the appointment of William Parker as Chief of Police in 1950, the constant harassment of blacks to and from Central Avenue has been identified as a major cause of the demise of the vibrant Central Avenue musical scene of

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<sup>36</sup> Becky Nicolaides, *My Blue Heaven: Life and Politics in the Working-Class Suburbs of Los Angeles, 1920-1965* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

the 1940s.<sup>37</sup> Edward Escobar argued that this policy was directly tied to LAPD's mission of social control through the suppression of labor unrest: boundaries and profiling were useful devices to dampen interracial solidarity and make it more difficult for communities to collaborate.<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, as Lisa Jacobson highlighted, middle-class and white boys were the target audience of advertisers of the 1930s who strove to make consumption masculine. Advertisers framed their ads as instructions to young boys on how to talk about consumer goods in terms that were manly. They sought to provide a manipulative language to young consumers that could convince parents that buying a particular product would be appropriate for successful maturation, or at least not detrimental to the growth of their sons.<sup>39</sup> In a similar fashion, Ruth Oldenziel argues that the Fisher Body Craftman's Guild, which sponsored a carriage design competition for 12-20 year old boys from 1930-1968, made car technology masculine and appropriate activity for middle-class boys. As admen constructed the boy consumer, the products they sold reiterated the promises of middle-class manliness: power, speed, reliability, and control.<sup>40</sup>

This period of advertising to boys appeared side-by-side with the popularity of Streamlined Modernism. Designers and manufacturers incorporated the lines of Streamlined Modernism into a plethora of household items, buildings and vehicles. Streamlined Modernism carried with it the promises of travel into air and space,

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<sup>37</sup> Mina Yang, "A Thin Blue Line Down Central Avenue: The LAPD and the Demise of a Musical Hub," *Black Music Research Journal* 22.2 (Autumn, 2002): 217-239.

<sup>38</sup> Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*. With the demise of the infamous red squad, the LAPD began more thoroughly focus on the control of vice and the youth population.

<sup>39</sup> Jacobson, *Raising Consumers*.

<sup>40</sup> Ruth Oldenziel, "Boys and Their Toys: The Fisher Body Craftsman's Guild, 1930-1968, and the Making of a Male Technical Domain," *Technology and Culture* 38.1 (Jan., 1997): 60-96.

including the futuristic scooter and wagon designs produced in Harold Van Doren's Toledo shop. In the midst of the Great Depression, Streamlined Modernism also articulated a frictionless future, a future free from struggle and from want. Hot rodders and customizers of the postwar period embraced the logic of the design elements of the mass culture of their childhood.<sup>41</sup>

These design elements dovetailed with youth literature, in particular young people's embrace of science fiction. Running from 1929 to 1967, the *Buck Rogers* comic strip introduced young people to a vision of a streamlined future of space travel and exploration and for 38 years Buck Rogers protected the American white race against the Han, the Mongols and pirate Black Barney. As applied to cars, the design of Streamlined Modernism, like the fantasy world of white cartoon spaceman Buck Rogers and his battles against the "yellow race," linked whiteness, masculinity, racism and middle-class consumption. Popular representations of the future saw outer space as segregated and other races as threats to civilization. This vision of the future was more than comic pulp. It reflected the racist and xenophobic discourses of the period, foreshadowed the shift in racial identity that favored color over ethnicity, and earmarked whose children would have access to the consumer culture of the postwar period.<sup>42</sup>

As the foregoing suggests, not all young people had equal opportunity to participate in the growing youth car culture in Los Angeles. In the earliest period, car clubs and racing were reserved for wealthy Anglos. As cars became more affordable in the late 1920s, more working-class youth were able to purchase used cars and "hop" them

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<sup>41</sup> Donald J. Bush, *The Streamlined Decade* (New York: G. Braziller, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Patrick B. Sharp, *Savage Perils: Racial Frontiers and Nuclear Apocalypse in American Culture* (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma Press, 2007), 13. Sharp shows that race conflict was central to the *Buck Rogers* comic strip from the first episodes onward.

up. In the 1930s, hot rods became an expression of working-class resistance to elitist hegemony as speed became a class equalizer on the streets of Los Angeles. In the 1950s, as hot rodding evolved into a middle-class hobby, the remains of 1930s cars, the material from which hot rods were fashioned, became less available and more costly. These economic barriers to participation in the culture of speed drove young and less affluent Angelinos to remake their cars with the resources at hand. This economic factor, coupled with the cultural trends of the city, fashioned the grounds for the development of both custom car culture and lowridding. While speed was still desirable, style became the preferred mode and measure of youth car culture expression. Although Detroit could have the upper hand in producing fast cars and this allowed it to absorb many of the innovations of the hot rod subculture, local Los Angeles styles proved more resilient to direct co-optation.

Initially, custom car culture and lowridding shared a rejection or extended critique of the speed-focused, hot rod youth culture and of the ways in which hot rodding had become a middle-class leisure pursuit. But the work of white customizers became attractive across the usual racial divides and also quickly became ripe for commercial exploitation. Like their predecessor, Harley Earl, Barris and Roth became a source of inspiration for the American auto-industry, and the “Kustomizers” imagined muscle cars became Detroit designs in the 1960s. These “supercars,” as they were initially called, tapped into masculine teen fantasies of danger. In his campaigns to improve auto industry standards, consumer advocate Ralph Nader held these models up as examples of cars that

were completely unsafe: their brakes often failed, the steering was unsure, and the lightweight body provided little protection in a collision.<sup>43</sup>

While Detroit co-opted the culture of hot rodding, the style of the lowriders was soon absorbed into the teen ritual of cruising the boulevard. Thus, although authorities and politicians sought to limit the practices of young lowriding Latinos, blacks, Asians and whites in Los Angeles, the harmonization of customizing and lowriding with a broader youth and consumer culture challenged the dominance of the white hot rod landscape. Lowriding encouraged the return of a more eclectic teen car culture that carried the potential of transcending class and race barriers. Like dancing in the 1930 and 1940s, the practice of cruising allowed young people to develop and practice modes of urban civility.<sup>44</sup> Despite social and economic separation, youth car culture broke through many of these barriers and embraced a more inclusive vision of society.

Within the built streetscape of the city, young Angelinos fashioned the groundwork for a national youth car culture, and many of the exclusions and innovations initiated in California spread through the rest of American youth car culture. The centrality of Southern California to the birth of this culture was a result of the work of an array of diverse local actors including Hollywood celebrities, the petroleum industry, and local manufacturing interests. In addition, Los Angeles was the closest metropolitan area to the Mojave's dry lakes and the legendary races that became the proving grounds of the earliest hot rods. Moreover, Southern California, and the West in general, represented the

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<sup>43</sup> Ralph Nader, *Unsafe at Any Speed: The Designed-in Dangers of the American Automobile* (New York: Grossman, 1965).

<sup>44</sup> Anthony Macias, "From Progressivism to Policing: Youth Culture and Public Space in Postwar Los Angeles." Los Angeles History Research Group, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California, September 2002.

regenerative frontier in which the nation's future rested, and Americans symbolically associated the region with youth. Southern California's boosters had been promoting the region's regenerative and youthful qualities since the late 19th century and by mid-century this notion had been incorporated into American culture writ large.<sup>45</sup> But the prime factor in Southern California's preeminence in the intertwining of youth and car culture was the booming economy of the region and its ability to attract Baby Boom families, consumptive domestic units that could sustain the many startup businesses around Los Angeles. These small businesses, garages, and speed shops served as the productive center of hot rod and custom culture.

### **The Birth of The Rod: Class Consciousness, Street Races and Dry Lakes**

According to hot rod historians, the rod was born at the turn of the century at the moment when young boys lightened their roadsters by removing fenders and took them racing across corn fields or dusty farm roads.<sup>46</sup> At this point they were called "jalopies" and "bugs" and often menaced local authorities and road traffic in small towns across the country. Around the turn of the 20th century, towns passed and then began to enforce speeding laws. The first speed traps consisted of ropes stretched across roads and obstacles placed in the street. According to Carl "Pop" Green, "then speeding limits through small towns and larger ones were as low as 8 mph, when ropes sometimes

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<sup>45</sup> Frederick Jackson Turner and John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999); May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*.

<sup>46</sup> Albert Drake, *Hot Rodder! From Lakes to Street*; Dean Batchelor, *The American Hot Rod* (Osceola, WI: Motorbooks International, 1995); Robert Genat, *Birth of Hot Rodding: The Story of the Dry Lakes Era* (St. Paul, MN: Motorbooks International, 2003); Robert Genat and Robin Genat, *Hot Rod Nights: Boulevard Cruisin' in the USA* (Osceola, WI: Motorbooks International, 1998); Ed Almquist, *Hot Rod Pioneers: The Creators of the Fastest Sport on Wheels* (Warrendale, PA: Society of Automotive Engineers, 2000).

stretched across the road to stop fast cars whose approach was alerted by a cloud of dust.”<sup>47</sup> Rambunctious drivers would frighten horses, destroy private property, and endanger the lives of citizens. In 1899, a *Los Angeles Times* editorial criticized Chicago’s exclusion of automobiles from city streets and concluded that “the edicts of city councils, village trustees, or boards of supervisors, excluding the automobile from the privileges of the public streets, will exercise but a little brief authority, for the rights of this improved and sustained in the long run.”<sup>48</sup>

Nonetheless, Los Angeles soon found itself victimized by youthful “scorchers” and “speed maniacs” and began to seek solutions to its own auto problems.<sup>49</sup> A humorous editorial in the *Times* presented a plan that suggested a solution to joyriding through the “removal of the ‘skidoo’ bug from brain of him with a penchant for scorching.”<sup>50</sup> In response to calls for reform, the city council enacted a speed law that restricted town traffic to 8 miles per hour and 4 miles per hour over crossings. Motorists and representatives of the Automobile Club of Southern California (ACSC) soon complained. The ACSC acknowledged the speed ordinance but argued that better roads and traffic signals would allow cars to travel quickly at safe speeds. Although, the speed limit was not immediately increased, the gradual improvement of the roads and the growth of city and county pavement contracts insured that higher speeds would be eventually legal. By

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<sup>47</sup> Almquist, *Hot Rod Pioneers*, 4.

<sup>48</sup> “The Rights of the Automobile,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 18, 1899, 2.

<sup>49</sup> Initially the term scorcher, like joyrider, was applied to bicyclists.

<sup>50</sup> “Solution to Scorching,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 11, 1901, 13.

1910, the city council had increased the speed to 12 miles per hour through the city and 20 miles per hour in the county.<sup>51</sup>

During these early years, outmatched police cars and motorcycles often had trouble catching up to motorists. A report in 1912 showed that on the road to the entertainment zone of Venice and the beaches, police used flashing smiles from “girl decoys” on the roadside to arrest a hundred speeding motorists.<sup>52</sup> Even when caught the penalties were often light, as most motorists were usually of a class that could afford paying speeding fines, and on more than a few occasions local magistrates forgave fines to speeding politicians and celebrities. Speed was a class privilege undermined by working-class hotrodders, and this extended to wealthy female drivers like premier motor girl Ruth Bekins, whose races made the daily news.<sup>53</sup> The newspapers did not articulate differences between male and female racers in this period, but claims of male superiority in driving increased in the 1920s; girls became identified as being prone to have car accidents, ones that were not caused by speed thrills, but instead, simple, everyday, driving routines.

In the early part of the century, most Angelinos saw cars as a novelty, the authorities treated bike and auto theft as similar crimes. In 1911, when Mexican authorities in Juarez apprehended the son of a wealthy Anglo for stealing a car, the youth replied that he was only joyriding and the *Times* as well as many powerful Angelinos concurred that the youth’s confession should exonerate him from any wrongdoing.<sup>54</sup> In a

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<sup>51</sup> “Speed Limits Change,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 15, 1924, F1.

<sup>52</sup> “Irresistible Mocking Smile is Fatal Lure,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 14, 1912, 16.

<sup>53</sup> From March 2 to April 14, 1911, 13 articles were written about Bekins’ races. One evocative example is “Gritty Motor Maids Ready For Race in Teeth of Storm,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1911, III1.

<sup>54</sup> “Joyriding Youth Apprehended in Mexico,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1911.

similar case in Los Angeles, a joyriding black youth, Arthur Sims, crashed into a palm tree, causing about \$600 in damage to the stolen car. The police court judge deemed the act a misdemeanor and let the youth free. However, a superior court judge ordered the youth arrested and set a \$2,500 bail. It is unclear how the class and race of the young offender affected the difference of opinion of the two judges. The case suggests that elite Angelinos saw young Anglos' interactions with cars as play, while the relationship of cars and non-Anglos were unclear but potentially defined as delinquent and criminal.<sup>55</sup>

Initially the cost of car ownership and the spatial limitations of the urban core severely limited automobile ownership to all but a few. Thus, jitney bus lines, informal bus services that were usually owner-operated, introduced working-class people to automobiles. Usually, jitney buses carried passengers for a minimal fee of around 5 cents, an amount that when all fares were totaled greatly cut into streetcar profits.<sup>56</sup>

The price and smaller number of vehicles in production limited the ownership of cars by working-class Angelinos until the mid-1930s. Nonetheless, the post-World War I migration to Los Angeles, the growth of the suburbs, and the increasing affordability of cars allowed middle-class Angelinos to purchase their own autos. The Ford Model T's starting price in 1909 was \$850 but by 1925 had been reduced to \$280—adjusted for inflation the 1925 Model T was priced at 18 percent of the 1909 cost. Solidly middle-class, Jim Hayes's family acquired their first car in 1933, a used 1928 Model A Ford

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<sup>55</sup> "Courts Clash Over the Law," *Los Angeles Times*, Dec 20, 1911, 6. On the 16, Sims claimed that he would have returned the vehicle, which at the time was only a misdemeanor. Michael Berger examined the relationship between race and automobiles in his history of the Jack Johnson/Barney Oldfield car race. Oldfield was Henry Ford's chosen racer and he handily defeated black boxer Johnson in a short race in 1910. The papers declared that Oldfield and the car had upheld "the white man's burden." Michael Berger, "The Great White Hope on Wheels," in *The Automobile and American Culture*, eds. David L. Lewis and Laurence Goldstein (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983).

<sup>56</sup> "The 'Jitney' Bus" and its Future" in Albert Shaw, ed., *The American Review of Reviews* (New York: Review of Reviews, 1915), 624.

Tudor sedan, after moving to South Pasadena from Santa Monica in 1933.<sup>57</sup> By the mid-1930s, middle-class high school students were driving to school—in 1935, Los Angeles High School’s student handbook gave campus parking directions crafted by the ACSC.<sup>58</sup>

Although many Angelinos were reluctant to become car owners, Maurice Strauss saw the future in Southern California’s auto market and in 1933 persuaded his business partners at the Pep Boys, in Philadelphia, to extend their franchise to the West Coast. The Pep Boys business thrived in Southern California, and with World War II shortages Pep Boys became a major supplier of clothing and tools for war workers. In the return to peace the Pep Boys—Manny, Moe, and Jack, a trio of names that symbolized the expansion of mass culture to hyphenated but white Americans—prepared to take a lion’s share of the auto-parts business in Southern California.

Car clubs and automotive associations began to multiply in the mid-1920s. Membership in a club or association was one of the few ways that auto enthusiasts could insure the proper maintenance and upkeep of cars, as auto mechanics were often unfamiliar with the standards of particular models and makes. These clubs pioneered the roads, put up signs indicating speed limits and driving directions, built rest stops with water for radiators, and offered the first license plates and driver’s licenses.<sup>59</sup> In some cases, organizations such as the Automobile Club of Southern California began to offer roadside assistance and insurance and became powerful political lobbyists for “the rights of the automobile.” From its birth on December 13, 1900, the ACSC also served a quasi-

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<sup>57</sup> Jim Hayes, “Kaboom, Swat, Clang,” *West*, April 30, 2006, 41.

<sup>58</sup> *Los Angeles High School Student Handbook* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles High School Student Body, 1935), AAA-LAHS.

<sup>59</sup> William J. Hickmott, *Where’s Your License: Early ‘Hot Rod’ Adventure* (Watkins Glen, NY: Century House, 1950).

public function in its administration of state registrations and driver's licenses, and the group retained a pool of detectives to hunt down car thieves.<sup>60</sup>

Most car clubs in the 1920s were not youth-oriented; they were created for the adult enthusiast, the hobbyist, whose leisure time and income allowed for tinkering in the garage. However, the auto designs of the Great Depression, and most famously the 1932 Ford Model A, changed the nature of car clubs and made the hobby of celebrities and upper-middle-class leisure accessible to middle- and working-class youth. Moreover, the first three decades of car stock provided a surplus of old vehicles on which young people could work, and the interchangeable Ford car parts of the early 1930s allowed groups of young people to assemble cars one piece at a time with less worry about compatibility. As seen in the previous chapter, the middle-class sought to organize youth activity through group work, and automobiles and car culture became the labor of youth car clubs.<sup>61</sup> Additionally, the speed parts that developed for the Model A allowed young working-class people to best upper-class coaches and their chauffeurs in the streets. According to Eldon Snapp, a 1930s hot rodder, "people wanted more speed, because these old guys who were wealthy could have a faster car but not when you'd ding your car up."<sup>62</sup> As police tried to regulate the speed of working-class car owners, events became clandestine, and races were held at night and on remote roads. With a name that clearly suggests subversive practices, Albert Drake cited the Night Riders of Fullerton as Southern California's first hot rodding club.

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<sup>60</sup> Richard R. Mathison, *Three Cars in Every Garage: A Motorist's History of the Automobile and the Automobile Club in Southern California* (New York: Doubleday, 1968).

<sup>61</sup> Hantover, "The Boy Scouts and the Validation of Masculinity." In the late 1970s, Hantover, David I. MacLoed and Joseph Kett discussed the growth of character building programs and group work for middle-class boys.

<sup>62</sup> Drake, *Hot Rodder!*, 9.

Fast Fords provided working-class hot rodders with a vehicle to challenge elite control of automobile culture, and at the same time, custom cars became a new consumer privilege of Los Angeles's elite. Hollywood cinema stars sought cars that could outshine the glamour of the Sunset Strip. These stars found their avatar in the guise of a young Los Angeles auto-designer named Harley D. Earl. The Earl Carriage Works was located downtown on Main Street, and in the transition from prairie schooners to automobiles the shop began producing props for Hollywood films. A child of the business, the young Earl began styling custom bodies for autos that replaced the boxy and unattractive carriage bodies of the day. Soon Earl became manager of the Don Lee Coach and Body Works, and by the early 1920s he was promoting pastel paints for the elite of Hollywood.<sup>63</sup> Among others, Hollywood stars Tom Mix and Fatty Arbuckle commissioned Earl to create unique customs. The *Times* reported that Arbuckle paid over \$28,000 for his custom at a time in which the Ford Runabout cost \$265 and the Chevrolet Superior Roadster cost \$490.<sup>64</sup> In 1926, Cadillac lured Earl to Detroit, and he soon became a consultant and then lead designer of GM's cars. For his first Detroit design the Cadillac LaSalle, Earl "leaned towards the demands of youth in that we reached out into the field of racing, and adopted some of the stream-line effects." He continued: "for young America, especially, these two-passenger cars are really five passenger cars in size-accommodating three in the driver's seat and two very comfortably in the rumble seat."<sup>65</sup> At his position as lead designer at GM, Earl sought to realize the futuristic dreams of

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<sup>63</sup> "Pastel Shades All Ago this Spring," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1922.

<sup>64</sup> Von Dutch, Ed Roth, and Robert Williams, *Kustom Kulture: Von Dutch, Ed "Big Daddy" Roth, Robert Williams and Others; C.R. Siecyk, Guest Curator, With Bolton Colburn* (Laguna Beach, CA: Laguna Art Museum in association with Last Gasp of San Francisco, 1993), 15.

<sup>65</sup> "He Designed the Car He's Riding In," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1927, G9.

young Americans, and in doing so gave his products a splash of youthfulness that would attract customers looking to purchase attention-getting cars.

As cars became more abundant in Los Angeles and traffic became a political rallying point, the city police and the sheriff's department focused their strategies on auto enforcement. Radio cars, speed traps and helicopters allowed authorities to compete with hopped-up vehicles. Sheriff Eugene Biscaluiz initiated these changes and gained the historical reputation as the modernizer of the Sheriff's Department.

In 1936, Harry Söderman and John O'Connell created a classification system for automobile thieves that began with "joy-riding" youths and progressed to professionals. Söderman and O'Connell argued that autos were most often taken from congested entertainment areas of the city such as the theater district, ballpark, and racetrack.<sup>66</sup> Developing the legal concept of theft, Jerome Hall explained the difficulty of distinguishing the techniques of "joy-riders" from professional thieves, as the near universal similarity of auto keys in the 1930s made theft simple. Nonetheless, Hall argued that the "joy-rider" was often young, not from a privileged background, had little or no access to automobiles, and expressed a desire for auto-mobility through theft.<sup>67</sup> By the late 1930s, County Supervisor John Anson Ford expressed concerns about the effect of automobiles on the lives of young Angelinos. In fact in the 1930s, automobile theft rates were higher in California than any other state, and Los Angeles County had the

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<sup>66</sup> Harry Söderman and John J. O'Connell, *Modern Criminal Investigation* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Co., 1945), 327.

<sup>67</sup> Jerome Hall, *Theft, Law and Society* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1952), 233.

highest rate in the State. Reflecting on this period, Ford thought that “the well-nigh universal use of automobiles multiplied the temptations of youth.”<sup>68</sup>

According to Beth Bailey, the movement of courtship from a young woman’s home to the back seat of her date’s car made it harder for young women to resist sexual advances from men.<sup>69</sup> In terms of sexual assault, cars allowed sexual predators to become mobile. Newspapers reported on the drive-by abduction of girls in the streets; after being raped and abused, these young women would be dropped off far from home.<sup>70</sup> In light of this, in the late 1930s, the Los Angeles Board of Supervisors began to draft programs and policies that specifically addressed the dangers cars posed for young people and cars, but war mobilization postponed the implementation of these programs.

While the city became a site of increasingly regulated and organized automobile usage, the nearby dry lakes provided a space with no governing authority and a smooth flat surface that stretched for miles on end. According to Wally Parks, founder of the National Hot Rod Association, his first trip to the lake in 1932 was a once in a lifetime experience. He described it as an experience in which “man, machine, and Mother Nature combined their unique and individual features into an overall spirit of challenge and achievement.”<sup>71</sup> The descriptions of the early lake meets by Parks and other hot rod historians loosely conform to Fredrick Jackson Turner’s frontier thesis—the dry lakes

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<sup>68</sup> Ford, *Thirty Explosive Years in Los Angeles County*, 149.

<sup>69</sup> As discussed in Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat*, 91.

<sup>70</sup> “Three Youths Sought for Ravishing Girl,” *California Eagle*, June 16, 1955, 2.

<sup>71</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hotrodding*, 6.

provided a space away from the city in which manhood could regenerate free from the degeneracy of civilization.<sup>72</sup>

In the early years, Muroc Lake was the site of the American Automobile Association speed trials. In May 1923, Joe Nikrent set a record of 108.24 miles per hour in a stripped down Buick. A year later, Tommy Milton ran 151.26 miles per hour in a Miller racecar. In 1927, Frank Lockhart, who had built his first car from spare parts at age 16, ran 171 miles per hour. In 1926, Lockhart won the Indianapolis 500 and was a hero among young auto enthusiasts. After the cessation of the AAA speed trials because of a refocus on races such as the Indianapolis 500, corporate groups took interest in organizing dry lake events. On March 25, 1931, the Gilmore Oil Company sponsored several dry lakes events. George Wright, owner of Bell Auto Parts, saw sponsorship as a good marketing move—and the Muroc Racing Association formed in 1931 with the sponsorship of Gilmore and Bell. In the mid 1930s, the cars transitioned from v4s to v8s and with the added power the dry lakes events became more elaborate as the different classes of cars required regulation.<sup>73</sup>

Muroc Racing Association held its first dry lake meet on May 8, 1932. These races were dangerous because multiple cars would race at once, creating a dust cloud that would obscure the vision of the drivers in the rear. In addition, the matches occurred early in the morning to avoid the stifling midday heat, and on more than one occasion test

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<sup>72</sup> The lakes were about a hundred miles northeast of LA. These lakes were formed by the runoff from bajadas that annually deposit water into a lake basin and as the water evaporates it creates a flat crust of alkaline silt. Muroc is the largest of the dry lakes at 44 square miles and from the 1920s to 1942 it was the site of numerous unsanctioned races and time trials. The lake was used for aerial bombing practice during WWII and a replica Japanese warship was built there. Dean Batchelor, *Dry Lakes and Drag Strips: The American Hot Rod* (Minneapolis: MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2002), 12; Turner and Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner*.

<sup>73</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hot Rodding*, 16; Tom Madigan and Benny Parsons, *Edelbrock: Made in USA* (MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2005), 47.

drivers in the dawn maimed and killed campers hidden by the dark. According to Jack Calori, “I was about 16 years old and it sure did make you feel odd to look over and see three dead bodies before you started out on a run at Muroc.”<sup>74</sup> In response to the safety concerns and the lack of organization of lake events, on November 7, 1937, after the last dry lake event of the year, representatives of the Hollywood Throttlers and the Glendale Sidewinders proposed a merger of all Los Angeles racing clubs. This proposed merger led to the Southern California Timing Association. The SCTA began with a handful of clubs and grew to twenty-three clubs by mid-1938.<sup>75</sup>

In 1938 and again in 1939, there were over 400 auto deaths in Los Angeles. The *Los Angeles Times* ran a column regular titled the “death toll,” a running tally of auto-related deaths. In 1940, the city and county had over a thousand auto-related deaths.<sup>76</sup> The most common proposed solutions to the “death toll” were the creation of “super” highways to help channel the flow of traffic, and the education of motorists and pedestrians on traffic safety. In the mid 1930s, the ACSC began to have weekend workshops for young drivers on driving safety, and this cultural concern helped shape the mission of the SCTA at the dry lakes.

In line with their dedication to safety, the SCTA cancelled its first race in 1938 on account of high winds. Nonetheless, over 10,000 fans showed up. By the end of 1938, the SCTA published a bimonthly racing newsletter. Within a couple of months, Wally Parks,

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<sup>74</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hot Rodding*, 50.

<sup>75</sup> Batchelor, *Dry Lakes and Drag Strips: The American Hot Rod*, 117.

<sup>76</sup> “Auto-Death Toll Sets New Mark,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 16, 1931, 1; “The Auto Death Toll,” September 2, 1934, 10; “Auto Deaths Exceed Bomb Toll in Britain,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1940, 18.

who would later form the National Hot Rod association, became the editor of the newsletter.<sup>77</sup>

World War II halted most racing events as the military acquired the dry lakes and the government rationed gasoline and tires. In addition, many of the rodders enlisted in the armed service. Others stayed in Los Angeles and honed their mechanical skills working at places such as North American Aviation Building in Downey or Lockheed in Burbank.<sup>78</sup> The SCTA had its Rosie the Riveter too: a young hot rodder named Veda Orr who created a newsletter that chronicled the experiences of the hot rod community in wartime. Orr would be the only woman to compete in the dry lakes competitions, and after the war she published the first pictorial work on the Southern California hot rod scene, and in doing so, created the template for *Hot Rod* magazine.<sup>79</sup> Before World War II the subculture of hot rodding had begun to move towards middle-class acceptability with an increasing regulatory apparatus that encourage safety, homologation and rewards for skill development; in the post-war period this subculture entered the mainstream with the governments' financial support of the masculine leisure/subcultural pursuits of GIs.

### **The Military-Industrial-Cultural Complex: Hot Rod Subculture Goes Mainstream**

The end of World War II and the subsequent entitlement programs for veterans, along with the growth of consumer culture and the end of rationing, served as catalysts for American car culture. After years of war-related rationing, the country hungrily turned toward the consumption of new automobiles. Unlike the utilitarian designs of the

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<sup>77</sup> Batchelor, *Dry Lakes and Drag Strips*, 121.

<sup>78</sup> Brock Yates, **The Hot Rod: Resurrection of a Legend** (Minneapolis: MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2003), 59.

<sup>79</sup> Veda Orr, *Veda Orr's Hot Rod Pictorial*, (Los Angeles: Floyd Clymer Publishing, 1949).

1930s Fords, the automakers of the late 1940s and 1950s followed GM's lead and focused on creating vehicles for specific consumer niches. This move severely reduced the interchangeability of car parts. Within the auto industry, competition among brands emphasized design: planned obsolescence developed as a result of the success of the auto industry to influence consumers to see cars as fashion symbols whose styles had a limited duration. As these new models came onto the market, young hot rodders continued to work on the older models of cars, but this subcultural pursuit would have a limited duration as both parts became less available to working-class youth because of financial limitations and the older cars became less thrilling because of innovations produced by veterans imbued with new engineering and mechanical skills.

Military service in World War II contributed to the organization of postwar youth culture. Young men came back from the military with resources to spend on leisure pursuits. The 52/20 hot rod club's name referenced the \$20 a week that servicemen received for a year after discharge. Veteran entitlements and privileges, and in particular the access to leisure time, allowed clubs to operate without interruption by work schedules. New members of the 52/20 were required to wear an oilcan around their neck for a week.<sup>80</sup>

Hot rod culture could be seen as an extension of military service, infused with the rituals of wartime masculinity, and hence women's direct participation was very limited. Through government-sponsored propaganda campaigns, women were encouraged to leave wartime careers and prepare the home for the return of soldiers. Women were spectators in hot rod culture and club organizations had very few female members.

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<sup>80</sup> Dean Batchelor, *The American Hotrod*, 75.

Initially, hot rod magazines pictured women as spectators at the dry lakes meets but as business sponsorship grew, magazines began to match models and pageant queens with winning cars and drivers.

Postwar youth culture was for the benefit of boys, and women's bodies circulated through an endless cycle of beauty pageants and competitions. Female bodies and "clean cars" became showpieces paraded as objects of masculine desire. Middle-class youth experts encouraged boys to model cars, boats and planes, and instructed young girls in another type of modeling in which their own body was the project. In 1946, Marilyn Buford, a 21-year-old blue-eyed brunette from Los Angeles, became Miss California in a pageant sponsored by the American Veterans Committee. On September 7, Buford became the first postwar Miss America and afterwards sought to channel her modeling success into a career in the movie business.<sup>81</sup> In the postwar period, veteran activities mainstreamed pre-war masculine subcultures and, concurrently, made little effort to elevate the cultural position of young women.

World War II also had a direct impact on the performance of automobiles. The increased technical skills of returning veterans allowed for car improvements, and the social structures of the war period that elevated cooperation provided models for the organization of new leisure communities.<sup>82</sup> Just as the GI Bill and loans to veterans had a role in developing suburbs, this bill had a tremendous impact on the shape of postwar car culture. The severance benefits gave GIs money to spend on their leisure pursuits, which

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<sup>81</sup> "Los Angeles Beauty Crowned 'Miss America,'" *Los Angeles Times*, September 8, 1946, 3.

<sup>82</sup> H.F. Moorhouse, *Driving Ambitions: An Analysis of the American Hot Rod Enthusiasm* (New York: Manchester University Press), 1991. Status, rank and order became hallmarks of postwar clubs. Coupled with the notion of the participatory father, this emphasis on organization led to the flourishing of controlled and ordered youth activities such as Little League, ASYO, and the Boy Scouts. Past field commanders could now serve as troop masters.

funded an expanding masculine consumer culture. The financial benefits given to veterans allowed many entrepreneurial leisure pioneers to transform subcultural pursuits into business and occupations. For example, after working as an engineer on B-17s, on the day of his discharge, March 13, 1946, Alex Xydias opened up So-Cal Speed Shop in Burbank. Xydias thought that military discipline had focused his mechanical skills and increased his awareness of safety issues. Although Xydias struggled to earn a living at the shop, within two years, he designed and fabricated some of the fastest dry lakes racers of the day.<sup>83</sup>

The dry lakes soon became a weekend destination for veterans and their hot rods. On April 28, 1946, the SCTA resumed racing and held five meets that year. By 1948, the SCTA had 500 members and 31 member clubs. In 1948, Bill Burke introduced his belly tank racer, a design that mounted a teardrop shaped aircraft fuel tank onto a roadster frame. Burke's racer and the cars that followed embraced the principle of streamlining to the fullest and represented the collaborative relationship between the consumer culture, the military and hot rod culture. On Tuesday, October 14, 1947, Chuck Yeager became the first person to break the sound barrier in a level flight in a Bell X-1 rocket plane over the Mojave dry lakes and racers incorporated the first man-made sonic boom into the lore of the lakes. Small shops and garages became the staging grounds for the evolution of the lakes racers.<sup>84</sup>

After his service in the US Navy in World War II, George Willis was drawn to Southern California because of its auto-related industries and hotrod subculture. Born in

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<sup>83</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hot Rodding*, 23.

<sup>84</sup> **Mark Christensen and Tony Thacker, *So-Cal Speed Shop: The Fast Tale of the California Racers Who Made Hot Rod History* (Minneapolis: MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2005).**

Brainerd, Minnesota, in 1927, George Willis decided to settle in Pomona, California.<sup>85</sup> Willis worked as a car mechanic and quickly became interested in engine performance. Willis became active in hot rod racing and embraced the challenge of making his car a little bit faster than the competition, a challenge not based solely on monetary resources but technical skills and imagination. Willis was not alone in his choice to stay in Southern California and choose a career in automobiles. From Glendale to Pomona, and in cities like Compton, Inglewood, and Torrance, returning GIs settled in Los Angeles and opened small auto shops. “Speed Shops” catered to racers and became centers of hot rodding and youth car clubs in their local communities. The distribution of the speed shops is significant in that most originated in communities that were on the periphery of the urban core: white suburbs and incorporated small towns.<sup>86</sup> In this framework, the geographic and community advantages afforded white rodders—including police officers who sanctioned youth car culture—were naturalized, and this re-enforced the notion that hot rodding was a white only activity.

Auto racing became a sensational growth sport in the postwar period. Participation in this culture was diverse and became instituted in the rituals of American boyhood. These rituals followed the principle of age segmentation and boys could move from making models cars to slot cars, soapbox derby cars, and 1/4 and 1/2 cars before they graduated to full-sized automobiles. Segmentation allowed promoters to distinguish legitimate middle-class leisure from the premature and delinquent use of cars by young people. Built for speed, midget cars were not vehicles in which young people could

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<sup>85</sup> George Willis interview by Margaret Parratt, November 23, 1982, O.H. 1771, Center for Oral and Public History, California State University Fullerton, Fullerton, California [hereinafter COPH-CSUF].

<sup>86</sup> Christensen, *So-Cal Speed Shop*, 36; Jay Carnine, *California Hot Rodder* (Victoria, Australia: Graffitti Publications, 2000), 91.

socialize and challenge the measures of social control. Midget car racing was very popular in the mid-1940s, and working-class people could afford to attend Gilmore Stadium and the Ascot Speedway to watch 1/4 and 1/2 cars race around the track. Older teenagers participated in the midget races, and some hot rodders and lowriders honed their mechanic and racing skills working with midget-cars.<sup>87</sup> After World War II spectator track auto-racing became a pastime of the masses and garage mechanics, rather than solely a sport of the elite.

Although particular venues allowed young people to satisfy their desires for speed, the street was the primary venue in which young people could race. Impromptu street racing occurred, but clubs often organized night races after club meetings—members would close off streets by diverting traffic, light the raceway with headlights, mark quarter miles, and provide timers and a starter. Particular streets became favorite destinations for racers and observers and served as proving grounds until closed down by law enforcement. The Trompers of Eagle Rock would go to Glenoaks Boulevard in Burbank to meet up with other clubs to race, and sometimes races would be organized through the “interclub grapevine” and the Trompers would ride to Pomona or Southgate.<sup>88</sup> Often hot rodders would know where and when local police would be active, often as a result of family and neighborhood connections, and clubs could then choose a site accordingly.<sup>89</sup> Without sanctioned bodies and adult sponsorship, these impromptu car club activities resembled popular representations of teenage delinquency.

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<sup>87</sup> Fernando Ruelas interview by author, March 17, 2007.

<sup>88</sup> *Trompers of Eagle Rock: 60th Anniversary Commemorative Pictorial Biography* (Los Angeles: Trompers, 2005), 48.

<sup>89</sup> Ron Jorgenson interview by author, August 15, 2006.

Tragic accidents of street racers comprised only a small percentage of yearly traffic collisions, but these incidents were sensationalized in the local papers and night racing became stigmatized as a delinquent youth activity. In 1940, after an accident on Riverside Drive, the captain of the police Traffic Investigation Squad, William Parker, described the racing as “suicide clubs of midnight owls.” Articles referenced the mysterious 100-Mile-an-Hour Club and the Coffin Patrol, describing them as “organizations addicted to high-speed driving in hopped up cars.”<sup>90</sup> The police eventually claimed to have apprehended six members of the “100-Mile-an-Hour Club” in 1948. But as most were teenagers at the time of arrest, it is very doubtful that any had been involved in street racing before the war, and they probably appropriated the name from the popular media or hotrodding lore.<sup>91</sup>

While politicians and the local media had sanctioned races by wealthy Anglo drivers in the 1910s, by the 1940s the new crop young racers encountered increasing prohibition of street races. In early 1947, 31 young people aged 15 to 18 participated in a “park-in” on the intersection of Sierra Madre and Villa Boulevards in Pasadena. Speaking for the group, eighteen-year-old Bill Mock told reporters,

I believe that the whole controversy has finally come to a head now, and all of us are forming a committee which will be glad to co-operate with police in stamping out ‘wildcat’ racing in public traffic areas. However, we feel that something should be done to allow us to race in legally designated places at certain times.<sup>92</sup>

In the late 1940s, hot rodders gathered en masse, with faster cars and greater numbers than local police forces, presenting a political body that community leaders were

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<sup>90</sup> “Night Racers Face Curb,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13 1940, A1; “Youths Suspected of Street Racing Escape Jail”, *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1941, A1.

<sup>91</sup> “Police Report Roundup of Hot-Rod Theft Ring,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 1948, 22.

<sup>92</sup> “Capture 31 Youths with ‘Souped-up’ Jalopies,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 18, 1947, A1.

forced to negotiate with. Young rodders were willing to give up the culture of night racing if they were authorized to race at particular times and given sanctioned spaces to race.

For the most part, many police officers and local politicians also supported a masculine and competitive car culture of speed and sought to validate some aspects of the culture by promoting sanctioned races in their own communities. In 1946-47, in response to a rise in accidents, Pomona Chief of Police J. B. Ashurst began to allow weekly drag races at the west end of the Pomona Fairgrounds. Ashurt's action curbed auto accidents and injuries and helped consolidate and organize the local hot rod community.<sup>93</sup> In 1950, "Mile Square," the first commercial dragstrip, opened in Tustin, California on an abandoned airfield.<sup>94</sup>

Beginning in 1946, the Greater Los Angeles National Safety Council, led by Col. F. C. Lynch, launched a campaign to fix the minimum age for the issuance of drivers' licenses at 16. Additionally, in the same year, the state's Motor Vehicle Advisory committee, seeking to curb the "hot rods" of Los Angeles County, sought to outlaw any speed contest on public roads. The GLANSC and MVA also suggested that drivers' education classes be incorporated into the public school system. By late 1949, the Californian legislature raised the minimum driving age to 16, the Los Angeles City Schools offered driving instruction at local high schools, and state laws and local ordinances prohibited most forms of street racing.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> George Willis interview, 1-2.

<sup>94</sup> H. G. Reza, "They're Over 80, Doing 90: Age, Eat Their Dust," *Los Angeles Times*, May 31, 2003, B8.

<sup>95</sup> "Our 14-year-old Automobile Drivers," *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1946, A4.

The competition between the *Herald-Express* and the *Los Angeles Times* drove the increasingly sensational identification of hot rodders as the new “street menace.” In the Hearst papers, every car driven by a teen was labeled a “hot rod” and on one occasion the *Herald* claimed that police had “rounded up hot rodders in the L.A. Riverbed” when in fact they had come simply to observe teens racing their non-hotrod sedans and coupes.<sup>96</sup> The climax of the hot rod hysteria occurred on March 3rd, 1948, when 32 police officers raided a hot rod “drag” on Sepulveda Boulevard in the San Fernando Valley and arrested 96 participants. Municipal Judge Joseph Call gave 35 of the hot rodders’ jail sentences and revoked their licenses.<sup>97</sup> While most of the participants of the drag were local white youth, a young Mexican rodger Willie Vega was given the harshest sentence. In a similar case, less than six months earlier, a municipal judge had sentenced Chinese youth Robert D. Lee to 60 days in prison for racing, while white Joseph Nitti was given a 15-day jail sentence by Judge A.D. Boone for the vehicular manslaughter of an 11-year-old.<sup>98</sup> In the reporting of these cases, both the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Herald-Examiner* only made notice of the ethnicity of drivers when they were nonwhite.

In general, while the young rodders were regarded with suspicion, as early as 1946 the *Los Angeles Times* and the National Safety Council recognized the difference between the members of the SCTA and the speed hungry youngsters that called “any battered jalopy a hot rod.” According to Lynch, members of the SCTA—“hot rod

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<sup>96</sup> Dean Batchelor, *American Hotrod*, 160; Ron Jorgenson interview.

<sup>97</sup> “Judge Deals Out Jail Terms to 35 Hot Rodders,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1948, A1.

<sup>98</sup> “Two Hot Rod Driver’s Jailed for 60 Days,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1947, A1.

boys”—spent money on their cars and refused to participate in events that could potentially endanger their autos.<sup>99</sup>

In the 1940s, studies of car theft revealed auto theft was not closely associated with the working class but was actually a “favored group” delinquency among white youth from middle-class neighborhoods. These thieves were from stable homes and had “good” peer relationships. Wattenberg and Balistrieri found that these youth were “socialized delinquents,” who clearly responded to the codes of their peer group but were not responsive to ordinances and laws.<sup>100</sup> By the mid-1950s, evidence shifted, suggesting that young people from delinquent areas were more likely to take autos in groups for “planned cruising” or stripping autos for parts. The middle-class offender was now more likely a lone operator, one who took cars impulsively and for kicks. Martin Bolger, a middle-class youth of the latter type, made it a habit of “borrowing” patrol cars from the local police stations and cruising the city posing as an officer.<sup>101</sup>

By the 1950s, middle-class youth could claim automobiles as a right and group identification through car work was sanctioned: an obsession with cars was no longer dangerous to middle-class youth, because cars were readily available and working with cars had become a hobby, a sanctioned leisure pursuit.

Youth car clubs in the early 1950s were a mixture of working-class desires for reputation and middle-class aspirations for respectability. Club members pooled resources and skills, and individual club members developed skills to benefit the whole. For example, a club may have had among its members a welder, painter, and

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<sup>99</sup> “Leeside,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 14, 1946, A4.

<sup>100</sup> W. W. Wattenberg and J. Balistrieri, “Automobile Theft: A Favored-Group Delinquency,” *American Journal of Sociology* 57.6 (May 1952), 575-579.

<sup>101</sup> “Youth Takes Joy Ride in Sheriff’s Cars,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 20, 1958, 26.

glassworker. Adult affiliates passed skills to club members and then the techniques would be distributed to the whole. In local shops and neighborhood garages, young people shared and developed these skills. At their height, young people in car clubs played central roles in the transmission of technical and cultural knowledge. Club networks, shows, races, and later magazines filtered technological knowledge and invention and labor in particular designs, parts and styles allowed some club members to turn their leisure pursuits into careers. The growing market value of car culture legitimated club activity as a purposeful and potentially financially lucrative middle-class youth activity.

The postwar high school was also an important site for the development of youth car culture. The turn towards vocational training and transformation of the school as a place to train skilled workers allowed teenage car fantasies to merge with school activities. Students would draw cars in drafting classes, and many club plaques were forged in metal shops.<sup>102</sup> While cars were rarely fully assembled in high school shops, the shop tools were often used to modify or fabricate parts. Furthermore, material, metal, fuel and fabric from shops were often surreptitiously taken and quietly incorporated into student's cars.<sup>103</sup>

Furthermore, like the street, the school's parking lot became a venue for exhibition. By the mid-1950s, both Garfield and Los Angeles High Schools newspapers had recurrent columns describing student cars, including the specific mechanic and body modification to each vehicle. By the 1960s, the technology of photo-reproduction allowed these columns to include pictures of the hot rod of the week. As small stages, the

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<sup>102</sup> Ron Jorgenson interview; *Trompers of Eagle Rock*.

<sup>103</sup> Carnine, *California Hot Rodder*, 161.

high school parking lot prepared students for competition at larger custom auto shows. In addition, high school newspapers gave students information about these larger shows such as the Motor Revue and Motorama at the Pan Pacific Auditorium. On October 28, 1954, Los Angeles County sponsored the first All County High School Auto Craft Contest channeling the shop work of the county high schools into one parking lot.<sup>104</sup>

By the early 1950s, youth car clubs reflected the racial segregation of L.A.'s neighborhoods. In this period, local mechanic shops and gas stations sponsored car clubs by providing critically needed spaces and tools, and most important adult legitimacy. Family garages and workspaces were also popular places for club meetings. While much time was spent working on cars, members would also plan cruises, dances, picnics and other events at club meetings. Discussions of style and group presentation were a central element of car club meetings. Matching hats, rings and jackets, and club plates or club plaques became symbols of group identity and recognition. All was not leather jackets; the Trompers of Eagle Rock decided to celebrate their service in the military by wearing Navy hats and peacoats at races and car shows.<sup>105</sup> As some clubs became more focused on social activities than racing, they adopted formal wear so that the group could look sharp at dances and in club pictures.<sup>106</sup>

Car clubs and youth clubs in general took on new social significance in Los Angeles in the 1950s. By late summer 1950, all underage dances in Los Angeles County required prior approval by the Police Commission, a joint county and city agency. The

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<sup>104</sup> "All County High School Auto Contest," *Belvedere Citizen*, October 21, 1954. Ford and Dodge also sponsored high school automotive contests in this period. "60 Students Compete in Car Repair Contest," *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1955; "77 Southland Youngsters Win in Design Contest," *Los Angeles Times*, August 3, 1955, 7.

<sup>105</sup> *Trompers of Eagle Rock*, 1.

<sup>106</sup> Sac Mesa and Mike Roman interview by author, March 19, 2006.

dance ordinance stipulated that all events would have adequate lighting, including lighted and supervised parking lots. In addition, no patron could leave the dance and return.

Adult sponsors could also bar from entry those without proper dress and those who failed to maintain civilized conduct. All people twenty and older, those of marrying age, could not attend these dances.<sup>107</sup> These city regulations created a segregated youth culture that authorized youth clubs to initiate and run dances and other social activities for young people. With proper sponsorship, a youth club could organize and promote a youth dance in a period in which commercial promoters were barred from participation in this market.

While clubs gave agency to youth groups, cars themselves allowed young people to skirt the 10pm curfew law for all youth under 18 unaccompanied by parent or legal guardian.<sup>108</sup> This curfew gave police the authority to arrest any underage person at night and potentially any of their adult companions. For example, after a struggle with police officers, Julietta Lambert found out, it didn't matter that she was 18; her friend was 16, and therefore Lambert was an adult contributing to her friend's delinquency.<sup>109</sup> As described in a Community Coordinating Council pamphlet, this law applied to those who "hang around" street corners or other public places and not to a person on his way home. It parenthetically added that "it is all right for young people to stop on the way home for refreshments or other legitimate purposes so long as their actions are reasonable and they conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen."<sup>110</sup> The city and county governments did not want young people in the streets; seeking to avoid confrontations like the Zoot Riots

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<sup>107</sup> West Group, *West's Annotated California Codes* (St. Paul: West Publishing Company, 1954), 259.

<sup>108</sup> See discussion of curfew in Chapter 1.

<sup>109</sup> "Two Teen-Age She-Tigers Hit, Kick, Bite Policemen," *California Eagle*, 1956, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Wilshire Community Coordinating Council, *Laws for Youth: Tentative Draft* (Los Angeles: County of Los Angeles, 1956), Box 34, Folder "1956," JAF-Huntington.

and the less known jitterbug jazz riots, officials promoted a decentralized youth culture organized by the growing consumer ethos of Los Angeles's communities.<sup>111</sup>

Wally Parks and Robert Petersen worked diligently to combat the negative image of hot rodders. Petersen moved to Los Angeles from Barstow in the mid-1940s and soon found work in the publicity department at MGM studios. After a staff reduction at MGM, Petersen joined together with other ex-MGM staffers to publicize a Mad Man Muntz car show at the Los Angeles Armory. Based on the format of *Tailwaggers*, a magazine begun by his father about celebrity dogs, Petersen and a friend, Bob Lindsay, offered the first issue of *Hot Rod* in January 1948. Within two years and with the success of Hot Rod, Petersen began to publish *Motor Trend* and *Cycle*. To protect his financial interest and growing publishing business, Petersen chose to promote the image of the hot rodder as a model white middle-class male teen. Petersen sought to transform the outlaw image of hot rodders and racing and arranged meetings between hot rodders, the police and women's groups.<sup>112</sup> According to Petersen,

They thought it was crazy. They thought the title was kind of racy. At that time we were having problems with the police. They were going to shut down hot rods. I used to go before big groups and try to sell hot rod stories and said, "If we could get all hot rodders off the streets and into drag strips, that would be wonderful." So we did that.<sup>113</sup>

Wally Parks was a dry lakes spectator in the early 1930s and a member of the Huntington Park Road Runner Club when the SCTA formed. Parks coined the term "drag

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<sup>111</sup> Anthony Macias, "Bringing Music to the People: Race, Urban Culture, and Municipal Politics in Postwar Los Angeles." *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004).

<sup>112</sup> A discussion of Petersen's lobbying of women's groups is found in Drew Hardin, "Sema Pioneers," *Sema News* (March 2004): 88-89.

<sup>113</sup> Jennifer Netherby, "Magazine Mogul—Robert E. Petersen," *Los Angeles Business Journal*, June 19, 2000.

race” in 1939 as editor of the SCTA’s *Racing News*.<sup>114</sup> After the war, Parks became the secretary and general manager of the SCTA and in 1949 became the editor of *Hot Rod*. Parks was *Hot Rod*’s liaison with racers and a direct link to the Southern California clubs. Looking to enhance the image of hot rodding, on September 19, 1948, the SCTA gathered 300 club members from 36 clubs at the Lincoln-Mercury plant in Maywood, California and a Los Angeles Municipal judge administered the National Safety Council’s pledge to its members.<sup>115</sup> This illocutionary initiation ritual transformed potential delinquents into entrepreneurial middle-class youth who would promote safe driving and cooperate with law enforcement. In addition, this event mechanically harmonized industry, law enforcement, media and youth culture. Parks’ motto for the SCTA was “Sponsor of the World’s safest automotive speed trials,” and a traffic conviction prohibited participation in matches. As a promoter of hot rods, Parks understood that a larger organizational body could provide the culture greater prestige and acceptance. In 1951, Parks started the National Hot Rod Association, whose mission was to sanction hot rods and drag races across the country.<sup>116</sup>

In 1950, in *American Quarterly*, Gene Balsley sought to introduce academia to the youth culture of hot rodding.<sup>117</sup> Balsley described hot rodders’ search for broader cultural legitimacy and how they sought to dispel the negative image of Hot Rod Happy—the popularly depicted cartoon delinquent whose enthusiasm for cars led him to make foolish decisions. Balsley’s article argued that hot rodders had a crude taxonomy

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<sup>114</sup> Batchelor, *The American Hot Rod*, 121.

<sup>115</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hot Rodding*, 73.

<sup>116</sup> Robert C. Post, *High Performance: The Culture and Technology of Drag Racing, 1950-2000* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 57.

<sup>117</sup> Gene Balsley, “The Hot-Rod Culture,” *American Quarterly* 2.4 (Winter 1950), 353-358.

that ranked cars and drivers into categories of sub-cultural authenticity. Cars that only had surface or bolt-on speed parts were of the lowest rank, and the drivers of these “shotrods” were the source of accidents and other law enforcement problems associated with hot rods. Real rodders had significant mechanical skills and could radically alter the car’s engine and body, including installing safety features such as disc or hydraulic brakes. Balsely interpreted car modification practiced by rodders as an example of cultural participation and creativity within mass consumerism. Balsely based his theories of the relationship between mass goods and the consumer upon the work of David Riesman and Reuel Denney,

As the hot rodder visibly breaks down the car as Detroit made it, and builds it up again with his own tools and energies, so the allegedly passive recipient of movies or radio, less visibly but just as surely, builds up his own amalgam of what he reads, sees, and hears; and in this, far from being manipulated, he is often the manipulator.<sup>118</sup>

Balsely’s taxonomy of authenticity and participation and the Petersen/Parks’ promotion of the young male middle-class enthusiast collaborated to create a powerful cultural ethos that legitimated young people’s enthusiasm for cars and speed.

By the early 1950s, further restrictions on young drivers failed to get enough public support, and a culture that feared and doubted the value of hot rodders began to exhibit an accepting if not suspicious view of the relationship between cars and youth. In the spring of 1963, Californian Assemblyman Alan G. Patte introduced a bill to increase

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<sup>118</sup> David Riesman and Reuel Denney, “A Research Program in American Leisure,” 4; quoted in Balsley “The Hot-Rod Culture,” 357. Riesman, Denney and Balsely presented a redemptive vision of mass culture in which the consumer is free to manipulate goods and thereby imbue them with alternative values and meaning. The opposite view, often associated with the Frankfurt School, stated that the mass produced goods of the cultural industry Nonetheless, the value young people put on cars was already mediated by mass culture before modification. Neither Frankfurt school’s nor the “American Leisure” vision of mass culture is sufficient to explain the complex relationship between mass culture and youth culture.

the minimum driving age to 18. High school student Len Krup argued that the lack of a modern transportation system would make the bill unfeasible and that “right now it would be too hard for teen-agers to get around if they couldn’t drive.”<sup>119</sup> Opponents argued that this bill would radically alter the contours of teen-age life, and teen-agers across California rallied against the bill. By June, the California Congress of Parent-Teacher Associations, the Traffic Safety Foundation and the California Automobile Association also opposed the bill and it was killed in the Senate Transportation Committee.<sup>120</sup> The shift in adult attitudes towards hot rods was evident in local programs by the mid-1950s. In 1954, members of the Los Angeles County Youth Commission discussed promoting car clubs as a solution to juvenile delinquency. A closer look at this meeting reveals how the city came to promote car clubs from the 1950s to the mid 1960s.

During the January meeting of the LACYC in 1954, city authorities, including William B. McKesson, William Parker, Eugene Biscailuz and John Anson Ford, discussed the “unnecessary hysteria” surrounding juvenile delinquency.<sup>121</sup> In McKesson’s opinion, newspapers and radio sensationalized the lives of young people and produced a discourse that made gangs and youth activities appear pathological. Specifically, the media used the term “gang” in relationship to any violent activity that occurred within the working-class and minority sections of the city, and McKesson gave numerous examples of when “gang” was inappropriately used. Alternatively, Police

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<sup>119</sup> Stan Mandel, “Raise Minimum Age? Feelings Mixed on Driving Bill,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1963, F1.

<sup>120</sup> “High Schoolers Protest: Bill Raising Driving Age to 18 Advances,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 1, 1963, 8; “Bill to up Minimum Driving Age Killed,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 19, 1963, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Los Angeles County Youth Commission, *The Current Delinquency Situation, January 20, 1954* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County, 1954), 1-10, Box 34, JAF-Huntington. Information found within the following two paragraphs are from this document.

Chief Parker saw juvenile delinquency as a product of the rough shift from rural to urban living that caused societal dislocation. From yet another perspective, Sheriff Biscailuz, the persistent modernizer, approached the problem scientifically; juvenile patrol officers would examine the places young people congregated—drive-ins, malt shops and playgrounds. In learning about the lives of juveniles the officers could work with the delinquency control section of the department to identify gangs. If the groups appeared to have good motives, officials would sponsor their activities. The first activity Biscalluz identified with “good” motives was a “hot rod club with a recognized sponsor.” In this framework, good youth were in groups with sanctioned sponsors, while delinquent youth were in autonomous gangs outside of the realm of state, adult and parental control.

At the end of the meeting, George Putnam from KTTV asked whether hot rod clubs and drag strips might be a practical approach to the delinquency problem.<sup>122</sup> Captain Harold Stalling of the Sheriff’s Crime Prevention Division stated that when supervised the clubs were a great benefit to youthful members and that the Juvenile Crime Division was working closely with the National Association of Hot Rod Clubs. Clubs in the pre-war period had been ad-hoc, but in efforts to cleanup the subculture, the clubs began to resemble middle-class fraternal organizations. Mrs. O.H. Spradling, president of the public welfare commission, issued teen-age dance permits to several of the clubs and declared that the clubs were well organized. Lastly, Mr. Hal Hodge, president of the Federation of Community Coordinating Councils, said that the Council had begun collecting information about hot rodders, dragstrips, insurance and supervision

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<sup>122</sup> In 1955 George Putman won the yearly award for his work with juveniles from the Conference of California Juvenile Officers. Jack Webb, of television show *Dragnet*, was the only civilian to win the award before Putnam. “George Putnam Wins Youth Officers Award,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1955, 1.

in approximately 100 communities in Los Angeles in order to distribute a guide to parents and authorities.

In 1953, Sid Davis directed a short film *The Cool Hot Rod*.<sup>123</sup> Sponsored by the Socony-Vacuum Corporation, now popularly known as Exxon-Mobil, the film shot in Inglewood, CA, told the story of a new boy in school who learns to curb his appetite for speed, works on his auto, and receives a scholarship from “Detroit” to learn more about cars. The film production crew included the staff of *Hot Rod* magazine, the Inglewood Police Department, and two youth car clubs, the 13-20 Club and the Rambling Rods. The film began with a historical and cultural lesson:

Since World War II a new hobby has appeared in the United States—the sport of building and racing converted stock cars. For a time, these ‘hot rods’ were considered a menace. But now, more than 2.5 million young men and women have banded together in clubs and timing associations, dedicated to safety and safe driving, and determined to give the ‘hot rod’ a new, respected meaning.

Through the film, young people learned that “squares” raced in the street and that dragstrips were the only place to test automobiles. The film professed to offer “America’s new safe and progressive hobby,” and although legendary racer Mexican-American Joaquin Arnett, founder of the Bean Bandits Club, appeared in the film, on the whole, the film branded hot rodding as both a white and middle-class activity.<sup>124</sup> In this example, a corporation with direct financial interests in promoting car culture, thereby selling more gasoline, attempted to tame and co-opt hot rodding subculture by associating it with the practices of white middle-class youth.

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<sup>123</sup> Sid Davis, dir., *The Cool Hot Rod*, Sid Davis Productions, 1953.

<sup>124</sup> Leah M. Kerr suggested that the Bean Bandits were often denied proper recognition because of their marginal status in the hot rod community, being both young and of mixed race. Leah M. Kerr, “Records???, We Don’t Need No Stinking Records,” *Drag Racing Monthly*, December 1997, [http://www.aeclassic.com/bean\\_bandits/p4.html](http://www.aeclassic.com/bean_bandits/p4.html) (accessed January 20, 2009).

Examining how automakers co-opted hot rodding culture provides a model through which to understand the relationship between youth culture, American desires and mass culture in mid 20th century America. In 1940 a Ford Roadster could be put together for around \$75, but owing to their popularity, in 1948, a 1932 Ford roadster could be found advertised for as much as \$900.<sup>125</sup> By 1960, the price of a 1930s Ford had declined and hovered around \$400, but in reality the period of the 1930s Ford had been surpassed because of the advances in speed equipment, and the new Ford Thunderbirds directly incorporating the speed designs of hot rodders started around \$3000.<sup>126</sup> Hot rods were sanitized for the market, their dangerous elements were suppressed or hidden, and the hot rodding subculture was authorized to operate within frameworks of adult sanction and commercial entrepreneurialism. By the mid-1960s, young Angelinos would pay to watch racers at regional drag strips. The famous Lions Drag Strip opened on October 9, 1955, on the grounds of an old railroad-switching yard in Wilmington. The popularity of its Saturday “Date Night” doubled attendance and generated thousands of dollars for the charities of the Lion’s Club International.<sup>127</sup>

### **Lowriding: Mid-20th Century Youth Culture of East Los Angeles**

Working-class Mexican American, black and Asian youth were some of the earliest South Californian hot rodders. However, their ethnicity denied them status and recognition within the hot rodding culture of the postwar period. Class, ethnic and racial barriers encouraged working-class and nonwhite youth to develop a culture that rejected

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<sup>125</sup> Genat, *The Birth of Hot Rodding*, 89.

<sup>126</sup> “Classified Ads,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1960 B34; “Classified Ads,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1960, L57; “Classified Ads,” *The Los Angeles Times*, January 29, 1960, B24.

<sup>127</sup> Steve Alexander, “The Last Drag Race,” *Hot Rod Magazine*, February, 1973, 68-73.

speed as the ultimate value of automotive design and elevated the social aspects of automobiles. In East Los Angeles, car clubs adapted to fit the community's needs and incorporated ethnic cultural influences into youth car culture that were not a part of mainstream American consumer culture. These forces forged a new subculture of lowriding.

In East Los Angeles, the sponsorship of car clubs began in the early 1950s. At this time, East Los Angeles was an ethnically diverse community, and with increasing immigration was gradually becoming the center of the Mexican community in Los Angeles. Car clubs served as both a point of assimilation for young Mexican-Americans and a point of sub-cultural innovation. Mexican-American youth participation in school activities, clubs and leadership positions was severely limited, and car clubs became an alternative vehicle in which Mexican-Americans could become active in community life and take leadership roles. Car clubs provided a social space and group on the periphery of the school, family and church, a space in which young people controlled the contours of their own culture.

On September 9, 1954, the ELA Drifters held a "Traffic Hop." The advertising slogan for the dance ran, "Remember life is sweet. So turn off the heat and drive safely."<sup>128</sup> The "Traffic Hop" was held in Laguna Park and both John Anson Ford and Edward Royball attended. A week later on September 16, local car clubs participated in the Mexican Independence Day parade.<sup>129</sup> Many youth groups had participated in the parade before, but this time adult groups sanctioned the participation of car clubs and the

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<sup>128</sup> "Traffic Hop' Opens Campaign for Car Safety," *Eastside Journal*, September 2, 1954, 2.

<sup>129</sup> "Car Clubs to Participate in Parade," *Eastside Journal*, September 9, 1954, 1.

practice of cruising at the event. In early 1954, David Roque's articles in the *Belvedere Citizen* strove to give car clubs a positive image by promoting them as a means of deterring young people from gangs and a way to introduce them to group work and good driving.<sup>130</sup> Roque's reports on the ELA Drifters fit the model set by the promoters like NHRA president Wally Parks. The Drifters club, whose plaque pictured a tramp floating on a white cloud, began in 1952 and initially the members were only interested in racing. However, a bond with gas station owner Sam Nevada and later real-estate developer Reynaldo Ochoa opened the possibility of affiliating with adult sponsors and redirecting the club's activities from racing. The Drifters performed inspections of members' cars and pledged to "operate my car at all times and under all circumstances with utmost consideration for human life."<sup>131</sup> Lastly, the Drifters had democratic elections and worked collectively on cars and events such as dances and parades.

By 1953 law enforcement attempted to co-opt the car clubs to regulate the youth car culture. In early 1954, Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz announced a new program to stem juvenile delinquency. In response to cruising youth, a special unit of five patrol cars would rove the streets "and question youth found roaming the streets." According to Biscailuz, "the heart of the idea" was to build constructive youth programs: "Hot-Rod clubs" were first on his list.<sup>132</sup> Clubs would also schedule visits with Officer Gordon M. Browning of the traffic education bureau of the LAPD who would show groups the film

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<sup>130</sup> "Drifters Show Proper Guidance, Nets Results, Better Citizens," *Belvedere Citizen*, January 7, 1954, 1.

<sup>131</sup> "ELA Drifters Launch Safety Drive Here," *Belvedere Citizen*, August 19, 1954, 1.

<sup>132</sup> "Sheriff Announces 3-Point Program to Curb Juvenile Delinquency," *Belvedere Citizen*, January 14, 1954, 1.

“Cool Hot Rod.”<sup>133</sup> Browning was also the secretary of the National Hot Rod Association.

Very soon “standard” youth organizations and fraternal orders became involved in the promotion of affiliated car clubs. The Santa Maria CYO sponsored the Road Knights and Knightettes, and the local ACSC promoted the Wolfhounds. The *Eastside Sun* featured the sanctioned clubs as community organizations. The Wolfhounds were an integrated car club, including both whites and Latinos, and when George Gonzales won the presidency in 1954 it made front-page news.<sup>134</sup> The paper praised the Wolfhounds for having a board of judges to blackball members whose cars failed to meet California’s Motor Vehicle Code. The paper worked to distinguish good clubs from “gangs,” and in reporting the investigation of a “youth dance slaying” made it clear that the group involved was not the Honeydrippers car club sponsored by the East Los Angeles Rotary Club.<sup>135</sup> As a representative of the ELA Drifters at a Rotary Club meeting, Fernando Figueroa closed his introduction to his club with, “I leave you with one request. All we ask from the adults is tolerance, respect and guidance.”<sup>136</sup>

The growing number and legitimacy of the car clubs in East LA led to the creation of a parent organization. The Federation of Social and Car Clubs came out of a joint club meeting, similar to the meeting that spawned the SCTA. The clubs decided to elect a president and pool their resources, both monetary and volunteer time. The FSAC mission was to enhance the image of East LA youth, work for brotherhood, promote good

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<sup>133</sup> “Show Safety Film at Car Club Show,” *Belvedere Citizen*, February 11, 1954, 3.

<sup>134</sup> “Wolfhounds Elect Gonzales New President,” *Eastside Journal*, January 27, 1954, 1.

<sup>135</sup> “Police Quiz Eight in Youth Dance Slaying,” *Eastside Sun*, June 23, 1954, 1.

<sup>136</sup> “Rotarians meet Car Club Representatives,” *Belvedere Citizen*, July 22, 1954, 3. Attending the meeting was the ELA Rotary President, John A. Howard, who was also East Los Angeles Junior College President.

driving and automobile maintenance skills, and provide academic scholarships to East LA youth.

Car and social clubs were important in the growth of political consciousness and Mexican-American identity in East LA. In a study of school participation, Marguerite de la Vega argued that Mexican Americans in high school shied away from leadership positions as a result of a number of factors including fear of misusing English, parental control, and the need to work outside of school. De la Vega found that Whittier High School divided students into three tracks, college prep, commercial courses, and mechanical and industrial arts. College prep students controlled the student government, while relatively few commercial or industrial students participated. Students thought that Mexican-Americans who participated were assimilated; they dressed according to dominant Anglo patterns and accepted middle-class values that stressed academic competition and achievements.<sup>137</sup> Car and social clubs were a means by which young Mexican-American youth could participate in the norms of American society, and yet, the clubs provided a measure of group autonomy that allowed them to directly shape local youth culture.

By the mid-1950s, car clubs staged a minimum of two car club dances per month in East LA. In March 1954, the FSCC sponsored a Friendship Fete Dance featuring Bobby Rey and his Orchestra, and clubs such as the Coffin Cheaters, the Charmers, the Dreamers, Gamblers, Playboys and Los Torredos contributed to the event. Club dances were a boon to the local music scene and provided the opportunity for young East LA musicians to perform in front of supporting audiences of their peers. Some car clubs, and

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<sup>137</sup> Marguerite de la Vega, "Some factors Affecting Leadership of Mexican Americans in a High School," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1951).

often those that were comprised of women, dropped the pretension of having anything to do with cars and reformed as purely social clubs. In January 1955, because none of the members had cars, the Road Knightettes reformed themselves simply as the non-car oriented Knightettes.<sup>138</sup>

The East LA FSCC was integral to the formation and maintenance of the East Los Angeles Youth Council. Sponsored by the Belvedere Coordinating Council and the Wabash City Terrace Community Council, the ELAYC advocated for work and educational opportunities for East LA youth. The president of the FSCC, Eddie Aguirre, was an active member of the ELAYC and representatives of the Coffin Cheaters, ELA Colettes, and Hot Coils, participated in early meetings. Los Angeles City Councilman Edward Royball frequently visited the ELAYC and encouraged him to advocate for a year round youth employment service and for greater art and recreational services for East LA youth.<sup>139</sup> The ELAYC also allowed participants to meet youth leaders in other communities: On April 21, 1955, members attended a youth conference, “What’ll it be: Streets, Alleys or Dragstrips,” at Compton High School. By 1958 all but one officer of the ELAYC was a member of a social or car club; officers included Angie Ramirez of the Demonettes, Jimmy Avila of the Royal Escorts, and Robert Lopez of the Valve Rockers.<sup>140</sup>

While the clubs of young Angelinos sought to improve the image of young drivers, the growing youth population and surplus of old cars created increasing opportunities for young people to own cars and race them in the streets. Like the sheriff

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<sup>138</sup> “Knightettes Hold Dance,” *Belvedere Citizen*, January 20, 1955, 3.

<sup>139</sup> “ELA Youth Council to Meet Today,” *Eastside Sun*, November 18, 1954, 1.

<sup>140</sup> “Youth Council President to Represent ELA,” *Lincoln-Heights Bulletin*, February 12, 1955, 1.

of Pomona, many communities decided to control these events and set up local dragstrips and racecourses.<sup>141</sup> Living north of Los Angeles, in the early 1960s, Jay Carnine used to drive south to the sanctioned San Fernando dragstrip, located on an a working airstrip, and further south to the Long Beach dragstrip.<sup>142</sup> In 1954, John Anson Ford sought to create such a space for the young residents of East LA. He promoted a plan to take a portion of the Los Angeles River and turn it into a timing strip. However, this plan soon raised the ire of local residents south of the river and they expressed fears of noise and delinquency. The river was a “natural” barrier between white and nonwhite communities and white middle-class community resistance defeated the plan for a public dragstrip in East LA.<sup>143</sup>

Ford’s failure to create a public timing strip in East LA was partly a consequence of the change in political climate towards youth. As James Gilbert has noted, in the 1950s, the delinquent youth became the scapegoat for postwar domestic problems and politicians, parents and youth experts scrutinized youth consumer culture for material that appeared to encourage, valorize or structure delinquency. From a war culture that valorized the deeds of young Americans and gave them the freedom of consumption as reward for their service, middle-class politics in the 1950s sought to limit this freedom and regulate the consumption of young people.<sup>144</sup> Reduced to its base motivation, this form of political activity reified class boundaries and separated middle-class and working-class young people. Across the United States, the cultural combination of James

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<sup>141</sup> This cycle of co-optation recurred in the 1980s with the creation of municipal skate parks for skateboarders. In addition, the popular motif “Skateboarding is not a crime” was borrowed from “Cruising is not a crime.”

<sup>142</sup> Carnine, *California Hot Rodder*, 53.

<sup>143</sup> “County Plans Strip for Drag Racing,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1955, A1.

<sup>144</sup> Gilbert, *Cycle of Outrage*.

Dean's *Rebel* and rock 'n' roll music influenced middle-class parents and their political representatives to take a stand against what they saw as delinquent working-class cultural activities.<sup>145</sup>

In Los Angeles, the move to prohibit rock concerts was also about cars and youth mobility. In Los Angeles County, youth dances were non-profit, as the proceeds could only go to charity. Furthermore, the dances required permits from the Police Commission.<sup>146</sup> In contrast, cities on the urban periphery in neighboring counties created opportunities for large rock shows. Promoters chose locations such as American Legion Stadium in El Monte or in union halls in Orange County. Cars were the primary method of getting to shows outside the urban core. Caravans of car clubs would cruise together in order to coordinate an arrival that would gain the group recognition and respect. Within this culture the practice of car customizing became an important way of participating in the rock culture and thereby capturing the attention of other attendees. Speed shop parts were out of the price range for many working-class rockers, but lowering the car, getting new upholstery and paint, and adding touches of chrome, skirts, and pipes allowed many young Angelinos to design vehicles that played a important role in transforming the regional youth scene. These climactic entrances to dances and rock 'n' roll concerts provided a romantic narrative structure to youth car culture, one that connected the labor on cars in garages and shops to the styles, music and dances of the city.<sup>147</sup>

Near to East LA white customizers were also creating an alternative car culture. In his studio in South Gate, "Big Daddy" Roth's designs challenged the developing

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<sup>145</sup> "Bias Blasted in Rock 'n' Roll Fight," *California Eagle*, November 3, 1955, 1.

<sup>146</sup> Los Angeles Municipal Code 45.14, LACCM-LACA.

<sup>147</sup> Fernando Ruelas interview; Sac Mesa and Mike Roman interview.

middle-class aesthetics of hot rod culture. Roth disliked the promotion of hot rodding as a “boy scout” event and through his car designs sought to tap into the fantasy world of male adolescence. Roth’s signature character, the Rat Fink, symbolically rejected Disney’s Mickey Mouse and was an exploration of the slovenly, roguish and desperate nature of a cartoon mouse anti-hero.<sup>148</sup> His 1959 design The Outlaw took the Ford roadster shape easily recognizable to hot rodders and re-imagined the car as a futuristic failed science experiment ala Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and *Tales from the Crypt*. Both the Rat Fink and the Outlaw were responses to the consumer youth culture of the 1940s, and simultaneous rejections of the politics of polite middle-class culture. Initially, Roth’s business began with T-shirts airbrushed with his signature characters. In 1963, Roth began to collaborate with the modeling company Revel, and this partnership produced miniatures of his cars and offered a range of Roth influenced paints. In response to critiques of his lifestyle by Revel, Roth, who was also called “Beatnik,” acquired the accoutrements of a mad aristocrat and would attend t-shirt and blue jean car shows wearing a top hat and monocle. Like his bohemian counterpart Von Dutch, Roth rejected the culture of conformity and appropriate middle-class norms, and his art sought to express the fantasy world of teenage male American youth.

“Kustom King” George Barris also sold his name and designs to a line of models and paints. Barris sought to market his cars directly to the teen market of Southern California and rented a lot on the main drag in Newport every summer.<sup>149</sup> Barris

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<sup>148</sup> Ed Roth, Douglas Nason and Greg Escalante, *Rat Fink: The Art of Ed “Big Daddy” Roth* (San Francisco: Last Gasp, 2003). Information about modeling in the next two paragraphs is taken from *Rat Fink*.

<sup>149</sup> George Barris and David Fetherston, *The Big Book of Barris* (Minneapolis: MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2003), 31.

participated in local cruising, and his creations blended into the circulation of cars built by teenage clubs. As an exclusive middle-class “white spot,” Barris’s choice of location racially marked his cars as white and middle-class. Along with the creation of miniature models, in 1962 Ted McMullen introduced the Instant “T,” a hotrod kit that could be home assembled. While hot rodding was packaged for middle-class culture, working-class youth continued work on cars in shops and schools. In East LA, working-class kids did not learn about cars by working on models—their world of play was rooted in the scavenging of junkyards and the practice of collecting real parts to assemble bikes and other forms of transportation.<sup>150</sup>

In 1959, California Vehicle Code §24008, commonly referred to as the law against the lows, came into effect. While this law attempted to prohibit the style of auto associated with the delinquent working class, it effectively validated that style as being authentically anti-authoritarian. This law also served as a point of departure in auto styling in that by the mid 1960s enthusiasts seeking to retain the low style while cruising began to add hydraulics to their cars so they could choose to raise or lower their car depending on the presence of the police.<sup>151</sup>

By 1963, auto theft was in the process of being redefined as a black and Latino crime. The Los Angeles Police Department data from 1959-1963 show that blacks were over represented as those arrested for auto theft.<sup>152</sup> In the popular media the picture of white youth packed into a hotrod transformed into one of black and Latino youth, armed

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<sup>150</sup> Fernando Ruelas interview; Sac Mesa and Mike Roman interview.

<sup>151</sup> Sonny Madrid, "Dropped on a Dime," in Paige R. Penland, ed., *Lowrider: History, Pride, Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: MotorBooks/MBI Publishing Company, 2003), 16.

<sup>152</sup> *Los Angeles Police Department Annual Statistical Report* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles Police Department, 1964), 48, Los Angeles Police Department Scrapbook, Los Angeles City Archive [hereinafter LACA], Los Angeles, California.

to the teeth, participating in gang wars. Cars were “loaded” with gang members, and this mobility created a new dynamic in the strategies of street gangs and fueled the media’s sensationalized of youth confrontations.<sup>153</sup> Territorial fights occurred at schools, parks and in the streets, and authorities attempted to contain these episodic rumbles to the racially coded sections of the city.

In contrast to “gang-war” confrontations between groups of non-white working-class youth, the media began to describe conflicts on weekends between young people in middle-class homes as “party crashing.” In essence, “party crashing” represented young people’s collective challenges to the racial and class layout of the city; cars allowed “crashers” a high degree of mobility, and a group could move from one party to the next. This practice was not racially coded, and both white and black youth participated in “party crashing.”<sup>154</sup>

Following the currents of white flight, by the mid-1950s Angelinos were less concerned with white middle-class juvenile delinquency in the street as the problems of middle-class domesticity had been defined as private acts in private homes. Family fraternal organizations sponsored their children’s car clubs and social activities, and by the early 1960s, car clubs had become a respectable activity for middle-class youth. In 1958, Disneyland sponsored its First Annual Car Club Day, including an “Autocade” of prize-winning custom and modified cars, and a dance from 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. The Police Advisory Council, a regional amalgam of Southland juvenile officers, sponsored the event. Its president, Lt. Ron Root of Pomona, claimed that the Disney event would curb

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<sup>153</sup> “Youth Shot in Teen Gang War Thursday”, *Lincoln-Heights Bulletin-News*, March 4, 1.

<sup>154</sup> “May Lose Eye From Beating by Party Crashers,” *California Eagle*, August 4, 1955, 1, 4.

street racing and create a close relationship between police and youth.<sup>155</sup> By the late 1950s, young Los Angeles police officers had themselves grown up in an automobile-saturated youth culture. Nonetheless, as a site that discouraged nonwhite attendance, events at Disneyland did not encourage relationships between the police and black and Latino youth.

If the 1950s were the high point for the group, the gang, and the club, the seeds of a new social order for middle-class youth were already in place. Representative of this new order was the organization Big Brothers of America. Instead of relying on peer associations, BBA sought to introduce positive male role models to boys through one-on-one relationships between young people and adults.<sup>156</sup> While middle-class youth were moving away from the club and turning towards individualistic commercial pursuits and cultures, clubs remained strong in working-class communities that valorized the group as a way to communally organize labor and resources.

Eugene Gilbert found that in 1965 teenagers across the country identified the word “gang” as a loosely associated group of young people. In a survey of 1,127 teenagers, Gilbert discovered that only about a third of the time did teenagers identify gangs with anti-social behavior. On the whole these groups resembled the social clubs of earlier years, without as much commitment. Many teens also thought that gangs became less important with age: teens claimed that attractions to the opposite sex, work, and “the

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<sup>155</sup> “Big Car Club Day Set at Disneyland,” *Los Feliz Hills News*, January 23, 1958, 1.

<sup>156</sup> “A Man’s Life Reflects His Youth,” *Los Feliz Hills News*, April 17, 1958, 1.

over coming of insecurity and no longer needing the recognition of gangs” diminished the meaning, value and purpose of gangs.<sup>157</sup>

For many working-class teens, “gang” activity was one of the ways young people could work together to collect the car parts that were either unavailable or too expensive. Cars were representations of power and prestige and young people stripped cars for parts for thrills, economic gain and neighborhood prestige. Through the accumulation of parts, young men created bonds of solidarity and shared dreams of future mobility, craft and style. Completed, “clean” cars were the physical embodiment of these bonds of solidarity and histories of these vehicles were spoken of in reverential tones.

Young blacks and Latinos who sought to distance themselves from gangs organized and joined car clubs. The Ruelas brothers started the Dukes of Los Angeles in 1962 in order to have social opportunities outside of gang life. The Ruelas’ uncle Tinker had taught the brothers how to work with metal and machines, and in his shop the boys learned how to build and modify bikes from parts found at junkyards. Initially, the core of the club consisted of brothers Fernando, Julio, Oscar and Ernesto but in 1963, “Chivo” Ceniceros, a neighborhood youth who disliked gang activity, a gangbuster, became a Duke and brought around 40 members with him.<sup>158</sup> By 1965 the Dukes had associates from Watts and Compton and as a group attended dances and concerts at the Big Union Hall, Rodger Young on Washington, the Old Dixie on 3rd and Western, Elf Hall, the Montebello Ballroom, and the El Monte Legion Stadium. While lowriding had preceded the formation of the Dukes, this car club advanced the style of lowriding and its members

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<sup>157</sup> “Teen-age Gangs still abound,” *Venice Evening Star News*, May 20, 1965, 6.

<sup>158</sup> Lynell George, “Slow Ride,” *West*, July 16, 2006, 20.

were some of the first to incorporate hydraulic lifts in order to raise and lower their cars.

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The Ruelas home was close to Dolphin's of Hollywood, a black owned record store, located on East Vernon and Central, just south of Downtown. Beginning in the mid-1950s, a white radio DJ Dick "Huggy Boy" Hugg hosted live R&B performances from Dolphin's. Music was central to lowriding, and many customs included "skip-free" phonographs and later 4 and 8 tracks and stereo equipment. On the weekends, the Dukes would party with other likeminded car clubs. "A Party was the opportunity to see each other's handiwork. Before you'd go into the dance you'd see the lineup of these beautiful cars," remembers soul singer Willie Garcia, an original Duke.<sup>160</sup> In this period, cruising culture would bring together white clubs such as the Igniters and Drifters, Mexican-American clubs such as the Clique and the In Crowd, and black clubs such as the Professionals and the Imperials.

While popular histories of lowriding credit the Dukes as an essential organization in the development of lowriding culture in Los Angeles, they themselves did not see their stylistic creations as distinct from the youth car culture at large. The Dukes attended drags and auto-shows and sought acceptance in the regional car culture, one that was often less than welcoming to nonwhites. Rather than focusing on their art as separatist, much of the Dukes cruising was purposefully racially integrative.<sup>161</sup> The Dukes would cruise to places they thought were "white dominated" and challenge color lines. At

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<sup>159</sup> Fernando Ruelas interview; Sac Mesa and Mike Roman interview. The founders of the Monumentos car club remember meeting discussions as how to make their club plaque and designs "less gangy," and they subsequently eliminated the Gothic script associated with gangs.

<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>161</sup> Fernando Ruelas interview.

Harvey's Broiler in Downey, the Dukes would instigate pipe duels with those willing to enter into automotive play. While many whites frowned at the style and practices of lowriders, others crossed racial boundaries because of their appreciation of the Ruelas's craftsmanship and passion for cars.

During the early 1960s, each high school and neighborhood was a locale for a number of car clubs. These car clubs often did not last for more than a couple of years. As young people got married or moved away from their family's neighborhood, clubs became secondary to other life concerns. However, the Vietnam War, Black Power and the Chicano movement significantly altered the youth culture of Southern California. Many working-class car clubs were shattered by Vietnam, and unlike after World War II, veterans did not return to prosperous job opportunities. Media condemnation of Black Power and the Chicano movement also worked to demonize the culture of nonwhite Angelinos of which lowriding was a part. The demonization of lowriders heightened through the 1970s and on March 23 through 25, 1979, Whittier Boulevard in East LA was closed down by Los Angeles Sheriffs. Like Joseph Call's purges of hot rodders 30 years earlier, more than 90 people were arrested and the strip became off limits to all cruisers.

In this way, throughout the 20th century cars have provided young Angelinos with forms of resistance even though individual subcultures were co-opted, and then became the means for social engineering projects by adult authorities. At first, youth subcultures are demonized, but as young people enter adulthood, the disassociation with youth tends to make subcultures available for both appropriation and co-optation. Appropriation allows a set of subcultural participants to profit off of subcultural networks

or practices, but at the same time these cultural middlemen do not seek to overtly control the subculture. Co-optation integrates subcultures into the mainstream and simultaneously aligns them with the dominant social order. In many instances, the gap between co-opted mass cultural representations and actual youth participation led young people to critique co-optation, create alternative subcultures, and adopt new identities.

### All My Friends Ride a Lowrider

In the mid 1990s, the work of Southern California customizers, including lowriders, began to circulate as works of art in galleries and art house publications. As early as 1963, Tom Wolfe promoted customs as works of modern art and chose to describe them as “monuments to their own style.” Brenda Jo Bright described customizers as “a masterful, and often resourceful, fusion of technical dexterity, artistic skill, and aesthetic vision” and George Lipsitz depicted lowrider customizers as masters of postmodern cultural manipulation.<sup>162</sup> As I have demonstrated in this chapter, these cars can also be seen as powerful cultural artifacts of mid-20th century American youth culture—a culture molded in metal that carried symbols of class divide, images of gangs versus clubs, and strategies of control from above and cultural resistance from below. While as works of art they may stand on their own, when divorced from the practices of cruising, racing and playing with the pipes; of going to drags, the lakes and shows; and of crossing racial and class boundaries, they only tell of the dreams of the individual artist and not of the culture from which they evolved. These artifacts provide a window into the

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<sup>162</sup> George Lipsitz, "Cruising Around the Historical Bloc. Postmodernism and Popular Music in East Los Angeles," in Simon Frith, *Popular Music: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 333-334; Brenda Jo Bright, *Customized: Art Inspired by Hot Rods, Low Riders, and American Car Culture* (Boston: Harry N. Abrams, 2000).

exciting cultural developments of the 1950s and 1960s, but absent an analysis of the practices associated with them, we have little way to understand the excitement and power of the purr of the exhaust and cruising on a weekend night. By exploring the youth culture that made these automobiles we can discover the strategies in which young Angelinos sought to remake their world.

Clean cars, cars primed for auto shows, were rare and not the property of the average young driver. Most of the time modifications were moderated by limited resources, functionality, and the desire for a little bit of speed, a little bit of style and a lot of fun. The cars and culture were about mobility, and as Ben Chappell posits for Latino lowriders, cruising was a way to expand the spatial limitations of their community.<sup>163</sup> In the postwar period young Angelinos from diverse communities shared the practice of cruising and were involved in the production of a regional culture that valorized the mobility of youth. Although not often coordinated with integrationist efforts, the practices of youth car cultures often dovetailed with the civil rights movement's challenges to forms of racial segregation.

For the most part, hot rodders did not think race was a pertinent category in which to evaluate an individual's worth; rather, hot rodding maintained racial orders through discourses of manliness, craftsmanship and conformity. Although many of the earliest hot rodders were nonwhite, races were thought of as levelers of class and racial status—yet, at the finish line, the contributions of nonwhite hot rodders were often undervalued. Nonwhite rodders were infrequently featured in magazines such as *Hot Rod* and *Street Rod and Custom*. Many hot rodders were surprised to find out that two of the members of

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<sup>163</sup> Ben Chappell, "Lowrider Crusing Spaces," Americo Paredes Center for Cultural Studies, University of Texas at Austin, 2002, [www.bridgewater.edu/~bchappel/downloads/cruise.pdf](http://www.bridgewater.edu/~bchappel/downloads/cruise.pdf) (accessed January 6, 2009).

the record-breaking gasser team of Stone, Woods and Cook were black. As the car's driver, Cook was often featured alone with the Willy's racecar.<sup>164</sup> One exception within the hot rod scene was the Bean Bandits Racing Team. Although the Bean Bandits were featured as an interracial hot rod team, they were also characterized as pranksters and therefore the community was unable to recognize their substantial contributions to hot rodding.<sup>165</sup> These magazines, aimed at an audience of young, white, middle-class consumers, made little effort to represent the contributions of nonwhites.

In the music of early 1960s Southern California, the popular songs of Roger Christian and Brian Wilson reified white teen car culture. Songs written for the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean such as "Shut Down," "Little Deuce Coupe," "Drag City," and "Dead Man's Curve," told of the dangers and excitement of speed but adventures free from the constraints of law enforcement, segregation and poverty. Jan and Dean's "The Little Old Lady from Pasadena" was actually an imaginative play on the association of youth and manliness with speed. In this song, a widowed woman refuses to conform to her age and gender and instead of driving an old car, she chooses to street race a muscle car, a hot "Super Stock Dodge."<sup>166</sup> The innocence and playfulness of these songs supported the commercial re-ordering of American youth spaces, and these youthful charades were distinct from the Chicano and black music of the period that emphasized dancing, cruising, romance and sex. In the fifth chapter, I examine Los Angeles's teen music in the 1950s and 1960s, elaborating on the ways in which the hyper-segregation of

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<sup>164</sup> SWC's main competitor was Big John Mazmanian, an Armenian-American from East Los Angeles. In past and current articles Mazmanian's ethnicity goes unexamined.

<sup>165</sup> Kerr, "Records???, We Don't Need No Stinking Records."

<sup>166</sup> In the 1960s, the "little old lady" septuagenarian Kathryn Minner would star in one of Dodge's longest commercial campaigns with her tagline: "Put a Dodge in your garage, honey."

the city and solidification of the entertainment industry worked to codify racial structures—whiteness was marketed as innocent, while nonwhite music was identified as dangerous and licentious.

The physical structure of the city and its postwar commercial culture, from Bob's Big Boy, Foster Freezes to Drive-Ins, supported the growth of cruising. It is in the context of this culture that Judge McKesson recognized, "Boundary Lines don't mean a thing to kids."<sup>167</sup> Increasing white flight and white fears of the inner city, the commercial turn towards contained experiences within shopping malls, the abandonment of boulevards for freeways, and the sometimes-outright prohibition of cruising, led to the suppression of a youth culture devoted to cruising.

Fernando Ruelas recalled struggling to promote his style of lowriders in the 1970s. Nonetheless, the collaboration of similar actors came together as in the case of *Hot Rod* magazine, and in 1977 *Lowrider Magazine* began publication. While not identical, the movement from a youth subculture to a part of mass consumer culture retains many of the same contours, aspects that could also be seen in other Southern California youth activities such as surfing and skateboarding. Initially a core of specialists develop a sub-culture, young people are recruited and encouraged to act as full participants in the sub-culture, the subculture threatens middle-class norms and is demonized, and over a period of years enthusiasts seek to gain acceptance for their practices. The struggles of enthusiasts often gain acceptance only as they become adults, and their work can no longer be regarded as “uninformed” youth culture. Furthermore, youth culture plays an important role as a venue in which products are stressed, tested,

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<sup>167</sup> Los Angeles County Youth Commission, *The Current Delinquency Situation*, 11.

and used to their limit. In the case of cars, the work of young hot rodders contributed to the growth of parts that made cars safer for all drivers. In this way, safety and performance features of modern automobiles are tied to the midnight races of mid-20th century youth culture.

Another feature that characterizes these cultures is that they often made little room for female participants. As hot rodding and lowriding became commercial vehicles, advertisers and publishers situated women's bodies as sex objects in magazines in order to enhance the appeal of cars and cultural practices. Nonetheless, young women played important participatory roles in sustaining these youth car cultures. While there were very few gender integrated clubs, in the 1950s a number of female car clubs grew and played a large role in sustaining social activities that grounded the masculine automobile culture. At some meets, crafty women racers could profit on the assumption of male superiority in youth car culture and in informal betting take the pink slips, transfer ownership of the losing car, of unsuspecting male dupes.<sup>168</sup> Future work could provide greater insight on the direct role of girl clubs (such as the Knightettes) and how they regarded the masculine culture of the shop and auto-racing, and how cruising changed the modes of courtship and sexuality. Furthermore, the role of women in car culture has often been overlooked—without the pioneering work of Veda Orr, the hot rodding community centered on the SCTA may have fallen apart during World War II. The exclusions embedded in the masculine framing of car culture also created the grounds for critique for the second wave of feminism. In the mid-1960s, artist Judy Chicago appropriated airbrush techniques from pin-stripers and car painters to critique the barriers young

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<sup>168</sup> Carnine, California Hotrodder, 16.

women faced when attempting to participate in youth car culture. In 1972, Chicago co-founded the CalArts Feminist Art Program at the California Institute of the Arts and organized one of the first-ever feminist art exhibitions, Womanhouse.

Cruising was a youth cultural response to the fragmentation of the metropolis and the region's adoption of the automobile as the primary means of transportation. Young people adapted their youth culture to respond to the structures of their inherited built environment. Although the culture of hot rods and lowriders were both eventually captured by corporate mass consumer culture, hot rodding was incorporated into these structures more thoroughly and in a shorter period of time. Hot rodding shifted the production practices of the world's largest car manufacturers, where low riding, with its association with Mexican and black gangs in the 1980s, remained a marginal mass cultural phenomenon. However, throughout this between World War II and the Vietnam War, cruising worked to dissolve many of the cultural divides between young Angelinos and subverted many of the projects that sought to promote a youth population segregated by class and race.

## Chapter Four

### From the Trenches to the Schools: How the Communist Party and the Labor Movement Forged a Youth Subculture

Our Nation must recognize its full responsibility to the youth who fought and labored to win the war, and to each succeeding generation of youth. To further the common welfare, and to conserve and strengthen the most vital resources of the nation, American youth must be guaranteed: the right to an education, health and physical fitness; and full and equal opportunity to enjoy these rights irrespective of race, creed, sex, national origin, or economic status. —American Youth for Democracy Program for Youth Security and Opportunity<sup>1</sup>

In the last days of November 1949, mixed-race members of the Alex Schaefer Club of the Labor Youth League (LYL) sought to bowl at the National Bowling Academy at 4871 West Washington Boulevard, located in between a growing middle-class black community in West Adams to the south and a developing Jewish community along Fairfax to the north. Because it was close to the 9 pm curfew hour for unescorted minors under 16, the Academy's management asked the group to leave. Later that week, the club revisited the bowling alley earlier in the day. When they tried to sign up for a lane, the owner first tried to discourage the group from bowling and then finally refused to give them a lane. The owner claimed that the pinsetter on duty would not work for a mixed-race group and when further questioned retorted, "I don't have to answer to any of you kids."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> American Youth for Democracy, "Youth Security Program," June 1946, Marvin Schachter Collection, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter MSC-SCLSSR].

<sup>2</sup> "Labor Youth League Club Wins Democracy in Bowling Alley," *California Eagle*, December 8, 1949, 1.

Twice denied service, with their suspicions confirmed that it was due to racist policies rather than curfew limitations, the group of young people began to organize. In Los Angeles, the LYL had connections to the Los Angeles Labor Council, the NAACP, the Independent Progressive Party and the American Civil Liberties Union. A week after the second denial of service the group returned to the alley with a mixture of progressive activists. At 7:30 pm on Saturday, December 3rd, the Alex Schaefer Club returned with members of the American Veterans Committee, the NAACP Youth Council, Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order, and the Independent Progressive Party. A member of the local pinsetters union of the Building Service Employees' Union also accompanied this amalgam of activists. In the early 1940s, the AFL-BSE began a campaign to organize pinsetters in Los Angeles and had gradually built a small union of the city's approximately 1,200 pinsetters. Earlier in the week, union representatives confirmed that all union pinsetters followed a strict anti-discrimination policy. After replacing the pinsetter on duty with the union pinsetter, the management allowed the Alex Schaefer Club to bowl.<sup>3</sup>

The campaign against the discriminatory practices at the National Bowling Academy was a single skirmish in a larger struggle to desegregate the commercial and consumer spaces of Los Angeles and the nation. It also represents a moment before automation, in which labor held a modicum of sway in establishments like bowling alleys. The club's activities also coincided with the United Auto Workers—CIO campaign, directed through the National Committee for Fair Play in Bowling, to

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<sup>3</sup> "Bowling Alley Deal Fought" *Los Angeles Times*, October 27, 1941, 14; "Unions Split on Recognizing Bowling Center Picket Line," *Los Angeles Times*, April 17, 1942, 7; "Stench Bombs Touched Off in Wilshire Café," *Los Angeles Times*, December 24, 1947, A1.

desegregate the national bowling leagues.<sup>4</sup> Through coordination with other progressive organizations and campaigns, youth within the Alex Shaefer club were the vanguard of the nascent civil rights movement in Los Angeles.

The Alex Shaefer Club, the Young Progressive Party and the Labor Youth League are all examples of a radical youth subculture that existed in Los Angeles from the late 1940s through the mid-1950s. The Communist Party and radical labor organizers in L.A organized this subculture. Many of the youth involved were from Jewish families that had recently moved to the city, and the subculture provided them with a community of intimate relationships forged in common action. Furthermore, participants in this subculture were often the primary troops of the civil rights movement in this period. Although young people in the 1950s were said to be “the silent generation” because of their lack of autonomous political mobilization, the activities of groups like the Alex Schafer Club indicate that not all youth conformed to this characterization. However, as this subculture was pushed underground in the mid-1950s, many of its members turned to the pursuit of cultural change, rather than direct political involvement. These cultural pioneers were central to the counterculture and the youth politics of the 1960s.

This chapter will examine the activities, success and limits of radical youth groups in Los Angeles from the late 1940s to the mid-1950s. The transfigurations of youth activism in this period can provide an alternative vantage point from which to understand the development of United States’ culture and politics in the postwar period. A more nuanced view reveals that instead of a rupture, radicalism of the 1960s was an expansion of youth activism in the 1950s. In addition, the suppression of radical youth

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<sup>4</sup> David M. Lewis-Colman, *Race Against Liberalism: Black Workers and the UAW in Detroit* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 48.

activism and its ties to mass organizations led to development of alternative and increasingly autonomous youth cultures, without ties to labor, government or religious organizations, that would continue to challenge the authority of age in limiting the full participation of young people. In response to this fracturing of the Old Left coalitions, young people worked to create worlds of their own.

### No Silent Generation

Historian Maurice Isserman argues that the 1950s were not simply a period of conservatism and complacency, but rather it was a decade of profound social transformation that changed political activism and strategies.<sup>5</sup> In the increasingly anticommunist era of the mid-1950s, most radical youth groups disbanded and their political and social networks went underground. However, lessons learned during this era of underground activism were fundamental to an emergent youth politics that critiqued the social, economic and cultural transformations of the United States in the post-World War II era. According to Doug Rossinow, the New Left articulated a new political ideology that offered an alternative to socialism and liberalism, a form of politics that sought to counter the conditions of alienation—that is estrangement from the mechanisms of cultural and political power wrought by increasing market segmentation, domestic isolation and urban segregation—through a politics of authenticity.<sup>6</sup> It is this politics of authenticity that called middle-class white college students to participate in voter registration drives in the South, poverty programs in northern cities, and increasingly,

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<sup>5</sup> Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*.

<sup>6</sup> Rossinow, The Politics of Authenticity.

antiwar demonstrations on campuses across the country.

While the New Left would fully elaborate this intimate politics of authenticity in the mid-1960s, young radicals in the 1950s would initiate the shift in strategies away from the materialistic doctrines of the Old Left and in doing so rejected what C. Wright Mills called the “labor metaphysic.”<sup>7</sup> Unable to organize street demonstrations during the era of McCarthy, participants in the twilight of the Old Left began to focus their activism on the transformation of mass culture through contributions through the arts and education. These labors helped create the grounds of the counterculture of the 1960s. Furthermore, issues of autonomy and authenticity emerged out of the ideological concerns and organizing strategies of youth leaders. These leaders did not promote unquestioning young party cadres; ironically, the Soviet-inspired structure of democratic centralism in radical youth groups allowed for the greater autonomy of groups within the organization and the intimate team structure of the organization at the local level created a barrier against strict top-down party control. Leon Wofsy, the longstanding president of the Labor Youth League, promoted the independence of local groups, which he viewed as a means to encourage the growth of grassroots campaigns developed out of the needs of local youth populations. The evolution of radical youth groups in the 1950s led to the politics of authenticity fully articulated by the New Left in the 1960s; the interplay between autonomy and authenticity, enhanced by both the increasing market segmentation and social segregation of young people, provided the grounds on which young people could articulate and mobilize generational solidarity for political purposes. While radical youth groups were isolated in the 1950s, the search for alternatives to mass

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<sup>7</sup> C. Wright Mills, "Letter to the New Left," *New Left Review* 1.5 (September-October 1960): 18-23.

consumer culture invigorated a mass youth culture in the 1960s that fought and won greater rights, most significantly the vote for those 18 years of age which was initially conceived as part of the Communist Party's youth platform in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

While the development of student politics in the 1960s was directly indebted to the evolution of groups in the previous decade, during the early post World War II period, radical youth groups such as the Young Progressives of America, the youth branch of the Independent Progressive Party, and the LYL were active in numerous national and local political struggles. The censure and erasure of their participation continues to play a role in generating the popular narrative that student and youth movements in the 1960s were a massive rupture from the 1950s.<sup>9</sup> While the historical framework above may suggest that the shift from the Old Left and the New Left debilitated mid-century struggles, in fact, although participation may have been restricted, radical political struggles in the 1950s quickly adapted to the unfolding culture of American consumer society. A decade before Ezell Blair, Jr., David Richmond, Franklin McCain, and Joseph McNeil demonstrated at a Greensboro lunch counter, members of the YPA and the LYL fought to desegregate both employment and leisure opportunities in Los Angeles, promote an internationalist vision of the city, and challenge the racist and sexist elements of youth culture.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Although Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon would all favor the reduction of the voting age, the American Student Union and American Youth for Democracy advocated lowering the voting age in the 1930s.

<sup>9</sup> Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1993); Terry H. Anderson, *The Sixties* (New York: Pearson Longman, 2006).

<sup>10</sup> For new work on the early civil rights movement see, Thomas Sugrue, *Sweet Land of Liberty: The Forgotten Struggle for Civil Rights in the North* (New York: Random House, 2008); Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006).

Bowling alleys and leagues contained many of the elements of the cultural aesthetic of the 1950s, an aesthetic forged during the nation's transition from an industrial war economy to a postwar consumer's republic.<sup>11</sup> During this era, bowling provided blue-collar workers both a space to retain the traditions of the neighborhood saloon and a place to purchase family-oriented middle-class leisure activities. At bowling lanes, balloon and cake parties for children and beer swilling league play could exist side by side. During this era, bowling lanes functioned as private community centers. These recreational centers would often include "coffee shops, elegant eateries, nurseries for infant care, banquet rooms, plush cocktail lounges, barbershops, dress shops, richly furnished billiard parlors and top-draw bandstand entertainment."<sup>12</sup> As a cultural and social midwife, the leisure practiced, purchased and consumed at bowling lanes was critical in the postwar birth of a new broad-base middle-class culture that through consumption and leisure labored to distance itself from its own working-class roots.<sup>13</sup> In the mid-20th century, consumerism was a powerful form of middle-class conscription.

In Los Angeles, community leaders such as Mayor Fletcher Bowron promoted bowling as the front line against juvenile delinquency—controlled competitive recreation provided an alternative to neighborhood street rumbles. In 1941, Bowron vetoed an ordinance that would allow Angelinos to bowl after 2 a.m. and in doing so told the city council that, "By making an exception of bowling alleys, it would mean that they would

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<sup>11</sup> Lizabeth Cohen described the term consumer's republic in Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*. In this era public policy and mass consumerism intertwined creating the figure of the citizen-consumer. Moreover, this republic also transferred the control of consumerism to men and worked to diminish working-class identity and the growth of the labor movement.

<sup>12</sup> Don Snyder, "Brunswick Chief Tells of Coming Pin Boom," *Los Angeles Times*, July 3, 1951, C4; Don Snyder, "Bowling Gains in Leagues by 225% Since '50," September 25, 1960, D1.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Hurley, *Diners, Bowling Alleys, and Trailer Parks: Chasing the American Dream in the Postwar Consumer Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

no longer be recognized as places of clean, wholesome sport and recreation, but as a hang-out of crowds from public dances, taxi dances, cocktail bars, and public cafes where liquor is dispensed. I believe that the change would tend to cheapen rather than popularize bowling."<sup>14</sup> Los Angeles's explosive industrial growth during the war created a demand for bowling and lanes, advertised as "centers" and "academies," and many opened within the rapidly developing suburban communities. Recognizing bowling's popularity, the *Los Angeles Times* provided reports on Southland kegeling activities in a weekly column by Don Snyder called "Down the Alley."

The broad-based growth of bowlers reflected the successful promotion of bowling in the media. Bowling boosters characterized the game as democratic; with the selection of the proper ball, anyone could play and have a good time. But the promise of democracy was not extended to all, and in Los Angeles many bowling alleys refused services to nonwhites. In this way, blacks, Asians and Latinos were routinely excluded from the mechanisms of cultural and class transformation available to the white working-class. In the late 1940s, articles in the *Chicago Defender* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* identified bowling, like golf, swimming and horse racing, as "decidedly jim crow."<sup>15</sup> However, as the "lace" sports of tennis and golf began to open their doors to black competitors, throughout the 1940s, the American Bowling Congress (ABC), the sport's sanctioning body, refused to desegregate. During the 1940s, groups such as the NAACP, American Veterans Committee, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and the American Jewish Congress struggled to integrate the sport of bowling through demonstrations

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<sup>14</sup> Fletcher Bowron to City Council, September 5, 1941, FB-Huntington, Box 1, Letters.

<sup>15</sup> "Unwritten Law Keeps Negroes Out of Derby," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 15, 22; "Negro Bowlers Do \$750,000 -Ebony Mag." *Los Angeles Sentinel*, January 23, 1947, 23.

against the lily-white ABC.<sup>16</sup>

In 1946, the Los Angeles Youth Council protested the exclusion of a Chinese-American women's bowling group from league competition by the Women's International Bowling Congress; the WIBC, like ABC, forbade the participation of all nonwhite bowlers.<sup>17</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, organizations of radical young Angelinos such as the Labor Youth League and the Young Progressives of America continued the struggle against segregation and challenged the exclusion of nonwhites at bowling alleys, as well as parks, pools, and dance halls. Moreover, these organizations sought to ensure that young working-class people would have adequate access to training and jobs in the transition from an industrial war economy to a postwar consumer economy. Through equal access to education, training and leisure, the mobilization of young people would ensure national prosperity through mechanisms that mitigated against the alienation of workers within capitalism.

While the New Left would inherit many of the positions of radical groups in the 1950s, two critical elements of these groups were not adopted. First, by and large, the early leftist groups were organized and led by women, including Dorothy Healy, Victoria Landish and Betty McCandless. Whereas men remained in control of mainstream political organizations in the 1950s, radical youth groups created a space in which women could become leaders of regional, statewide and even national organizations. In 1952, the Independent Progressive Party nominated Charlotta Bass as the nation's first black female vice-presidential candidate. Thus these 1950s groups were constituted with

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<sup>16</sup> "ABC to Confer with NAACP on Bias Policy," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 27, 1950, B8.

<sup>17</sup> "Group Protests Bowling Rule," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 11, 1946, 23.

platforms that challenged male chauvinism.<sup>18</sup>

Second, while the New Left sought to reform and redeem American political institutions through the practice of egalitarian citizenship, progressive groups in the 1950s promoted world citizenship and internationalism. These concerns were not ancillary to public discussions of internationalism during this period and many of the programs promoted by the YPA and LYL mirrored the short-lived UNESCO program in the Los Angeles public schools.<sup>19</sup> As promoters of world citizenship, many of the veterans of youth radicalism went on to become international researchers and educators, thereby providing the next generation of young Americans with visions of a world beyond the limits of myopic American nationalism.

An internationalist vision of the city was validated by overseas conferences in the postwar period organized for leftist youth. In August of 1948, the International Conference of Working Youth was held in Warsaw and was attended by 400 delegates from 23 different countries. At the conference an adopted resolution urged the youth of the world to unite in a fight for “political, economic and democratic rights and national independence.” Although the State Department did not issue passports to the elected delegates of the United States, a small group of Americans attended the conference, where the presidential candidacy of Henry A. Wallace was a hot topic of conversation.<sup>20</sup>

The National Bowling Academy became a turf battle because young progressives

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<sup>18</sup> Jerome Handler interview by author September 21, 2005. According to Handler the elimination of chauvinism in all forms was central to discussions within the LYL. For a closer look at the Communist Party in Los Angeles, see Dorothy Healey and Maurice Isserman, *California Red: A Life in the American Communist Party* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 125-129.

<sup>19</sup> Glen Warren Adams, “The UNESCO Controversy in Los Angeles, 1951-53: A Case Study of the Influence of Right-Wing Groups on Urban Affairs” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, 1970).

<sup>20</sup> “Youth Conference Opens in Warsaw,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1948, 8.

sought to enact their vision of an integrated Los Angeles within their own communities.

In the 1940s, Los Angeles's Jewish community moved south and west from the established community in Boyle Heights and City Terrace. The Jewish population grew exponentially during the war, and by the 1950s, nearly half a million Jews lived in Los Angeles.<sup>21</sup> Many of these new immigrants found access to the privileges of postwar whiteness and benefited from FHA loans leading to a widespread movement to new suburban homes in middle-class neighborhoods in the West Adams area, the Fairfax district and the San Fernando Valley.<sup>22</sup> The spatial redistribution of the community created a dynamic in which many young people had friends and relatives in multiple communities. In moving back and forth from one community to the other, young Jewish activists experienced the pluralism of Los Angeles's communities firsthand as they were not isolated within one particular suburban or urban enclave.<sup>23</sup>

The movement to the Westside was also important because the growing Jewish community had to fight against anti-Semitism in an area that had been a stronghold of conservatism and racial exclusion. This movement also put the Jewish community in proximity with the recently integrated community of middle-class blacks in West Adams. The National Bowling Academy was located just to the south of the new center of Jewish Los Angeles. The efforts of the Alex Schafer Club at the National Bowling Academy were a way of claiming space for their vision of community and culture. During the

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<sup>21</sup> Raphael J. Sonenshein, "The Los Angeles Jewish Community: An Examination of its History of Activism for Human Rights" (Sacramento: Center for Californian Studies, 2000), [www.csus.edu/calst/Government\\_Affairs/Reports/ffp34s.pdf](http://www.csus.edu/calst/Government_Affairs/Reports/ffp34s.pdf) (accessed January 8, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1994), 36.

<sup>23</sup> Augustus Maimodes interview by author, July 10, 2005; Lenny Potash interview by author, August 21, 2005.

bowling campaign, the YPA also participated in the demonstrations to desegregate the Bimini Baths, a central commercial recreation area at the end of the H street car line that featured three very large pools and a gymnasium.<sup>24</sup>

In spite the fact that young radicals had local successes such as the desegregation of the National Bowling Academy, the structures of American consumer society began to limit labor's power to challenge inequality and specifically within Los Angeles, *de facto* segregation. In the summer of 1950, after years of campaigning *de jure* segregation within bowling was defeated, and the Committee for Fair Play in Bowling convinced the ABC and WIBC to drop their Caucasian only provision thereby opening the door for nonwhite bowlers to compete in league play.<sup>25</sup> However, with the advent of the automatic pinsetter and televised broadcasts in the early 1950s, the changes at bowling alleys mirrored changes in the economy and culture. By the mid-1950s pinsetters and their unions were a thing of the past, and labor had little room to negotiate after automation.<sup>26</sup> While *de jure* segregation was no longer practiced by the sport's sanctioning bodies, in the early 1960s, white middle-class families in the new suburban communities bowled in automated alleys whose spatial distance from nonwhite communities insured *de facto* segregation.

An integrated and multi-cultural vision of community promoted by young radicals often clashed with the business practices of the controlling political interests of Los

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<sup>24</sup> Lenny Potash interview; "Racial Equality Group Wins Right to Swim as Bimini Bathhouse Suddenly Reverses Policy," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 9, 1948, 9. The Bresee Foundation also supported a short documentary with four subjects who visited the baths as young people. It can be found at <http://www.bresee.org/biministories/pages/biminibathdescription.html> (accessed January 6, 2009).

<sup>25</sup> "Drop Bowling Bar," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, June 15, 1950, B6.

<sup>26</sup> American Machine & Foundry's first automatic pinsetter was characterized as a "robot pin boy" and was introduced in 1953. "Automatic Pin Setter Fete Tonight," *Los Angeles Times*, November 29, 1953, B13.

Angeles. The commercial elite promoted a vision of youth that accepted authority and hierarchy, a youth that understood its primarily passive position within the matrix of consumption. During this period, youth political action was a direct challenge to established political ideologies and family-oriented assumptions of postwar American society—bowling lanes were supposed to be sites of clean middle-class behavior not political activism, and young people were supposed to be concerned with the rhythms of the segmented teenage culture rather than the struggle for civil rights.<sup>27</sup> Radical youth groups provided a subcultural outlet for young people who did not fit in or chose not to adopt the modes of model middle-class youth.

As the politics of anti-communism increased during the early years of the Cold War, radical youth groups negotiated dual identities—one as participant political youth, a promise of progressivism that came to fruition during the era of the popular front, and one as youth consumers in an increasingly age-segmented consumer culture. For example, at the UCLA campus members of the Labor Youth League, a Communist Party youth group, were either open or non-open members. Open members were the outward voices and faces of the group, conservatively dressed and usually Anglo, while the rest of the membership was not public. As the hysteria of McCarthyism grew, these groups went further underground, and this in turn largely reinforced the subcultural nature of radical youth activism. Subcultural radicals, the invisible stitch, sewed the political visions of the 1930s to the youth political culture of the 1960s. In the 1950s, contestations over the proper role of youth within society, and specifically limitations to participation within the

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<sup>27</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1990). Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic*; Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage*; Susan Douglas, *Where the Girls Are: Growing up Female with the Mass Media* (New York, Times Books, 1994).

realm of politics, structured activities of young people in that decade and created subcultures of activism that would transfer, translate, and transform youth politics from the Old Left to the New Left.

### **Reconstituted Radicals: The Formation of New Groups in the Early Postwar Period**

Throughout the 1940s, the Communist Party embraced the strategy of working with and within a number of progressive civil rights, religious and labor organizations. In Los Angeles, the local communist organization, lead by Dorothy Healey, promoted organizing young people through a number of organizations.<sup>28</sup> Since 1935, this Popular Front strategy forged relationships with liberal organizations that the communists had once labeled reactionary and fascist; by the late 1940s, the Los Angeles party was closely connected to a network of local youth organizations including both the YWCA and YMCA.

The Los Angeles Communist Party was known for independence. To party insiders Hollywood, California, was jokingly referred to as the land of “Communist Millionaires.” While the national party membership had generally declined since 1939, the locals in Los Angeles remained healthy and active under Healy’s leadership. During World War II, the CPA was successful in organizing the progressive community around the rights of young Mexican-Americans. During the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial, communist organizer Alice McGrath and the International Labor Defense worked with progressive Carey McWilliams and entertainers Orson Welles and Guy Endore to make

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<sup>28</sup> Healey first came to Los Angeles at the age of 18 in 1932 to organize unemployment councils in the Eastside and in 1937 she became the organizer for the Young Communist League in San Pedro. “Dorothy Healey,” *Daily People’s World*, January 4, 1952.

public the ways young Latinos were unfairly treated by law enforcement and the justice system.<sup>29</sup> In the late 1940s, the CPA in Los Angeles continued to defend the rights of youth, but became more active in encouraging young people to take part, as well as lead, struggles at the local level. As the wave of anti-communist backlash increased, young activists became the most visible extension of the party—age provided a modicum of defense against blacklists and other anti-communist measures.

In October 1945, members of city youth groups met at Holmes Hall at Los Angeles City College and formed the Los Angeles Youth Council (LAYC).<sup>30</sup> The LAYC constitution described the organization's mission as “unifying all youth groups within the City of Los Angeles and its surrounding territory; giving the young people of this community the opportunity to consider their mutual problems, seek their own solutions and strengthen their cooperative efforts.”<sup>31</sup> The LAYC also drafted messages for representative Elizabeth McCandless to present at the World Youth Conference in London—Los Angeles was the only American city to send a representative. Combining religious, labor and civil rights organizations, the LAYC leadership in 1946 included Bert Corona from the ILWU, Isabelle Baron from the YWCA, and Howard Griffin from the Negro Youth Council. The LAYC program was closely aligned with the platforms of the national organization American Youth for Democracy. The shared programs included the struggle for equal rights for blacks, support of the labor movement, and lowering the

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<sup>29</sup> “Sleepy Lagoon,” Subject Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter SUB-SCLSSR]; Pagán, *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon*. The ILD defended the Scottsboro Boys a decade earlier.

<sup>30</sup> “Youth Council Organized Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 8, 1945, A3. The American Jewish Congress and Baptist Youth Fellowship were two of the groups mentioned in the article.

<sup>31</sup> Los Angeles Youth Council, *Conscript Youth* (Los Angeles: City of Los Angeles), back cover, Los Angeles Youth Council, 1912-1980s, Box 21, 20th Century Organizational Files, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter 20C-SCLSSR].

voting age to 18.<sup>32</sup> The LAYC had the added benefit of networking multiple groups outside of the AYD and bringing their representatives together on a regular basis.

In the spring of 1947, the LAYC and 36 participating youth organizations, held a folk dance and chorus festival at Polytechnic High School.<sup>33</sup> Concurrent with the dance, twenty members of the LAYC met with former vice-president Henry Wallace to talk about the issues confronting the nation's youth. Wallace advised the students to take a greater interest in economics and sociology and told them than universal military training was not the answer to the problems of youth or a peaceful world.<sup>34</sup> On December 29, 1947, Wallace reiterated these themes when announcing his independent candidacy for president. In his speech, Wallace identified Universal Military Training as "the first step on the road towards Fascism," and he announced the need to support "a positive youth program of abundance and security, not scarcity and war."<sup>35</sup> In the beginning of 1948, the LAYC sponsored celebrations of Brotherhood Week at the Soto-Michigan Jewish Community Center, which included performances by comedian Lou Costello and actor Howard Da Silva.<sup>36</sup>

By the spring of 1948 during the election campaign for president, both Californian and national House Un-American Activities Committees (HUAC), a legislative committee whose responsibility was to investigate fascist and communist

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<sup>32</sup> American Youth for Democracy, *Proceedings of the Second National Convention of American Youth for Democracy, June 13-16, 1946* (New York: American Youth for Democracy), 1946, MSC-SCLSSR. The California delegates to the National Council of the AYD included Bob Zakow, Chuck Bruck, Ralph Johnson, Vicki Landish, Henry Leland and Elaine Rose.

<sup>33</sup> "Youth Council Will Give Dance, Festival," *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1947, B5.

<sup>34</sup> "Wallace Says He'll Quit Democratic Party if it Drops F.D.R. Principles," *Los Angeles Times*, May 20, 1947, 2.

<sup>35</sup> Henry Wallace, "I Shall Run in 1948," December 29, 1947, in *Vital Speeches of the Day* 14.6 (January 1, 1948): 172-174

<sup>36</sup> "Actors Will Appear at Brotherhood Rally," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1948, A3.

threats to the United States, identified the American Youth for Democracy as a communist front. Celeste Strack, Victoria Landish, and Betty McCandless, then the current chairman of the LAYC, were all identified as communists.<sup>37</sup> The “outing” of the AYD and its membership encouraged many supporting groups to leave the LAYC, thereby hobbling its effectiveness. Nonetheless, the LAYC continued to establish projects throughout the early 1950s, including the leadership conference at Camp Max Strauss, Brotherhood Week celebrations, and an annual convention.<sup>38</sup>

In May 1948, 31,000 people jammed into Gilmore Stadium, known locally as the “Workingman’s Palace” for its low-cost entertainment, to hear a speech by Progressive Party presidential candidate Henry Wallace.<sup>39</sup> On July 25, 1948, the Young Progressives of America formed as a youth wing of the Independent Progressive Party at a convention for Henry Wallace. During the convention the IPP candidate for vice-president, Senator Glen Taylor of Idaho, addressing the young people in the audience, promised to introduce a bill to repeal the draft. The IPP presidential platform argued that progressivism and youth policies and politics were intertwined and Wallace made the welfare of America’s young a centerpiece of his campaign.<sup>40</sup>

By the fall of 1948, tuned to the timetable of the presidential election cycle, there were several YPA branches in local junior and senior high schools throughout Los Angeles. Organizers recruited heavily from the former ranks of American Youth for

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<sup>37</sup> “Red’s Campus Activities Prove to be Complicated,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 7, 1945, A1.

<sup>38</sup> Catherine Crosby Lemaire, “A Handbook For The Los Angeles Youth Council,” M.S. Thesis, University of Southern California, June 1950.

<sup>39</sup> As part of this campaign, Los Angeles radical Harry Hay, a union organizer and Communist, developed the idea for a gay campaign organization, “Bachelors for Wallace.” Though this group never got off the ground, Hay subsequently formed the Los Angeles based Mattachine society, the nation’s first modern gay-rights organization.

<sup>40</sup> “Youth Unit Launched to Help Progressives,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1948. 2.

Democracy; in the same fashion, Labor Youth League members were recruited from the YPA membership. Henry Wallace was a popular political figure for many radical young people and as Vice-President Wallace had argued that, “the prevention of youth erosion is more important than the prevention of soil erosion. It is even better business to stop youth waste than to stop soil waste. Educational opportunities for young people must come first.”<sup>41</sup> In 1948, *People’s Song* published Pete Seeger’s and Irwin Silber’s “Songs for Wallace” and thereby provided a compendium of music for student meetings.<sup>42</sup>

Previous to the formation of the YPA, leaders of the American Student Union and later the American Youth for Democracy argued for the organization of both college and high school aged youth. In 1936, the ASU newsletter, *The Student Advocate*, provided high school students with a “letter to the principal” template to protest using schools for war preparation; the same issue presented the congressional testimony of Charles Beard, Francis Gorman, and Celeste Strack advocating for the American Youth Act. This act sought to guarantee a system of job training and career counseling for all American youth regardless of race and class.<sup>43</sup> Celeste Strack argued that “merely having the school buildings in which to carry on education is not enough to provide equal opportunity” and that “hundreds of thousands of youth” felt inferior to their peers because of the lack of “clothes or money for some recreation.”<sup>44</sup> By the mid-1940s, Strack had been involved in the youth movement for over a decade, and she tutored younger organizers such as

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<sup>41</sup> Henry A. Wallace, “What America Can Have,” in ed. Russell Lord, *Henry A. Wallace: Democracy Reborn* (New York: Reynal & Hitchcock, 1944), 24.

<sup>42</sup> In 1959, the Kingston Trio re-released the Progressive Party campaign song “M.T.A” and it became a #15 hit on the Billboard Top 20.

<sup>43</sup> “Don’t be an Unknown Soldier—Act Now for Peace; A Call to High School Students,” *The Student Advocate*, 1.3 (April 1936): 7, MSC-SCLSSR.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 18, 21.

Victoria Landish Fromkin how to recruit high school aged activists.

Even though the YPA's initial purpose was to support Henry Wallace's run for the presidency in 1948, the group outlasted the election and continued to organize and do political work through the presidential campaign of 1952. Later identified by the federal and California HUACs as a front for the Communist Party, many YPA members never identified their activities with Marxism, nor were even familiar with local communists activities. In the late 1940s, liberal progressives and communists shared common projects and worked together in organizations such as the IPP, NAACP and the Civil Rights Congress.<sup>45</sup>

As YPA initiated young people in a third-party political action group, the Labor Youth League provided an organization for young people who sought structural change through the labor movement. In 1948, the Federal Bureau of Investigation identified the American Youth for Democracy as a communist front and soon afterwards the group disbanded. In its place, in May of 1949, the Communist Political Association formed a youth organization that would concentrate its efforts within both the labor movement and mass organizations.<sup>46</sup>

At the convention, the LYL produced its slogan, "Young Americans will not be found wanting in humanity's cause of peace and freedom." Its founding document outlined three goals: to work for a peaceful, secure and happy life for every young American, to devote youth to the problems of the working-class, and to stimulate the

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<sup>45</sup> Authors Karl M. Schmidt and Curtis Macdougall have argued that the YPA was not communist-dominated and in fact was mostly comprised of left leaning liberals. Curtis Macdougall, *Gideon's Army* (New York: Marzani and Munsell, 1965); Karl M. Schmidt, *Henry Wallace; Quixotic Crusade 1948* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1960).

<sup>46</sup> "Joseph P. Lash, "Interview: The Student Movement of the 1930s," <http://newdeal.feri.org/students/lash.htm> (accessed July 30, 2007).

study of Marxism. The LYL advocated for unemployment insurance for first-time job seekers, childcare pay for working mothers, greater federal aid to education, and training and apprenticeship programs that did not discriminate on the basis of race. Additionally, the LYL urged the building of state-run childcare centers and income tax breaks for the payment of childcare. Furthermore, in its attempt to forge a new relationship between young people and American labor, the LYL proposed bringing the needs of young female workers to the forefront of the Labor movement.<sup>47</sup>

LYL's national constitution proposed that students and young workers would be the backbone of the organization and envisioned a community of activists ranging in age from their teens to their early thirties. Although initiated by communists, its constitution also argued that there was no one road to the society of the future and that dogmatic Marxism and socialism would not constrain activism and projects; many representatives at the founding convention viewed doctrinaire Marxism as a closed avenue of inquiry and an obstacle to the recruitment of a broad base of young people. Instead, the LYL drew parallels between itself and middle-class organizations like the Boy Scouts of America and promised to "build the character" of youth, while emphasizing that "the needs and desires of youth are bound up inseparably with the working class."<sup>48</sup> In terms of membership, the LYL had both working class and middle class members, but as the organization evolved it began to rely more heavily on middle-class student participation.

Embracing the élan of the Popular Front, the LYL encouraged its members to become active participants, organizers and leaders in local civil rights and labor activities.

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<sup>47</sup> California Labor Youth League, *Youth for Unity* (Oakland: Labor Youth League, 1954), 2, Labor Youth League, 20C-SCLSSR.

<sup>48</sup> Labor Youth League, "Constitution of the Labor Youth League: (adopted by the Second National Convention, February 22, 1954), 1, Labadie Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

The president of the league Leon Wofsy thought that through its work with mass organizations, the activities of the LYL would establish the ways in which young people could be the vanguard of progressive social change. The communist party sent thirty-year-old labor organizer Victoria Landish Fromkin from San Francisco to Los Angeles to coordinate the LYL's activities. Fromkim helped develop the organization from the remnants of the AYD and by soliciting progressive organizations such as the YPA and the Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order IWO Youth Council. Through these established activist networks the LYL spread to Los Angeles high schools and to the University of California, Los Angeles and Los Angeles City College. At UCLA, the LYL quickly mushroomed out of the remains of older organizations and in the spring of 1949 the organization campaigned for the school's first black student-body president Sherrill Luke. By the beginning of the next fall semester, the LYL had members in many UCLA campus student organizations, including the student body and the campus newspaper the *Daily Bruin*.

### **Lenny Potash: Teenage Labor Activist and Folk Troubadour**

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, teenage activist Lenny Potash attended YPA and then LYL meetings held in Los Angeles's public schools. During this period, Potash's activism and music developed alongside his participation in youth groups. Potash's story provides a unique window on the activities of the radical youths groups in Los Angeles and the political activities and motivations within the public schools and of

an activist in his early teens.<sup>49</sup>

Born in New York City in 1936, Potash was the son of Jewish labor activists; his father was a union printer and his mother was a garment worker with the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. In 1948, during the Henry Wallace campaign, eleven-year-old Lenny Potash and his family moved to California. The move to California was seen to be a fresh start on life, and it was his parents' hope that the move would help with Lenny's poor health and growing rebelliousness.

In many cases, members of radical youth groups were sons and daughters of recent immigrants to Southern California; these groups provided intimacy and identity for young migrants. Many had come to the West following labor opportunities—migrants from New York and the Midwest bolstered local labor support. As recent immigrants from Eastern Europe who brought with them radical political traditions, many felt they did not fit into the nationalist and navel-gazing culture of the postwar period. Future historian Leon Litwack, whose parents had moved to California from Russia, became a member of the YPA in Santa Barbara. He thought the culture of the period excluded both working-class and immigrant narratives.<sup>50</sup> As mass culture and reflections of that culture in public education provided little for disenfranchised working-class youth, they banded together in clubs to challenge the authority of the nativist and Anglo culture of Southern California.

After living on Western Avenue and in North Hollywood, the Potash family moved to the Fairfax District. Lenny first attended Le Conte Junior High and then Fairfax

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<sup>49</sup> Lenny Potash interview.

<sup>50</sup> Leon Litwack, "Interview," <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5274> (accessed January 6, 2009).

High School. Once in the Los Angeles public schools, Potash did not “crack a book” for two years. The education he had been receiving in New York had been superior to that of Los Angeles, and he filled his time with extracurricular activities.

By the time of his graduation from Le Conte Junior High, Potash was involved with political youth groups and was a participant in the growth of the local folk music scene. During junior high, Potash became a member of the Jewish Young Fraternalists and the Young Progressives of America. Potash and his friends would often visit local community organizations, such as the Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born, and volunteer their time to the organization. Although they were unionists, Potash’s political work was not fully accepted by his parents; after his political activities he was getting in after midnight and his father thought the young man was failing to take care of business at school.<sup>51</sup>

LYL clubs were drawn from neighborhood social networks sustained by religion, ethnicity and class, and organized into two types of units, student and worker; a member’s status was printed on the membership card.<sup>52</sup> The structure of the LYL was based on Lenin’s principle of democratic centralism and operated with a membership not open to the public. Each club had a representative who would meet with the regional organizing committee to coordinate activities, but on the whole members rarely had any sense of the overall membership. In general, the clubs had autonomy in their decision making process and often refused to follow the directives sent by the coordinating body. Retention of members was an increasing problem for the LYL over the course of the

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<sup>51</sup> Lenny Potash interview.

<sup>52</sup> Labor Youth League Membership Card, Labor Youth League, 20C-SCLSSR.

1950s because of the fear of blacklisting and other reprisals. The decisions of the upper structures of the LYL became less than mandatory for local groups. Strict and conscious discipline was almost impossible to sustain.<sup>53</sup>

The YPA and LYL were not the only progressive political organizations of youth, as many mainstream mass organizations had youth branches. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and the Jewish Peoples Fraternal Order IWO (JPFO) both had youth clubs, and often, young people would be members of a number of parallel organizations. For example, black youth Horace Alexander was a member of the YPA, an IPP candidate for office in 1952, and national vice president of the NAACP, Youth.<sup>54</sup> In the late 1940s and early 1950s, these organizations often worked in tandem. Many of the offices of these organizations were shared or in close proximity to each other, and young activists would often schedule visits to the offices of parent organizations to offer volunteer support. Overall, these groups provided alternatives to participation in school-sanctioned groups and/or participation in the youth-oriented commercial culture of the city. While the street was a primary site for political activity, mass organizations provided spaces in which young people could meet, organize and shape alternative cultures and visions of the city.

In this period, social justice-focused religious organizations also promoted membership in activist youth clubs. The Friends, the Unitarian Church, and the YWCA

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<sup>53</sup> Jerome Handler interview; Lenny Potash interview.

<sup>54</sup> At the NAACP national convention in 1950, Horace Alexander and the Los Angeles delegates introduced language that would eliminate the “subordinate” clause from the youth constitution; however, the voting body rejected the “autonomy resolutions” after a number of youthful Boston delegates lost their seats. Although the NAACP declined to promote “a comprehensive youth program in behalf of their own need,” the delegates at the convention voted to place one youth on each branch standing committee. Horace Alexander, “Youth Reports,” *California Eagle*, August 17, 1950, 1, 24,

provided spaces for youth group meetings, talks and conferences. In December of 1948, over fifty college students organized by Rev. Glenn E. Smiley, a Methodist minister, participated in a march from Monrovia to Hollywood protesting against UMT and the 1948 Selective Service Act.<sup>55</sup> These churches supported the Brotherhood Week celebration, including speakers on African-American history, and efforts to defeat UMT and other forms of growing militarism. Although young communists and liberals had supported militarism in the efforts to defeat fascism during the war, in the late 1940s, youth groups returned to the peace platforms advocated by the American Youth Congress and American Student Union in the 1930s. A new generation of progressive youth sympathetic or at the least open to cooperating with communism sought to make peace with the Soviet Union and argued against Universal Military Training and the draft. Although, mainstream Protestant churches provided support and funds to radical youth groups, by the mid-1950s, religious motivated peace advocates were not free from being labeled as Soviet-inspired, and this often made open support for politically active youth groups difficult if not outright impossible.<sup>56</sup>

All in all, Los Angeles's Jewish community organizations were probably the greatest supporters of independent youth organizations. These organizations ran the gamut of political ideologies within the community, but on the whole supported social reform, civil rights and the labor movement. In the mid-1940s, the organizers for the Jewish Welfare Fund organized the Los Angeles Jewish Youth Council (LAJYC). LAJYC's mission was to provide connections among the array of Jewish youth

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<sup>55</sup> "Draft Protest Paraders Head for Hollywood," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1948, B10.

<sup>56</sup> Robbie Lieberman, *The Strangest Dream: Communism, Anticommunism and the U.S. Peace Movement 1945-1963* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2000).

organizations, from Zionist orthodox laborites, to Hadassah, and to social clubs such as the Debonairs. For young immigrant and first generation working-class Jews on the left, the JPFO Youth Council served as a safe haven, reinforcing Jewish culture, trade unionism and the international labor movement.

In 1951, while at Fairfax High, Potash became a full member of a student club of the Labor Youth League. His club consisted of members who lived from Western Avenue to Fairfax. With about fifteen members, his club met at least twice a month and followed a regular agenda. Every meeting included both an educational component with readings assigned ahead of time and an activist component that included discussion of group and individual activities.<sup>57</sup> Ages of members ranged from the mid-teens to the mid-twenties, and member came to the group with different levels of political experience and education. The club meetings sought to create a space in which young activists could talk about radical politics with interested peers. Meetings were held in a variety of places—members' homes, offices of mass organizations, and school facilities. For Potash, these meetings provided intellectual stimulus lacking in the public schools and introduced Potash to the LYL, a community in which not all the members were white and/or Jewish. These meetings, along with dances and social events held at Aliso Village and the CIO's headquarters, created an interracial and multicultural space in which youth activists could experience at first hand young people from around Los Angeles coming together in a common cause.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Lenny Potash interview; Jerome Handler interview; Jerome S. Handler, "Radical Undergraduate Political Activities at UCLA in the Early 1950s: A Personal Remembrance," 1998, UCLA Special Collections, Charles Young Research Library, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>58</sup> Lenny Potash interview.

Then at the height of its influence as a progressive labor organization, the CIO promoted a vision of a cosmopolitan city by holding a yearly International Festival. Organizers from around California came to this event to enjoy traditional Mexican dances, Yiddish folk songs and classical music. At these events foods and languages mingled, exposing young participants to a cosmopolitanism that did not exist in mass culture. On many occasions, the community came together to appreciate a Paul Robeson performance, sharing both his music and his intellect. In the late 1940s, his popularity would attract standing room-only audiences in Los Angeles's largest venues. For many young activists, the CIO Hall was the first place they attended an interracial dance, as residential segregation coupled with fears of miscegenation continued to support the segregation of young people's leisure in public spaces. Under the leadership of Phillip "Slim" Connelly and black activists such as Walter Williams, Los Angeles's CIO fought for minority employment and equal rights—including equal access to recreation and leisure.<sup>59</sup>

During the early 1950s, Potash was involved in an array of political work. In 1951, Potash campaigned in defense of the Rosenbergs and was Youth Chair of the Committee to Defend Morton Sobell, a scientist who along with the Rosenbergs was accused of handing scientific information to the KGB. The next year, he campaigned for the Independent Progressive Party's presidential and vice-presidential candidates Vincent Hallinan, a San Francisco attorney and Charlotta Bass, the publisher of the progressive African-American paper, the *California Eagle*. At one point in local black activist Horace Alexander's IPP campaign for Congress, Potash rode on a sound truck with "Alexander's

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<sup>59</sup> Sides, *L.A. City Limits*.

Ragtime Band.”

Coupled with Potash’s growing political activities was his participation in the local music scene. In the late 1940s, Woody Guthrie, Leadbelly and Earl Robinson as well as the music magazine *Sing Out!* attracted young people to a radical folk subculture. Potash attended and performed at hootenannies in Topanga Canyon, often held at the home of the actor Will Geer, as well as gatherings closer to home in the Central and Fairfax districts. Potash met yet-to-be famous folk singer Odetta, at the time a housekeeper and student at LACC, at an IPP envelope stuffing and remembers her breaking into song at the event. Like many young troubadours on the left, Potash styled himself after Woody Guthrie, and later in the decade he sponsored a Pete Seeger performance at LACC. While the LYI was often unable to and or limited in sponsoring political speakers at campuses, music and dances became a popular way to inform audiences of a cultural politic of subversion.

In 1952, Potash’s parents moved back to New York. After four years, the couple had not been able to find secure employment. Although the printing industry in Los Angeles published quite a number of government documents, Potash’s father’s refusal to take loyalty oaths limited the number of jobs he could work. In addition, the garment work in the city was only seasonal for Potash’s mother. As New York was both a center of the garment and publishing industries, the couple decided to return. At the age of 16, Potash stayed in Los Angeles and moved in with his brother, an employee at an army surplus store. Finding that institutional education offered little for him, he dropped out of Fairfax High School in the 10th grade and dedicated himself to political work and folk music.

In the year his parents left the city, Potash participated in one of the most dramatic episodes of community cooperation. Since the end of war, progressives and radicals had supported open housing initiatives in Los Angeles. As in other cities with a booming post-war economy, jobs were at times more plentiful than housing, and blacks in the city struggled to find decent homes. On July 25, 1951, two homes one block from each other were bombed on Dunsmuir Avenue. Dunsmuir ran north to south on the western edge of the Mid-City district.<sup>60</sup> The first bomb went off at 4 a.m. and tore a corner of the home of real estate broker Sallie H. Mazoway. Mazoway told police that she had received anonymous phone calls asking her about the sale of homes to nonwhites. A little after noon on the same day, at the recently purchased home of Dr. M. D. Matsumoto, a bomb blew out a section of flooring in the breakfast room and created general damage that exceeded \$1000. Although the police attributed the bombings to racial tension, the Fire Department's spokesman claimed that the explosions had been caused by trapped gas.<sup>61</sup>

Eight months later two identical bombings occurred two blocks to the south. On Sunday March 16, bombs blasted through the homes of William Bailey, a black science teacher at Carver Junior High School, and Ralph Martinez and John W. Potts, two men planning to rent the home to a black family. The American Civil Liberties Union issued a \$500 dollar reward for information leading to the arrest of the bombers and categorized the bombings as infringing on the rights of a black person to rent or buy property. Each home sustained around \$5,000 of damage in the bombings. The national chairman of the American Veterans Committee, Michael Straight, called upon the Los Angeles City

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<sup>60</sup> The homes on Dunsmuir were approximately one mile from the National Bowling Academy.

<sup>61</sup> "Racial Trouble Blamed for Dunsmuir Ave Blasts," *Los Angeles Times*, July 26, 1951. The *California Eagle* criticized the fire department's finding as a racist cover-up.

Police and State Attorney General Edmund Brown to protect the “home of our members and a former chairman of our Wendell I. Willkie Chapter, William Bailey.”<sup>62</sup>

During the following week, the LYL staged demonstrations at Bailey's home and at city hall. These demonstrations generated additional attention to the situation and provoked the involvement of the FBI. Initially, it was unclear whether the radical organizations were welcome at the Bailey home, and a group of ministers claiming to represent Bailey said that he had asked the groups to disperse.<sup>63</sup>

On Monday March 31, Bailey received a letter that said that he had seventy-two hours to evacuate the property. The letter's author threatened, “You think those two-bit police can protect you? Stick around you'll find out.”<sup>64</sup> On the same day neighbors discovered KKK graffiti in front of two houses a couple blocks from the Bailey home and a couple days later the home of a Mexican-American family was bombed.<sup>65</sup> At this point, Bailey formally invited community organizations such as the LYL and the Civil Rights Congress to his home. The LYL responded to Bailey's call by providing twenty-four hour security of his property. Members from across Los Angeles came to the home on Dunsmuir, took patrol shifts and sang songs through the night, while other members brought food to the family and began repairs on the home. After the seventy two hours threat passed, Bailey's family held a gathering to thank all who helped for their support and to celebrate the family's and community's courage and resolution in the face of racial terror. For many in the LYL, the events on Dunsmuir validated the projects of the LYL

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<sup>62</sup> “Protect Citizens in L.A., Veteran Group Demands,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 18, 1952, 2.

<sup>63</sup> “Home Bombings Condemned by Church Group,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1952, 2.

<sup>64</sup> “FBI Drawn into L.A. Bomb Plots,” *Daily People's World*, April 1, 1952; “New Bigot Bombing in View Park,” *Daily People's World*, April 9, 1952.

<sup>65</sup> “Family, Negro roomer tells bigots, ‘not moving.’” *Daily People's World*, April 22, 1952. A family with a black boarder in Venice was threatened a week after the Dunsmuir blasts.

and signal how when organized the local community could work together to defeat racial terrorists.<sup>66</sup>

### Youth in the Uncertain Political Economy of the Postwar Era

Although the growth of the economy in the postwar period opened new opportunities to young people, many were unsure that prosperity alone would insure the welfare of youth. The leadership of the LYL promoted the harmonizing of the goals of progressive youth activists and the labor movement. There was a general sense that unions had often worked against the interest of youth; seniority and job security often trumped the opening of jobs to young employees. By providing labor for local struggles, the LYL sought to influence local union politics and lobby for jobs for young workers that were attractive and well paid. The national leadership of the LYL argued that the differences in pay and opportunities between cohorts of workers allowed for exploitation of labor which, in the case of exploiting young workers, led to youth unemployment; the LYL identified this exploitation as a source for both delinquency and war.<sup>67</sup>

The LYL also viewed race as a category of exclusion and a source of social and economic disequilibrium for working-class people. LYL argued that as a whole, blacks were an “oppressed nation” within, and that black bourgeois nationalism created a go-it-alone strategy that nullified cross-race labor alliances. The LYL introduced white progressives to the struggle for civil rights, jobs and homes for black youth and against all forms of segregation. LYL recommended the study of Negro history and the Negro

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<sup>66</sup> “Night Bombers Strike L.A., We Charge Genocide,” *CRC Flash Bulletin*, March 1952. Civil Rights Congress Papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter CRC-SCLSSR].

<sup>67</sup> California Labor Youth League, *Youth for Unity*, 4.

liberation movement for all young Americans. During Brotherhood Week in February 1950, the student division of the LYL sponsored lectures about Negro history at the Hollywood Eagles Hall. The organization encouraged participation in civil rights organizations such as the NAACP and created opportunities for cross-race recreation in churches and YMCAs.

YPA and LYL championed an antiracist, proto-feminist, international and working-class vision of Los Angeles. By the mid-1940s, the CIO was a key player within the political structures of Los Angeles's wartime economy and helped elect labor leader Parley P. Christensen to the City Council from the 9th district.<sup>68</sup> Harry Bridges' ILWU attracted and developed activist networks that supported CIO and communist organizers. Young CIO radicals came to Los Angeles in the 1940s first to help organize unions in manufacturing industries and later turned their efforts to organizing farm-workers. Both Dorothy Healy, the long-standing head of the Communist Party in Los Angeles, and Victoria Landish Fromkin, the organizer for the Labor Youth League, first came to Los Angeles as CIO organizers. In 1947, Healy married CIO leader "Slim" Connolly.<sup>69</sup>

In the fall of 1949, in tune with its labor roots, the LYL campaigned for the passage of a Los Angeles Commission for Equal Employment Opportunity. The plan outlined a commission with a staff of about 40 city employees, including Employment Practices Investigators and Employment Opportunity Educators. The LYL worked within the Citywide Youth Committee for Fair Hiring Practices, a subsidiary of the Los Angeles Youth Council, and collected over two hundred and fifty youth signatures that petitioned

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<sup>68</sup> The papers of the Los Angeles County Labor Commission indicate that CIO representatives were invited and participated in the commission by 1945. Los Angeles County Labor Commission Papers, Archives of the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter LACHRCA].

<sup>69</sup> Healey and Isserman, *California Red*, 116.

for the commission and supported the end of discriminatory hiring; no petition was circulated against the measure.<sup>70</sup> The LYL and the YPA collected the majority of signatures in support of the bill, and efforts were concentrated in the San Pedro, Venice and Echo Park-Coronado districts. On the day before the vote, the YPA spokesperson published an article in the *Daily Bruin* urging concerned students to call their city councilman.<sup>71</sup>

After a grueling council session that included speakers of numerous groups for and against the ordinance, the bill was defeated in a 6 to 8 vote.<sup>72</sup> Conservatives on the council viewed the measure as “communistic” and thought that it sacrificed the rights of employers; letters to the council denounced the bill as “an attempt to take away our rights and have a dictator tell us who we must hire and associate with.” Nonetheless, employer rights provided a superficial veneer for a politics of white racism; one letter against the EEOC read, “I’d been hoping that these rude and really uncultivated colored girls who smack their “gum” and drawl “What’d you want?” in the recorder’s office might be gradually replaced by women, who due to many generations of civilization, have innate feelings against such things.”<sup>73</sup> After the defeat of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the LYL refocused its efforts on the desegregation of large retail employers

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<sup>70</sup> Fair Employment Practices Commission Petition, September 27, 1949, Los Angeles City Council Minutes, Los Angeles City Archive, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter LACCM-LACA]. Petition Collector signed their names and Labor Youth League affiliation at the bottom of the petitions.

<sup>71</sup> “Support Equal Employment,” *Daily Bruin*, September 26, 1949.

<sup>72</sup> Los Angeles City Council, Vote Roll Call, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, September 27, 1949, LACCM-LACA.

<sup>73</sup> William C. Ardery to City Council, September 24, 1949; Dorothy Richards to City Council, Los Angeles City Council; Vote Roll Call, Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, September 27, 1949, LACCM-LACA.

such as the May Company, Sears, and Woolworth's.<sup>74</sup>

The LYI's vision of youth in the postwar period differed substantially from the society planned and promoted by national policy makers. The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 created the means by which working-class veterans of World War II climbed into the ranks of the middle class. This act, known as the "GI Bill of Rights", provided for tuition, books and living expenses for up to four years of college or vocational school.<sup>75</sup> The SRA also made low interest loans and mortgages available for small business owners and homebuyers. Furthermore, reminiscent of California's Ham and Eggs and Townsend social welfare campaigns, the SRA also created a twenty-dollar weekly allowance for veterans seeking employment. Promoted by the American Legion, the SRA was a policy departure from the meager benefits given to veterans of World War I. SRA was in essence youth policy and its largesse shaped youth institutions and organizations.

As an example of youth policy, the SRA opened the door for one million veterans to enter college in 1946, and by 1956, over ten million veterans had used the education benefit. In Los Angeles, local community colleges burst at the seams and many institutions had to offer alternative scheduling of classes because the physical space of campuses did not accommodate the postwar influx of students. In this period, centrally located Los Angeles City College on Vermont Avenue became the spawning ground for three other institutions, East Los Angeles College, California State Los Angeles, and California State Northridge. During this period of institutional transition, the school

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<sup>74</sup> Lenny Postash interview.

<sup>75</sup> Suzanne Mettler, *Soldiers to Citizens: The G.I. Bill and the Making of the Greatest Generation* (New York: Oxford University Press US, 2005); Edward Humes, *Over Here: How the G.I. Bill Transformed the American Dream* (New York: Harcourt, 2006).

newspaper, *The Collegiate*, often ran articles that expressed students' desire for the school to be on par with better-funded local institutions such as UCLA and USC.<sup>76</sup>

At LACC students shared concerns about their roles as workers and soldiers. In the late 1940s, both the Taft-Hartley Act, over a presidential veto, and Selective Service Act of 1948 were seen as youth policies that constricted young peoples' opportunities. Taft-Hartley, an amendment to the Wagner Act, limited labor power by abolishing the closed shop and by outlawing secondary boycotts. Young people in the LYL supported labor causes with less economic risk than laborers and thus filled a void in the labor movement caused by Taft-Hartley.<sup>77</sup>

The Selective Service Act and Universal Military Training served to tie national defense and military strategy with labor policy. As argued by proponents of the SSA and UMT, during World War II, the United States had time to train and equip its soldiers because of the cushion provided by its allies. However, military experts argued that the United States would not be provided a grace period in the future, and therefore the nation needed to mobilize its young in anticipation of war. President Eisenhower promoted a six month training plan for every young man, including vocational skill training, so that the military would be ready to engage aggressors without having to train fresh civilians for combat. Before his parting presidential speech in which he critiqued the dangers of the military-industrial complex, Eisenhower promoted manpower over technology. Many shared this belief with Eisenhower, and ROTC training became mandatory in many high

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<sup>76</sup> Numerous editorials in LACC's *The Collegiate* described how UCLA and USC, and the new schools California State University Los Angeles and later California State University Northridge received the lion's share of resources thereby limiting the reputation and employment opportunities of LACC alumni.

<sup>77</sup> Kim McQuaid, *Uneasy Partners: Big Business in American Politics, 1945-1990* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993).

schools, colleges and universities. With greater knowledge of the affairs of the world, many Americans felt that the world had gotten smaller in the postwar period and that UMT was the only way to ensure national defense. The American Legion was a longstanding promoter of UMT and during its national convention in Los Angeles in October 1950, legionnaires from around the country visited local schools, promoted UMT, plans and encouraged the expansion of ROTC programs.<sup>78</sup>

The struggles over UMT brought politics to campus. On April 17, 1948, nearly a thousand students at Pasadena City College attended a speech against UMT by the IPP's Wallace campaigner Averill Berman. According to the *Times*, exchanges between Berman supporters and students sparked a number of fights.<sup>79</sup> Two days after the talk at PCC, the YPA, American Veterans Committee, and the Student Committee Against UMT planned a parade and talk with *California Eagle* publisher Charlotta Bass at LACC.<sup>80</sup> Nonetheless, before the event began, students opposed to the speaker and rally broke into the car of 22-year-old Larry Pearlman, one of the organizers of the event, and destroyed anti-UMT signs and pro-Wallace literature. In the parking lot, confrontations between parade supporters and pro-UMT students erupted, and when YPA speakers including Berman attempted to climb on top of cars and reason with the growing mob, their efforts were met with a hail of fruit thrown by students opposed to the

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<sup>78</sup> "Universal Military Training," *Los Angeles Times*, August 19, 1947, A4; "Welcome Mat Out for Legionnaire," *Los Angeles Times*, October 7, 1950, 1.

<sup>79</sup> "Pasadena College Head Pooh-Poohs Riot Report," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1948, 14.

<sup>80</sup> In March of 1948 a few branches of the American Veterans Committee disbanded with the complaint that big city interests and communists controlled the organization. "AVC Disbands at Oxnard in Red Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, March 26, 1948, A2; "Will Rogers Jr. Calls AVC Red Front, Resigns," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1948, 2.

demonstration. Due to the riot, Charlotta Bass's appearance was cancelled.<sup>81</sup>

It is revealing to note that many of the students who objected to the demonstration did so not out of pro-UMT sympathies, but rather they felt that student politics threatened the expedient acquisition of an education and the reputation of their school.<sup>82</sup> Richard Glasier, twenty-year-old Navy Veteran, opposed the parade and demonstration because it would disgrace the college and tarnish its image. Glasier, as well as many other students, thought that the LACC campus should be free from political activity. After the riot, with the permission of the president of the college E.W. Jacobsen, two students, J.C. "Duke" Wark and James "Buck" Buchanan, set up a booth on the quad to collect signatures to support a ban on all communist and communist front organizations on campus. Duke and Buck's campaign did not last long, as students accused the duo of also bringing controversial politics to campus. Although many students chided their classmates for displays of activism, a minority of students came to the defense of the Wallace supporters and declared that the issue was really about freedom of speech. In an editorial to the *Daily Trojan*, USC student Jerry Maher saw the mob violence against Berman and the Student Committee as a form of physical repression that challenged the workings of democracy.<sup>83</sup>

Much of the desire to complete school without interruption was directly related to the provisions given to veterans in the SRA. As almost a direct extension of military service, veterans flooded college campuses with strict time-to-degree schedules. While

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<sup>81</sup> "Blows Exchanged in Campus Demonstration," *Los Angeles Times*, April 20, 1948; "Students Sign Anti-Red Paper at City College," *Los Angeles Times*, April 24, 1948, A1.

<sup>82</sup> On April 9, 1951, the House Armed Services Committee dropped plans to write a universal military training into law. Instead, the draft age was lowered from 19 to 18.5, the terms of service were extended from 21 to 26 months, and deferments were tightened for husbands without children.

<sup>83</sup> Jerry Maher, "The Simple Issue," *Los Angeles Times*, April 29, 1948, A4

students had previously debated politics and culture, this generation of students was concerned with administrative budgets and academic processes. In this period, the editorials of Los Angeles's daily campus newspapers became more critical of wasteful student government policies and poor administrative decisions. In electoral races at USC and UCLA, candidates supported by new political coalitions between student reformers and veterans defeated fraternity-supported candidates. California politician Jesse Unruh started his political life at USC as a student veteran. Through the school's newspaper, Unruh challenged the elitism and immaturity of the school's fraternities and brought together a coalition of veterans and independents to defeat the Greek-supported candidates.<sup>84</sup>

Moreover, this period also saw the development of organizations that provided coordination between student governments at local colleges and schools across the nation. Formed in 1947, the National Students Association worked to coordinate college student governments across the country and allowed school officers to explore other institutions' practices. Also in 1947, the California Association of Secondary School Administrators and the State Department of Education sponsored the founding of the California Association of Student Councils. In one year, over half of the secondary schools in California became part of CASC. The organization's constitution stated that its mission was to "stimulate students in their civic responsibilities, to encourage leadership and statesmanship, to co-operate with high school administrators and teachers in their efforts to motivate students in the fields of citizenship training." CASC allied itself with the fight against communism and promoted the initiation to representative democracy

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<sup>84</sup> Bill Boyarsky, *Big Daddy: Jesse Unruh and the Art of Power Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 40-41.

within student councils as the greatest protection against communism. In 1948, the CASC held a statewide conference in Glendale in which attendees debated UMT, the place of the United Nations, and codes of conduct at athletic contests.<sup>85</sup>

While both liberal and radical organizations provided outlet for a controlled amount of political activity on campus, conservative politicians sought to prohibit all radical influences in the schools and in doing so they threatened the progressive impulse that stressed the self-regulation of youth. In 1946, Canoga Park High School teachers Blanche Bettington and Frances Robman Eisenberg were called before the Joint Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities in California, otherwise known as the Tenney Committee, and questioned about their associations with the Communist Party; a school board investigation found little evidence for dismissal of either teacher. On April 9, 1949, the California State Senate voted to limit the teaching of “isms” in the California public schools. Sponsored by Senator Jack B. Tenney, the law limited the teaching of communism or any other totalitarian form of government to “an objective presentation” of fact.<sup>86</sup> Following on the heels of Tenney, in 1953 Nelson S. Dilworth successfully sponsored a law, the Dilworth Act, which required all teachers to sign an oath denying communist affiliation. After pioneering the teaching of “Negro” history at Fairfax High School, Frances Eisenberg was again called to testify, this time in front of the California State Burns Committee, and because she refused to answer questions about her associations with communists, she was fired from her job because of her non-compliance

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<sup>85</sup> Ernest R. Camfield, “Students Fight isms—With Democracy,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 2, 1948, A4.

<sup>86</sup> “Senate Votes to Control ‘Ism’ Teaching,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 24, 1949, 1.

with the Dilworth Act.<sup>87</sup> Progressives spoke up against the practice of blacklisting and at a CRC meeting Carey McWilliams attacked conservative anti-communism loyalty platforms in the schools as the product of a loyalty fixation, the doctrine of guilt by association and “the tendency towards thought control.” McWilliams’s larger argument was that academic freedom was not incompatible with needs for national security; in fact this freedom was essential to any meaningful form of security.<sup>88</sup>

Students were also asked to take loyalty oaths, and failure to comply severely restricted young activists access to public school facilities for meetings and rallies. In September of 1949, the superintendent of Santa Barbara schools, E. W. Jacobsen, asked organizers of a state convention of the California Young Progressives to sign a loyalty oath and they refused. Their refusal led to the retraction of their permit to use of Santa Barbara High School for their convention.<sup>89</sup>

Seven months after the first regional meeting on June 26, 1949, at the Elks Hall on South Central Avenue, members of the Labor Youth League were called to Sacramento to testify in front of the Californian Senate Fact Finding Committee on Un-American Activities. The government’s lawyer examined John Conley, 23, and teenagers

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<sup>87</sup> “Collection Guide,” Box 1, Frances Robam Eisenberg Papers: Blacklisted Teachers in Los Angeles, 1928-1995, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter FEP-SCLSSR]. After the blacklisting of left leaning teachers, the Los Angeles City Schools found that it had few teachers that could teach about communism, consumerism and capitalism. Los Angels County Superintendent of School’s C.C. Trillingham argued that a new educational program needed to be developed that taught the constitution and the bill of rights, capitalism and free enterprise, liberal education, and Judeo-Christian religion. In the late 1950s, the Los Angeles County Schools developed the program, “Our American Heritage”, to help teachers with these subjects. Many local school districts such as Culver City, San Gabriel and South Pasadena copied the LACS program. Our American Heritage, SUB-SCLSSR.

<sup>88</sup> Carey McWilliams, “Our Freedom is Our Security,” Civil Rights Congress Meeting, February 4, 1949, Box 6, Folder 22, CRC-SCLSSR. In 1950, the CRC had members from the IPP, the Communist Party, California Eagle, Young Progressives, JPFO, American Jewish Congress, UAW, UOPWA, ILWU, LYL, and National Lawyers Guild. Marguerite Robinson, “Letter to the Board,” June 22, 1950, CRC-SCLSSR.

<sup>89</sup> “Loyalty Oath Board Group From,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 11, 1949, A6. E.W. Jacobsen had been an administrator at LACC during the UMT controversy and this may have influenced his decision to ban the students.

Lynn Marshall, Dorothy Neff, and Miriam Luke. Victoria Landish Fromkin also testified and described herself as the “teen-age director of the Labor Youth League” and said she was “proud of the fact that I was elected to this office.” Each witness asserted her constitutional rights and refused to answer any incriminating line of questioning.<sup>90</sup>

By the early 1950s, anticommunist politicians, cautious campus administrators and cautious students sought to limit the practice of student politics on Los Angeles’s campuses. However, these moves had the effect of making mainstream student politics oppositional. In March 1950, fifteen student government officers at LACC resigned in protest over the administration’s attempt to limit discussions at meetings. President Howard McDonald argued that student government deliberations should concern campus business only and that controversial political issues should be left to school forums. Challenging McDonald’s proposal, an editorial in the LACC’s *Collegian* argued from a liberal and anti-communist position that the “restriction on free discussion channels students into subversive organizations.”<sup>91</sup> While the Free Speech Movement would flare up in 1964, its antecedents can be located in campus discussions in the early 1950s during the nation’s transition from military preparedness to a Cold War consumer economy.

### Youth Subcultures, Suppression and the Roots of Subversion

In 1948, Federal Bureau of Investigation director J. Edgar Hoover suggested to President Harry Truman that the Smith Act, which made it a crime to “knowingly or willfully advocate, abet, advise, or teach the duty, necessity, desirability, or propriety of

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<sup>90</sup> “New Youth League Called Communist,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 5, 1950, A1.

<sup>91</sup> “Student Protest Still Undecided at City College,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 28, 1950, A1.

overthrowing the Government of the United States or of any State by force or violence,” be used against the CPA and its sympathizers. In early 1950, following Alger Hiss’ perjury conviction, Senator Joseph McCarthy delivered a speech in Wheeling, West Virginia, in which he claimed to have the names of hundreds of communists that had infiltrated the federal government. Following McCarthy’s lead, Senator Walter McCarran resurrected the failed 1948 Nixon-Mundt bill also known as the “Subversive Activities Control Bill.” McCarran bundled the measure with a raft of other stringent anti-communist provisions such as preventing party members from holding American passports. Known as the McCarran Act, the 1950 Internal Security Act was denounced by Republican Senator William Langer as the direst threat to American liberty since the 1798 Alien and Sedition Acts.<sup>92</sup>

In California, Jack B. Tenney, California house representative and later state senator from Los Angeles, spearheaded campaigns to identify the IPP as communist-dominated. In March 1948, California’s HUAC, the Tenney Commission, identified a number of communist operatives in the IPP. In addition, the Tenney Commission produced a list of organizations that were alleged fronts for the communist party in California, many of which were CIO unions.<sup>93</sup>

Following a car crash in the spring of 1950, the federal HUAC obtained papers held by the LYL’s organizational secretary, Lillian Lewis. The report showed that as of December 5, 1949, the LYL had 3,660 members nationally and 487 in Los Angeles, including 96 college and 61 high school students. A second undated document indicated

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<sup>92</sup> Michael J. Ybarra, *Washington Gone Crazy: Senator Pat McCarran and the Great American Communist Hunt* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2004), 377.

<sup>93</sup> “Third Party Assailed as Red Creation,” Los Angeles Times, March 26, 1948, 1.

an expansion of national membership to 5,879, with the greatest increase in membership among college and high school students.<sup>94</sup>

With a political environment dominated by the politics of anti-communism it is not surprising that in its initial year at UCLA, LYL submissions to the *Daily Bruin* ignited a controversy over freedom of speech on campus. Estelle Parness, the LYL contact with the *Daily Bruin*, wrote articles about the lack of housing for minorities on campus, the loyalty oath battle between the academic senate and the regents, and the racist homecoming parade floats.<sup>95</sup> It was this last issue, LYL's campaign to challenge racist practices of the student body, that caused the greatest amount of disagreement among students. During the parade one fraternity featured a student in blackface playing a "negro mammy." Parness characterized the float as an insult to black students, and in keeping with LYL's labor-based ideology, pointed out how this particular depiction supported the idea that black people were a racial caste of manual laborers and servants. Local sororities and fraternity representatives responded by claiming that the float was a tribute to the figure of the black matron.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, the homecoming parade was a local spectacle and more than one hundred thousand people attended the parade and/or football game; Sherrill Luke led a large procession of students and fans throughout the streets of Westwood on homecoming day.<sup>97</sup> However, even though the student body had elected Sherrill Luke to the presidency, many fraternal organizations continued to practice racial exclusion and the racist float was an outward cultural display of these

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<sup>94</sup> "Red inroad into Schools Shown in Seized Papers," *Los Angeles Times*, March 14, 1950, 15.

<sup>95</sup> Throughout the fall of 1949, Estelle Parness wrote weekly editorials in the *Daily Bruin* as a representative of the LYL. Her articles appeared side-by-side with complimentary staff editorials.

<sup>96</sup> Estelle Parness, "Homecoming," *Daily Bruin*, November 6, 1949.

<sup>97</sup> Rachel Kelley, "Where has all the spirit gone?" *Daily Bruin*, November 1, 1996.

practices.

During 1949, the *Daily Bruin*'s staff often supported the YPA and LYL letters to the editor with collaborating editorials. On April 21, 1950, the regents passed a resolution initiating an anti-communist loyalty oath for all university employees.<sup>98</sup> When the LYL insisted that the loyalty oaths limited academic freedom, the editors wrote a corresponding article in defense of the constitutional rights of freedom of association and speech. The editors of the *Daily Bruin*, Jim Garst and Clancy Sigal, were progressive Democrats and not members of the LYL, although on some days it may have seemed so because of the collaboration of articles.<sup>99</sup> Their articles of the time, like the student government walkout at LACC, promoted open political dialogue and discussion. By the end of fall semester 1949, both university administrators and conservative students had enough of the paper's liberal-radical alliance, and for the first time the University's Publications Board began to censor all editorial decisions. In the beginning of 1950, Dean Milton Hahn denied Clancy Sigal the position of managing editor because he was seen as too supportive of groups like the Labor Youth League.<sup>100</sup>

In 1951, Dean Hahn suspended the campus activities of the African-American Carver Club because it failed to register speakers for Negro History Week. The registration of speakers at UCLA was a policy decision based on University Regent's

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<sup>98</sup> "Having taken the constitutional oath of office required of public officials of the State of California, I hereby formally acknowledge my acceptance of the position and salary named, and also state that I am not a member of the Communist Party or any other organization which advocates the overthrow of the Government by force or violence, and that I have no commitments in conflict with my responsibilities with respect to impartial scholarship and free pursuit of truth. I understand that the foregoing statement is a condition of my employment and a consideration of payment of my salary."

<sup>99</sup> "Young Democrats Meet," *California Eagle*, December 15, 1949. Speakers included Jim Garst, Clancy Sigal, Hal Watkins and Stanley Kristal.

<sup>100</sup> George Garrigues, *A History of the UCLA Daily Bruin, 1919-1955*, [www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/14B\\_Death.html](http://www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/14B_Death.html) (accessed January 25, 2009).

Regulation 17 that disallowed political speeches or rallies on University of California campuses. Even Estes Kafauver, in his bid for the Democratic Party's nomination in 1952, spoke off-campus in an empty lot next to the YWCA because of Regulation 17. In the case of the Carver Club, the LYL responded by organizing a rally in support of the club and Negro History Week. In the *Daily*, the LYL spun the suspension in a way that highlighted the lack of attention to black history and challenged the execution of Regulation 17.<sup>101</sup>

On June 8, 1951, in the spirit of Jack Tenney, five members of the California Senate Committee on Un-American Activities released a 291-page report examining the ways the CPA infiltrated California universities, colleges and high schools.<sup>102</sup> The report highlighted UCLA and the committee sent a threat of dismissal to top administrators if they permitted any Communist-front meetings on campus. The report identified Berkeley psychology professor Edward C. Tolman as a leader of academics that refused to sign the loyalty oath.<sup>103</sup> In terms of organizing techniques, the report noted that the faculty was rarely directly involved in spreading communism but that youth organizations often worked to bring young people into the fold. At UCLA, the report identified the Labor Youth League and the Mike Quinn Club as communist organizations.<sup>104</sup> In 1952, President Robert Sproul directly banned all communist speakers from campus, and Dean

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Concurrent to communist witch hunts, in 1951 Florence Fowler Lyons gave an address to the Southern California Republican Women that argued the multicultural UNESCO program daily fed students "doses of Communism, Socialism, New Dealism and other isms." Adams, "The UNESCO Controversy in Los Angeles."

<sup>103</sup> In 1952 the California Supreme Court overturned the loyalty oath in *Tolman v. Underhill* and forced the re-instatement of all teachers who were refusing after failing to sign the oath. In 1956, 31 teachers were reinstated with back pay and with time towards sabbatical. "Collection Guide," FEP-SCLSSR.

<sup>104</sup> "Red Drive Charged in State's Schools," *Los Angeles Times*, June 9, 1951, 1.

Hahn refused the sale of the *Anvil*, a pacifist magazine, from the student store.<sup>105</sup>

The report also listed the death of student Everitt Hudson as a communist plot. Hudson, a student at UCLA, had been found dead in the basement of his co-op. Although he was known to have a weak heart, the report claimed that Hudson had recently tried to leave the party and that party members murdered him so he would not leak party secrets to the press. The Hearst press exploited this story and UCLA was labeled the “The Little Red Schoolhouse.”<sup>106</sup> This episode drove radical youth organizations on campus further underground.<sup>107</sup>

In 1952, as part of the Justice Department’s efforts to eliminate the CPA, fourteen local communist leaders were put on trial for Smith Act violations. Defense committees formed to provide assistance to the leaders, and the LYL mobilized to demonstrate at court appearances and publicity events. During the trial, the Eastside Defense Committee arranged to use the auditorium of the Roosevelt High School for a public meeting with two of the fourteen leaders, William Schneiderman and Henry Steinberg, and their lawyer Leo Branton, Jr. The publicity led to complaints that the board of education allowed communists the use of school facilities. Administrator Dr. Herbert Popenoe showed that the policies of the board of education gave permission to almost any group requesting facilities for meeting purposes and that an average of five “communistically inclined” meetings a week were held in various Los Angeles County schools.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Garrigues, *A History of the UCLA Daily Bruin*, [ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/12A\\_Golden.html](http://ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/12A_Golden.html) (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>106</sup> As early as 1935, UCLA Provost Ernest Carroll Moore identified UCLA as “a hotbed of Communism.” This characterization has resurface again and again throughout the history of the university.

<sup>107</sup> Garrigues, *A History if the UCLA Daily Bruin*, [www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/09A\\_People's.html](http://www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/09A_People's.html) (accessed January 25, 2009).

<sup>108</sup> “Reds’ School meet Stirs Protest Cry,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 29, 1952, 2.

Following Popenoe's account of meetings, the board of education, like the board of regents, decided to ban all political meetings within the public schools. During this period a number of teachers at local secondary schools and colleges were also blacklisted, including poetry teacher Thomas McGrath at LACC. Blacklisted from teaching, McGrath and a number of other fellow travelers founded the literary magazine *The California Quarterly*.<sup>109</sup>

In December 1953, the Subversive Activities Control Board began proceedings to determine whether LYL should be required to register as a communist-front organization.<sup>110</sup> Samuel Gruber, lawyer for the league, argued that the "clear and present danger of McCarthyism" in terms of its threats to civil liberties was far more dangerous than the activities of the LYL. The government's lawyer, Kirk Madrix, rejected the use of "McCarthyism" as a defense because the term had no established definition. In the long run, the LYL failed to persuade members of HUAC that they were not a communist front organization. In the waning years of the organization members worked through mass organizations to challenge the societal excesses of McCarthyism and through cultural practices, such as the Green Feather Movement, internalized these confrontations into the culture of student politics.

### **Jerome Handler: Working Within Mass Organizations**

During the 1950s, politicians and the mass media promoted the idea that

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<sup>109</sup> The *Quarterly* would also feature the poetry of former *Daily Bruin* editor Eugene Fromkin, husband of Victoria Landish Fromkin. For more on Fromkin's newspaper activities at UCLA see, George Garrigues, *Loud Bark and Curious Eyes: A History of the Daily Bruin, 1919-1955*, 2001, <http://www.ulwaf.com/Daily-Bruin-History/index03.html> (accessed January 6, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> "U.S. Youth League Red Hearing Opens," *Los Angeles Times*, December 1, 1953, 10.

communists were infiltrating mass organizations and subverting them into fronts for the Communist Party. Members of the LYL saw it differently; their goal was to work within mass organizations to strengthen their membership base and further the goals of the organization. In 1952, at the LYL national convention, delegates proposed to disband the entire group to focus efforts within mass organizations.<sup>111</sup> At UCLA, the *Daily Bruin*, student government, NAACP, UCA Co-op community, and American Friend Service Committee received support from individual LYL members.

As a student at UCLA, LYL member Jerry Handler worked within the campus branch of the NAACP and in a group called Fact Finders.<sup>112</sup> Fact Finders, begun by restaurateur and political reformer Clifford Clinton, offered a back door around Regulation 17 by inviting political speakers to the YWCA just off campus. The two women who co-chaired the YWCA believed that as Christians they needed to provide the campus community with political discourse, and one of these chairs, Opal Jones, influenced Handler to study black history and African culture. During Handler's tenure at Fact Finders, Linus Pauling gave a talk on modern science and its relationship to the potentials of world peace, W.E.B. DuBois shared his insights on colonialism in Africa, and sociologist Ralph Turner spoke on the implications of the Brown v. Board Supreme Court decision.

In the 1952 election for IPP candidates Hallinan, Bass, and Alexander, Jerry Handler also met folksinger Odetta. Handler and Odetta worked together for a day handing out election material at UCLA's Westwood campus. Like Lenny Potash, Handler

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<sup>111</sup> Leon Wofsy, "On the Way to Our Third National Convention," 1956, 7, Labor Youth League, 20C-SCLSSR.

<sup>112</sup> Jerome Handler interview. It is interesting to note that title "Fact Finders" mirrored the state and national HUAC "fact finding" committees.

was Jewish, and had attended Le Conte Junior High School and Fairfax High School. He was also a recent immigrant to Los Angeles; his parents relocated to California from the South Bronx after World War II. However, unlike Potash's parents, and like most immigrants, Handler's immediate family was not politically radical. In high school, Handler was peripherally involved with the YPA, and most of his early political experiences focused on the struggle for black civil rights.

After high school, Handler attended LACC but was not politically active. His interest in Marxism really began after he spent time in France with relatives. In France, he played basketball with a communist recreational group and had stimulating political discussions with a cousin who was a member of French Young Communists. On his return to the United States, Handler professed his desire to study Marxism with an acquaintance who unbeknownst to Handler was involved in the Labor Youth League. Through this contact Handler joined a Marxist study group and membership in the LYL followed soon thereafter.

When he entered UCLA in 1951, Handler was deeply involved with LYL activities. At this time, and reflective of the *Daily Bruin* controversy, loyalty oaths, Regulation 17 and the blacklist, the culture of student politics on campus was dominated by the chill of the Cold War. Because of administrators' heightened policing of suspected activists, the LYL strove to have a spotless appearance on campus. Members of the LYL tried to remain above reproach; members' dating, sex, and the use of alcohol and drugs were strictly policed by the organization. In fact, the LYL made it a policy that open members, those who sent letters to the *Daily Bruin* and spoke for the LYL in public, would appear and sound "waspish." The public face of the LYL was clean cut, in white

bucks, with a crew cut and cashmere sweater. Internally, the LYL was anything but “waspish” and was dominated by Jewish members. In fact, LYL parties at the co-ops were the only racially integrated parties on campus. Nonetheless by the early 1950s, the LYL tried to keep the interracial and religious nature of its membership out of the public spotlight and cultivated the image of model middle-class WASP youth through physical appearances and behavior that conformed to societal expectations.

In the early 1950s, there were a very limited number of student radicals on campus. The Young Peoples Socialist League had a handful of members and the LYL had fewer than forty members. The UCLA club was divided into teams of five or six members. Structured on the principles of democratic-centralism, each team’s leader met weekly with the other team leaders who would then send a representative to the Los Angeles County Student Division meetings. At team meetings, the group would discuss current activities and decide how to participate. Handler remembers that sometimes a representative of the CPA would come to a “quiet corner” of campus and meet with the student leader of the UCLA club in order to solicit support for CPA projects.

During Handler’s time in the LYL, the UCLA chapter challenged the policies of UMT on campus that required three semesters of ROTC participation by every male student. Handler and friends would refuse to take care of their uniforms and halfheartedly participated in the weekly drills; this contempt of authority raised the ire of the ROTC instructors. At one point, Handler and associates began a unit that drilled out of uniform. Although the LYL was limited in its ability to affect a beatnik culture, the rejection of the militarism of UMT was a simple stylistic act of defiance.

At UCLA, Handler participated in the struggle to open housing for black students

in Westwood and picketed against establishments that refused to serve blacks, such as the Bruin Barber Shop. In 1953, the LYL also joined with the other socialist organizations to push the student body to ban the tradition of fraternities performing in black face on floats during the homecoming parade.

While UCLA's LYL promoted both anti-militarism and civil rights, it was also very active in demonstrations against HUAC and McCarthyism. Handler participated in demonstrations in support of Ethel and Julius Rosenberg and picketed HUAC when it came to Los Angeles. However, the Green Feather Movement of 1954 provided a break from traditional protests and suggested many of the themes that would become part of the New Left and Free Speech Movement. The GFM began at the University of Indiana, Bloomington, and was a response to what was seen as local McCarthyism: the Indiana State Textbook Commission had recently banned editions of Robin Hood within the public school libraries because its "rob-the-rich-give-to-the-poor" motif was seen as inspiring communism. Foreshadowing student movement strategies in the 1960s, the Green Feather Movement organized University students across the nation in a coordinated demonstration that rejected the absurd policies of anti-communist authorities. During the GFM, the LYL distributed small white pins with a single green feather that students wore to signal solidarity with the movement.

At UCLA, the pin supply failed to reach campus before the date of a planned march. Instead, local activists went to a local poultry shop, purchased a load of feathers, and hand-dyed them green. In the following weeks, these feathers were distributed to the marchers and supporters. UCLA's GFM march featured a crier dressed in a Robin Hood costume followed by drummers and other merry men. As the marchers crossed campus

they chanted anti-McCarthy slogans. The parade began at Kirkoff Hall and concluded at a grove of Eucalyptus trees on the northern edge of campus, designated as Sherwood Forest. At end of the march, Professor Currin V. Shields gave a speech in defense of the First Amendment to about two hundred students garbed as Robin Hood's merry men.

The Green Feather movement at UCLA was a turning point in student activism on campus because this type of political performance was not sanctioned by the administration. In dressing for the event, youth activists tested the waters of the counterculture and for the moment put aside reservation of appearing to conform. Second, the organizing for this event connected local struggles to a national organization, thereby harmonizing the practices of youth activism. Many students continued to wear the movement's pins and feathers after the initial events, and to those in the know this practice revealed networks of youth solidarity. Although the LYL played a role in organizing the Green Feather Movement on campus, the GFM pointed to a new brand of youth activism that would fully develop in the 1960s.<sup>113</sup>

### **Camelot and the Magic Kingdom: The Politics of Young Democrats**

Handler left the LYL in 1954. During this period, he lost interest in the LYL as his training in anthropology made him question the doctrinaire Marxist analysis of slavery; afterwards, readings of Engels and Howard Fast's *Spartacus* held less interest to him. In leaving the LYL, Handler kept his allegiances to the YWCA and became a resident in their co-operative housing. After he had left the organization, two FBI agents interviewed him about his activities in the LYL; he later learned that his professors had

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<sup>113</sup> Jerome Handler interview; Lenny Potash interview.

been questioned about his political activities. By 1955, the LYL had been identified as a communist front by the Justice Department and many of its members began to leave the organization.<sup>114</sup>

While McCarthyism pushed radical youth politics underground in the 1950s, liberal youth in California found new opportunities to politically participate within the Democratic Party. New structures in the party such as the California Democratic Committee created grassroots political networks that allowed young politicians to quickly enter the world of politics. Rosalind Wiener's election to the Los Angeles City Council provides a good example of how new political opportunities became available to young politicians during an institutional and cultural shift within California's Democratic Party.

In 1953, the 5th District of the Los Angeles City Council stretched from Wilshire to Westwood. Conservative and anti-communist George P. Cronk had successfully defended his council seat there for four terms.<sup>115</sup> In 1952, Cronk decided to advance his political career and run for state office and six candidates entered the race for the 5th District. On April 5, 1953, the *Times* predicted the race would be a toss-up between accountant Elmer Marshrey and attorney Harold W. Nash. However, after the primary on April 16, Rosalind Wiener led the field. Only 22 years old, Wiener was the youngest candidate for city council in the history of Los Angeles elections.<sup>116</sup>

Although Rosalind Wiener's age made her an unusual candidate, her candidacy

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<sup>114</sup> "Major Strides Against Subversion Disclosed," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1955, A10; Jerome Handler interview.

<sup>115</sup> When the Congress of Industrial Organizations tried to open union co-operatives in 1947, Cronk opposed this move and suggested that Los Angeles was falling under the tyranny of socialism. On numerous occasions he blocked wage increases for city employees, voted against the FEPC, and vetoed expansion of public services in Los Angeles.

<sup>116</sup> "Councilman Win Austin Endorses Marshrey," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 1953, 2.

also indicated the changing ethnic and political identity of the 5th District. Wiener was from a Westside middle-class Jewish family and like Handler and Potash she was a student at Fairfax High School. During her candidacy, Wiener was employed as the recreational director of a Jewish youth group and had contacts with many young families in the Westside. During the campaign, Wiener went door to door to talk to constituents, and it was estimated that she personally rang 4,500 doors bells. A mother's group organized to back her candidacy, and this group rallied women's civic organizations throughout the 5th District.<sup>117</sup> Wiener also promoted herself as youth's candidate and spent Saturday mornings during the campaign handing out balloons to young people outside of matinee theaters.

Rosalind Wiener was not the *Times*'s candidate of choice. From the beginning of her candidacy, the city political columnist the Watchman insinuated that Wiener was a radical ultra-left liberal and a "school girl" unqualified for the responsibilities of council.<sup>118</sup> "Managing a city the size of Los Angeles is no child's play," began William D. Hammond, who gave his support to Wiener's challenger, 51-year-old Elmer H. Marshey, after losing the primary.<sup>119</sup> Betty Hammond, a delegate in the 1952 Democratic National Convention, declared that the defeat of Wiener would be a "repudiation of the socialistic principles of the 'young turks' who have done irreparable harm to our party and nation."<sup>120</sup> The *Times* and the Hammonds attacked Wiener as being too young and too radical; she was a threat to conservative Democratic Party politics in Los Angeles.

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<sup>117</sup> "Mothers Group for Wiener Candidacy," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1953, 11.

<sup>118</sup> The Watchman, "Poulson Mandate Seen in Primary," *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, A13.

<sup>119</sup> "Hammond Throws Backing to Marshrey," *Los Angeles Times*, May 21, 1953, A7.

<sup>120</sup> "Leading Democrat Backs Marshey," *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 1953, 11.

Wiener countered accusations that she was a communist by rejecting endorsements by the *People's World* and the LYL. Wiener claimed that radical support was a plot to undermine her campaign and an indirect way of supporting her opponent who would “so ineptly handle the affairs of their office that the interests of those subversive groups will be thereby advanced.”<sup>121</sup> Wiener, like student editorials at LACC, USC and UCLA and later John F. Kennedy in the 1960 presidential election, argued that inept conservative politics actually strengthened the position of radicals. Finally, Wiener had one more trick to defeat her opponents who characterized her as too young and radical; she promised to bring major league baseball to Los Angeles. Wiener argued that professional baseball would both make Los Angeles a world-class city and provide healthy recreation to young people, thereby curbing delinquency. With a political platform tuned to the growth of the suburban consumer society in the 1950s, Wiener defeated Marshrey for the 5th district council seat, on May 27, 1953.<sup>122</sup>

Overall, the 1953 election marked an ideological shift to the left in the make-up of the Los Angeles City Council. On July 8, the newly elected liberal bloc selected John Gibson as council president, and his first task as president was to reform the council committees and assign new committee chairs. As the new Recreation and Parks chairwoman, Wiener’s first resolution urged the Coliseum Commission to permit the American Legion to hold a test baseball game in the Coliseum on July 18th. Soon thereafter, Wiener and County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn began to work in tandem to

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<sup>121</sup> The Watchman, “Last Day-Smears Mark Two Councilmanic Races,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 26, 1953, 2.

<sup>122</sup> Wiener place in politics is also nationally significant in that Wiener and her husband, Eugene Wyman, became early supporters and fund raisers for John F. Kennedy. “Election Returns,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 28, 1953, 2. The vote was 21,110 for Wiener and 18,790 for Marshrey.

bring Walter O’Malley’s Dodgers to Los Angeles.

With Wiener’s election the *Times*’s Watchman recognized a shift in the political culture of Los Angeles. He saw the champagne and cocktail invitational fundraisers held for Wiener at local residences as the end of the politics of hard drink and smoky back rooms. The Watchman regretted that the city’s hyper-masculine “old-boy” politics was being domesticated by the politics of the “well-filled glass.”<sup>123</sup> Wiener’s election also marked the growing political power of the Westside Jewish community and a string of Jewish politicians would follow her to the city council. At the end of the 1960s, coalitions between liberal Westside Jews and South-Central blacks were instrumental in electing Los Angeles’s first black mayor Tom Bradley.<sup>124</sup>

Furthermore, this period shows that as the activities of the radical youth subculture were suppressed, liberal youth were given new opportunities within the Democratic Party. The YPA existed for a moment as a bridge between these groups, but the politics of anticomunism tore liberal and radical left coalitions apart. In this period, the promotion of youth consumer culture and the defeat of delinquency and communism became features of young liberals’ platforms. Wiener’s politics reflected a desire to provide new exciting consumer opportunities to young people without fully realizing that this did not ensure equal access to these opportunities; class, race and ethnicity were all barriers to access. At the same time Wiener sponsored a resolution to make July 11, 1955,

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<sup>123</sup> The Watchman, *Los Angeles Times*, May 29, 1953, B3.

<sup>124</sup> Raphael J. Sonenshein, *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

Disneyland Day in Los Angeles, the magic kingdoms' doors remained closed to young black and Latino patrons.<sup>125</sup>

### **Bridging the Gap: From the LYL to the New Left**

In the fall of 1954, the state leaders of the LYL held a state conference in preparation for the national conference to be held in February 1955. Notes from this conference indicate an ideological shift within the organization that recognized how claims of delinquency were used to segregate young people as a united political body. While the LYL continued to protest anti-communist measures, such as the Humphrey Butler Act, by the mid 1950s, the LYL no longer promoted itself as a parallel to the Boy Scouts and a cure for juvenile delinquency; leaders in the late 1940s saw juvenile delinquency as a social problem and embraced recreational activities as a solution. After years of organizing students, leaders argued that recreation alone could not address the social and economic conditions that failed to provide young people with ample educational and employment opportunities. The LYL's platform argued that youth unemployment was the real problem, not delinquency. While not fully articulated, shifts in LYL's platform point to discussions in 1960s in which youth radicals identified the delinquency discourse as a method of silencing and demonizing young people; delinquency was a tool used to impede social justice campaigns as it directed attention to the results of a malfunctioning social system and not the roots of inequality.<sup>126</sup>

In this framework, the LYL developed a special analysis of the problems of black

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<sup>125</sup> Rosalind Wiener, "Resolution for Disneyland Day," July 11, 1955, LACCM-LACA.

<sup>126</sup> Wofsy, "On the Way," 8.

youth. Not unlike Malcolm X or Stokely Carmichael, the LYL saw black youth as being trapped between the complacent politics of white liberals and black leaders that promoted the growth of the economy over the growth of healthy communities. The LYL recommended the study of Negro history and the Negro liberation movement, and during Brotherhood Week, February 1955, the student division of the LYL sponsored lectures about Negro history at public forums. After Leon Wofsy retired, Earl Durhan became the first acting black chairman of the national LYL in 1956.<sup>127</sup>

At mid-decade, the majority of students at UCLA and USC accepted LYL's promotion of a desegregated student campus culture. During graduation in 1955, USC's student senate voted unanimously against the administration's Commencement Day speaker selection, Texas Governor Allan Shivers, who had a record working against desegregation.<sup>128</sup> In the spring of 1956, after a year of student activism against "restrictive clauses" in fraternity constitutions, which were seen as a microcosm of racial restrictive housing covenants, the Student Body President Irv Drasin tried to force the fraternities to drop racially exclusive clauses in their constitutions by denying them participation in student government. Dean Milton Hahn suspended Drasin for this tactic and called for an election, and attempting to moderate the sources of radical politics, the dean barred graduate students from voting. In this election, black student Willard Johnson, the director of public relations at UCLA's NAACP campus branch, ran for student body president against Dave Pierson, a popular white fraternity candidate. With

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<sup>127</sup> Wofsy, "On the Way," 10. Wofsy would leave LYL in 1956 and in 1964 he became a professor at Berkeley.

<sup>128</sup> "Faculty Asks SC to Cancel Shivers Talk," *California Eagle*, June 9, 1955, 2; "Students At USC Protest Invitation To Governor Shivers," *California Eagle*, June 2, 1955, 1; "NAACP Head Asks USC to Cancel Invite," *California Eagle*, June 2, 1955, 1-2.

the largest number of student voting in an election, students rejected the fraternities and Hahn's attempts to control student culture and chose Johnson as the new UCLA Student Body President.<sup>129</sup>

Although integration had become a central platform of student politics, by the mid to late 1950s, most of the progressive organizations of the late popular front were disbanded. The JPFO, the IPP, and the Civil Rights Congress were defunct. While in 1950, Al Caplan, the president of Local 26 of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union, promised to "fight for the right of the Labor Youth League to carry on its activities," by the mid-1950s, the CIO's expulsion of communists and fellow travelers erased connections between the LYL and CIO.<sup>130</sup> The CIO's merger with the American Federation of Labor led to a moderation of its position towards young workers and much of the organizations' youth agenda was abandoned.

Despite the fact that the LYL and YPA advanced many social causes in the 1950s, bereft of larger political support and isolated by the politics of anti-communism, many of their programs never came to fruition. In November of 1949, a Fair Employment ordinance failed to pass in the Los Angeles City Council; conservatives argued that it was bad for business and violated the rights of employers to choose their employees. In response, on December 22nd, 1949, in the midst of holiday shopping, a delegation of 30 Young Progressives led by two members both costumed as Santa Claus, one black and one white, passed out pamphlets at the downtown May Company store.<sup>131</sup> The YPA's pamphlet asked Tom May, vice-president of the May Company, for the immediate end to

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<sup>129</sup> "Johnson in Run-Off in Hot UCLA Voting," *California Eagle*, May 17, 1956, 1; "Johnson Chosen as UCLA President," *California Eagle*, May 24, 1956, 1.

<sup>130</sup> "Union Leader Hits Red Investigation," *Los Angeles Times*, January 11, 1950, 4.

<sup>131</sup> "Young Progressives Join Job Campaign at May Co., Store," *California Eagle*, December 22, 1949, 37.

discriminatory practices in hiring, and for the employment of minority workers in sales and clerical positions. Even though the May Company expressed interest in hiring minority workers during the holidays, it made no long-term promises. While radical youth groups had helped desegregate small local businesses in the late 1940s, larger organizations such as the May Company outlast initial integration attempts. In a review of clerical and retail opportunities open to young blacks in 1956, researcher Luther Hall Williams found that “with the exception of the one department store which has begun hiring Negro sales girls only recently and in very small numbers, there appears to be only token employment of Negroes as clerks or sales people in the large department stores in the Los Angeles area.”<sup>132</sup> Williams report included data from private placing agencies that revealed that in 1956 over 76 percent of employers filing with the agency requested Caucasian only applicants.

Mirroring the loss of mass organizations and the increasing divide between the projects of radical and progressive liberal youth, by mid-point in the decade, the LYL’s membership was in decline. However, the LYL continued to operate into the late 1950s. LYL members fully experienced the political fallout from the 20th Congress of the Communist Party in which Nikita Khrushchev, in arguing for a new direction for the Soviet Union, exposed the terrible consequences of Stalin’s modernization program. On campus and in local political circles Khrushchev’s allegations validated the critiques of the communists by Trotskyites and other socialist groups. On the UCLA campus, many wanted the LYL to continue without ties to the Communist Party, but its relationship with

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<sup>132</sup> Luther Hall Williams, “An Investigation of Opportunities in Clerical and Sales Positions for Negro Youth in the Los Angeles Area, With Implications for Business Education,” M.S. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1956, 28; “May Co. Decides to Hire Negroes, *California Eagle*, October 6, 1955, 1.

the CPA was not easily shaken. In many ways, the LYL's platform and constitution was trapped in between two historical periods, that of the industrial war society and the suburban consumer society, and the politics of anti-communism hamstrung the organizations ability to retain and recruit membership through this transition.

In a letter to the membership in 1956, Leon Wofsy, seven-year national chair of the LYL, reflected on the organization's accomplishments and saw the need for a broader youth movement. During his tenure, the League had moved away from doctrinaire Marxism, and Wofsy suggested that future movements would continue in this direction. Wofsy criticized the LYL's organizing strategies:

Our starting point rarely is what's cooking among the young people themselves—what's bothering them, what's happening to them, what is different about them, in what ways and patterns are they expressing themselves. For example, it is only in the past couple of years that we are beginning to appreciate the whole moral impact of the so-called "juvenile delinquency" issue, to appreciate the needs, problems, and changing role of teen-agers in the youth movement.<sup>133</sup>

Instead of trying to foster a relationship with labor, Wofsy advocated the growth of a youth movement that would first and foremost promote the interest of young people, rather than support the work done by other organizations. Wofsy did not have to wait long for a confirmation of his vision of a new youth movement. In 1960 at the University of Michigan, the members of the Student League for Industrial Democracy decided to reform under the name Students for a Democratic Society, thereby erasing ties with organization's labor and socialist past. Dick Flacks, a former LYL member and graduate student at the University of Michigan, provided assistance to SDS leaders during the

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<sup>133</sup> Leon Wofsy, Letter to LYL, 1956, 8, Labadie Special Collection, University of Michigan; see also Leon Wofsy, *Youth Fights For its Future*, Labor Youth League, New York, 1952, Labadie Special Collections, University of Michigan.

drafting of the Port Huron Statement.<sup>134</sup> SDS would become the largest progressive student organization in the 1960s and play tremendous roles in the struggle for civil rights and against the war in the Vietnam.

While LYL bridged youth and student movements from the Old and New Left, the activities of members after the organization's dissolution are just as important and in need of mention. An emancipated minor modeled after Woody Guthrie, Lenny Potash would often hitch across the country from Los Angeles to New York in order to visit family and friends. Over time, his transience became a problem for LYL leadership and he was expelled in 1953. When Potash briefly returned to the LYL in the mid-1950s, he found it but a shell of its former self, with only one active group in the city. After leaving the LYL, Potash became more involved in the music scene, began teaching guitar, and by the end of the 1950s opened the Folk Shop, a place that held dances, movies and hootenannies, near the LACC campus. The Folk Shop served as one of the sites that supported the folk revival in Los Angeles, and Potash, like his contemporary Odetta, introduced *Singout!* to the next generation of activists.<sup>135</sup>

Lastly, activists Leon Litwack, Jerome Handler and Victoria Landish Fromkin went on to become college educators, thereby transforming their commitment to youth into careers. Litwack and Handler, influenced by the civil rights campaigns of their youth, studied and taught about race, slavery and the influence of African cultures on American history and culture. As a faculty member at University of Southern Illinois in

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<sup>134</sup> Isserman, *If I Had a Hammer*, 206; Al Haber interview by author, October 20, 2008. Haber's story is not unlike Handler's. Haber began a political discussion group on the campus of the University of Michigan that became the genesis for Students for a Democratic Society.

<sup>135</sup> Lenny Potash interview.

the 1960s, Handler served as the advisor for SDS chapter.<sup>136</sup> Victoria Landish Frumkin returned to graduate school to study linguistics and, as a professor of linguistics at University of California, Berkeley, co-wrote an introductory linguistics text that would become a standard in classes across the nation. Although no longer young themselves, these former YPA and LYI members continued to serve young people as progressive scholars and educators.

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<sup>136</sup> According to Handler, students involved in SDS in the 1960s were free from fears of reprisal unlike the co-hort of student activists in his generation.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Rocking the Beach and the Barrio: The Youth Music Culture of Mid-20th Century Los Angeles**

Teenager Richard Delvy moved from Connecticut to Southern California in 1958. After a vacation visit to the southland, his parents decided to sell the family store and relocate to the suburban, beach life of the South Bay, a small peninsula community at the southern end of Los Angeles County. Delvy enrolled as a senior at Narbonne High School, Harbor City. As a newcomer, uninitiated in the region's youth culture, Delvy witnessed the campus rivalry between wealthy, surfing Anglos from Palos Verdes and the racially mixed, Latino and white, working-class "ho-dads" and hot rodders from Torrance. The year after Delvy graduated from Narbonne, a new high school opened that succeeded in physically separating surfers and ho-dad hot rodders on separate campuses.<sup>1</sup>

Delvy's move to Southern California coincided with the beginning of a national surfing craze loosely based on the fantasy life of the region's white, beach-going teenagers. Concurrently, rock music, after a period of repression in the 1950s, was slowly becoming an acceptable and accessible musical genre for middle-class teenagers. Instrumental surf music fused the surf myth with the power of rock 'n' roll, creating a cultural hybrid that appealed to the young and was less threatening than earlier manifestations had been to their middle-class parents. May argues that the production and

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Delvy interview by author, June 18, 2006.

marketing of white, Californian youth culture “briefly resolved the fear about rock and roll and juvenile delinquency that plagued the mid-1950s. The image of fun in the sun for white middle-class teenagers reigned, wielding its influence across the country into the mid-1960s.”<sup>2</sup>

During his first summer in Southern California, Richard Delvy learned to surf. He was already an accomplished musician, adept on both the trombone and the drums, and his appreciation for music had been formed through exposure to his parents’ musical tastes and the discovery of rock ‘n’ roll on radio programs such as Alan Freed’s “Rock and Rhythm Review.” As a manager of a South Bay pizza shop, Delvy played music with his co-workers during downtime in the work schedule. After he was fired from his pizza job for mixing beats and eats, he began to earn around \$15 a night playing trombone with a local jazz group. He quickly grasped the economics of the local music business—fewer musicians meant more money for each player. He decided to join a small instrumental group known as the Belairs. The Belairs included Paul Johnson on guitar, Eddie Bertrand on bass, Chas Stuart on sax and Jim Roberts on organ. Delvy played the drums. The group was initially styled after instrumental groups such as Link Ray, the Ventures and the Rumblers. But the Belairs played a special role within this history as the first group to record a hit in the musical style dubbed “surf music.”<sup>3</sup>

In the summer of 1960, Delvy made a handful of appointments with studios to record a demo of the Belairs. Initially, his attempts proved unsuccessful. At Western Recording on Sunset Boulevard, Delvy was told that because he and his teenage

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<sup>2</sup> May, *Golden State, Golden Youth*, 6.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Delvy interview; John Blair interview by author, July 15, 2006; Paul Johnson interview by Alex Kindell, December 1995, COPH-CSUF.

bandmates were not members of the American Federation of Musicians Local 47, the studio would be required to beep the recording every ten seconds. As the band was not planning to become members of the union, Delvy found these conditions unreasonable and economically unfeasible. Returning home via La Brea Boulevard, Delvy spotted the aptly named Liberty Records; there he struck a recording deal for \$32 that bought him studio time to record five songs, including the soon-to-be-a-hit, “Mr. Moto.” The song contained distinctive elements of the southern California musical style, including heavily reverbed and overdubbed guitar lines, a recognizable Mexican melodic influence in the guitar introduction, and a honking R&B sax solo. “Mr. Moto” became the archetype for hundreds of instrumental songs that youth groups recorded in Southern California over the next couple years.

After the band made their recording, they sold it to RV Records. RV’s promoter, Salvatore “Sonny” Bono, however, was an R&B fan and made no effort to promote the Belairs because he thought “the record was a bomb.” “Mr. Moto” would have remained forever in obscurity if not for Delvy’s tenacity and DJ Sam Riddle’s show on KRLA. Every week Riddle surveyed local high schools and played their top ten; Delvy was dating the president of a local high school. “Mr. Moto” was put first on the school’s list, and with subsequent calls to Riddle, the song became a part of his playlist. Despite the fact that Dick Dale had been playing what he called surf music at the Rendezvous Ballroom in Newport Beach for a year or so, by way of radio “Mr. Moto” introduced the genre to young people across the Southern California and eventually the nation as a whole. Through contacts with Riddle, Delvy became friends with music industry personnel. After the Belairs disbanded, he started another surf instrumental group, the

Challengers, while also serving as the musical director for a string of youth music oriented television shows including *Hollywood a Go Go*, *Surfs Up* and *9th Street West*.<sup>4</sup>

Richard Delvy's entrepreneurial spirit drove his personal successes in the music business, but his story also reveals elements common to the broader production of a vibrant musical youth culture in Southern California. Small recording labels relied on the talent of young musicians to compete with major recording companies. Young people's labor was inexpensive and their peer networks served as an easy means of promotion. By surveying high schools, these labels could gauge the popularity of different musical genres and respond quickly to changing youth cultural tastes. The music scene was sustained by intimate relationships between managers and performers, who often developed familial and even paternal bonds; while female vocalists could find a modicum of success in performing, the pathway from performer to manager was decidedly male.

In this period, privately organized teen dances became a central part of youth culture of L.A.<sup>5</sup> Concurrently, the base of popular youth music shifted from jazz to R&B and rock 'n' roll, which was, quite simply, R&B marketed to white audiences. The youthful embrace of the dance cultures of R&B and rock 'n' roll, like the turn to youth-oriented athletic cultures in the early 20th century, separated youth culture from adult culture and allowed young people to issue claims of generational difference. Moreover, this period was one of vast opportunities for young male instrumentalists and their musical ensembles. The territory was uncharted, and the market was vibrant and free of preconceptions.

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Delvy interview.

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of L.A.'s early music history, see Catherine Parsons Smith, *Making Music in Los Angeles: Transforming the Popular* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

Independent record labels and businessmen in Los Angeles sought to exploit the wealth of musical talent, in part a product of public investment in youth and the arts by an earlier generation, as well as the financial resources of the large and relatively well-heeled youth market. These middlemen ran local dance clubs and other commercial establishments oriented around youth culture and helped translate small acts into regional sensations. Such small-scale operations bound musicians and management together in intimate relationships. Teenage rock ‘n’ roll musicians were not union members, and they would often perform and/or record for little or no compensation, driven by the hope of being discovered by a major label. Sonny Bono remembered that “the way independent companies were lined up on Sunset Boulevard reminded me of gumball machines. All you had to do was put in the right coin and they were ready to pay off.”<sup>6</sup> Independent labels on Sunset included Si Waronker and Herb Newman’s Liberty, Randy Wood’s Dot, Herb Newman and Lew Biddell’s Era, Gene Autry’s Challenge, Art Laboe’s Original Sound, and Bob Keane’s Del-Fi. Independent labels were central to the production of youth music in Los Angeles.<sup>7</sup> Music historian Barney Hoskyns notes that “where the movie studios spent months grooming their celluloid heartthrobs, the indie hustlers merely rounded up kids on the street, herded them into garage studios, and hit the ‘Record’ buttons.”<sup>8</sup>

Independent and locally owned radio was a critical component of this mix. It provided the tie between performers, entrepreneurs and consumers. In the fight for

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<sup>6</sup> Barney Hoskyns, *Waiting for the Sun; Strange Days, Weird Scenes and the Sounds of Los Angeles* (New York: Penguin, 1996), 47.

<sup>7</sup> “Independent Record Labels of the Early Rock Era,” [www.history-of-rock.com/indielabels.html](http://www.history-of-rock.com/indielabels.html) (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>8</sup> Hoskyns, *Waiting for the Sun*, 51.

greater ratings and ad revenues, radio programs sought to encourage the identification of young people with individual stations and specific DJs. The relationship between DJs and their fans was central to this period, and regional papers routinely polled high schools students to understand their tastes in DJs. DJs with intimate knowledge of local youth cultures had a decisive advantage competing for young listeners. Conversely, radio play of locally produced singles provided a means by which small acts gained great regional attention and thereby generated greater audiences and revenue at their performances. DJs such as Dick “Huggie Boy” Hug, Sam Riddle, the Magnificent Montague, Bob Eubanks, and Hunter Hancock were central to promoting, and knowing, the youth musical culture of Southern California.<sup>9</sup> Weekly, DJ B. Mitchel Reed on KFWV dedicated a three-hour program to an individual high school and played the school’s favorite songs.<sup>10</sup>

In this way, in the early 1960s, a critical mass of young people, small-scale entrepreneurs with new technological and media innovations, came together to create a multifaceted American youth culture that brought young musicians and their fans together in a range of entertainment dedicated venues. This chapter will explore the creation of Southern California’s musical youth culture in the mid-20th century. Many of its claims, such as the importance of community-sensitive DJs and small labels, could be applied to other regions of the nation as well. However, this chapter will also explore how regional development in Southern California affected youth culture nationally.

As the city experienced increasing racial and class residential segregation, the separation of youth culture followed suit. Hawthorne High School was home to both the

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<sup>9</sup> The mass production of electric instruments and amplifiers were also central to the performance of rock ‘n’ roll youth culture and in 1963, riding the wave of surf, over a half million electric guitars were sold.

<sup>10</sup> “KFWV salutes Garfield High,” *The Garfield High School Log*, Fall 1962, Garfield High School Library, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter GHSL].

Beach Boys and Mexican-American rocker Chris Montez, who had a 1962 hit “Let’s Dance.”<sup>11</sup> The year after Delvy’s graduation, Narbonne High School became two campuses, and this separation segregated the wealthy Anglo surfers from racially mixed ho-dads. Residential segregation and a conservative suburban populism worked to undo many of the important supporting structures of youth-driven musical culture. First, in the mid 20th century, local high schools had well financed, well equipped, and fully staffed arts programs. The overcrowding of the Los Angeles City Schools provided an environment in which young people had to compete with scores of other youngsters to be in the best school bands and groups. High school bands were often a direct route to professional careers. For example, Jefferson High School’s band program under musical director Samuel Browne was the training ground for musicians on Los Angeles jazz strip on Central Avenue. Browne was a graduate of University of Southern California and his students included jazz greats such as Dexter Gordon, Eric Dolphy, “Big” Jay NcNeely, Chico Hamilton and Don Cherry.<sup>12</sup> However, as California taxpayers underfinanced school budgets in the late 1960s and 1970s, the great high school musical programs began to decline.

Second, in the movement from dances at high schools to large for-profit venues, the geography of mid 20th century Los Angeles funneled many young people into a handful of locations. The two largest of these places were the Rendezvous Ballroom in Newport Beach and the American Legion Stadium in El Monte. While the American Legion Stadium offered integrated crowds and musical acts, the Rendezvous Ballroom

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<sup>11</sup> When Montez toured England in 1963, the Beatles opened for him on a number of dates.

<sup>12</sup> Reed, *The Black Music History of Los Angeles*, 35.

catered to young whites who lived in the beach communities; the spatial contours of the city segregated the young audiences. As the music scene moved to clubs in Hollywood in the late 1960s, the era of the integrated local rock revue shows slowly dwindled.

The marketing of musical genres also led to the fragmentation of the music scene along class and race lines. Surf music was the result of the whitening of Southern Californian rock ‘n’ roll; most of the musicians were trained either in jazz or R&B, but the label of “surf” fused the instrumental music to surfing, a sport with subcultural roots that had been co-opted as a mass consumer leisure pursuit for white middle-class youth by the 1950s. The promoters of surf music sought to isolate its performers from the shared and cosmopolitan landscape of youth musical culture and in this process and worked to disassociate surf music from its shared roots with R&B, Doo Wop, Mariachi and Country music.

This chapter begins by looking at the flourishing local youth music culture in the late 1950s and the practices of young Angelinos who supported it. It moves to explore the evolution of surf music and how it became a regional phenomenon. Next is a discussion of the East Los Angeles music scene and the ways its musicians and promoters struggled to bring attention to the talents of working-class nonwhite youth. The chapter concludes by explaining how in the mid-1960s a convergence of historical factors began to transform youth musical culture in Southern California. Throughout, this chapter pays close attention to interactions among musicians, producers and audiences: these close and collaborative relationships became the driving force behind Los Angeles’s thriving youth music scene by the mid-1950s. This period marks a transitional midpoint between

community-sponsored musical performances of the 1930s and the mainstream corporate controlled music industry of the 1970s.

### **The Sounds of Youth Culture: From Jazz to R&B, Doo Wop and Rock**

In the late 1930s, the Savoy Ballroom in Harlem began to advertise contests between swing orchestras as “battles of the bands.” This format was popular with young swing music aficionados, and a 1937 contest that pitted Chick Webb and Benny Goodman drew over 20,000 swing fans. During World War II, “battles of the bands” spread to regional markets outside of the core urban jazz centers. In 1946, Lionel Hampton challenged Woody Herman and his Thundering Herd to a musical duel because *Esquire* and *Downbeat* magazine had named Herman, and not Hampton, bandleader of the year. The structure of Hampton’s challenge is important because it shows that the battle was not simply for promotional purposes, as Hamp was willing to battle at any venue to prove that his band swung more than the Herd. Furthermore, all revenues generated by the contest would go to non-profit organizations such as the NAACP.<sup>13</sup>

Los Angeles’s Central Avenue jazz scene had its own share of “battles of the bands,” as both Club Alabam and the Avalon Ballroom made these events recurring features. As a central part of the improvisational culture of jazz, these battles were key to the status and, indirectly, to the income of musicians. By the late-1940s, “battles of the bands” were no longer simply identified with jazz and most clubs featured Rhythm and Blues as the primary musical style.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jon De Leighur, “Hampton Leads Band Vote,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 21, 1946, 18.

<sup>14</sup> Late 1940s club advertisements in the *California Eagle* and *Los Angeles Sentinel* record this shift in musical performance.

R&B musicians, many disciplined in the territorial jazz big bands of the 1930s and 1940s, meshed the sophistication of jazz improvisation with the gutsy tones of the blues. Johnny Otis, Club Alabam's bandleader and owner of the Watts-based Barrelhouse Club, participated in the musical transition from a swing-based beat to R&B. According to Otis, many jazz drummers "were too conditioned to dropping bombs and embellishments to ever settle down to the business of a steady groove." Otis finally found a drummer for his R&B band, Leard Bell, who was described by Otis as a "human rhythm machine" with "arms like a weight lifter, with a rock-solid style."<sup>15</sup> Otis argued that R&B was a Los Angeles art form and entertainers "T-Bone" Walker, Roy Milton, Charles Brown, Jimmy Witherspoon, and Joe and Jimmy Liggins were all performing in Los Angeles. According to Otis, "By around '48 or '49 it was set—we had an art form though we didn't know it then."<sup>16</sup> In the 1950s, Los Angeles-based blues musicians became increasingly popular and in 1954, Los Angeles's Savoy Ballroom promoted a battle that pitted Blues greats Muddy Waters and Guitar Slim.

The growth of Los Angeles's R&B and Blues scenes in the 1950s coincided with the decline in industrial jobs for black workers who lived along the Figueroa/Central Avenue corridor that stretched from Pasadena through the central city and down into Watts. Industrial workers had been the core patrons of nightclubs, and as jobs took a downturn, opportunities in the entertainment business lessened and new capital was less frequently invested in developing and redeveloping Los Angeles's Central Avenue. The disappearance of the interurban rail also reduced access to Central Avenue nightspots.

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<sup>15</sup> Otis, *Upside your Head!*, 112.

<sup>16</sup> Reed, *The Black Music History*, 30.

Furthermore, the movement of blacks to the Westside and away from Central Avenue coincided with the departure of many of the region's promising jazz entertainers and blues artists to the East Coast.<sup>17</sup>

However, with advances in recording and communication equipment, many jazz trained artists transitioned from performance to production and promotion. For this generation of producers, billboard hits and publishing royalties were the surest way to guarantee a steady income, similar to the transitions in the movie industry. The demographic shift to teenage consumers meant that success in the music business was predicated in marketing to the tastes of young listeners. During this decade, the young consumers of music began to dictate a musical style that condensed the most rhythmic, exciting, humorous, and sexual parts of the live musical shows onto a recorded album. R&B offered the bawdiness of blues and room for jazz improvisation with a rock steady swing beat. R&B was an artistic form generated by Los Angeles's black community. Performances by young R&B and later Doo Wop artists brought black artistic culture to white and Latino audiences. In the shift from jazz to rock 'n' roll through R&B and Doo Wop, performances by black artists sustained a culture of imitation and accommodation by white and Latino groups that produced the grounds for a vibrant and integrated youth musical dance culture in the late 1950s and early 1960s.

Changing consumer appetites created a break for Disc Jockey and radio personality Hunter Hancock, the "Ol'H.H." Born in Texas, Hancock moved to California

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<sup>17</sup> Bryant, *Central Avenue Sounds*, 16.

in 1942 and found work as a radio announcer on station KFVD.<sup>18</sup> In April of 1943, Todd Clothes, a clothing store located in downtown Los Angeles, bought a one-hour show on Sunday, “Harlem Holiday,” to appeal to the black community. Hancock, who had very little knowledge of black musical tastes, decided to play jazz music. In 1947, Hancock got the opportunity to expand his program to a daily half-hour show. A salesman from Modern Records, Jack Allison, convinced Hancock that he needed to play “race” records to reach a larger black audience. Because of overwhelming positive listener feedback, within a week Hancock was playing all race music. This format proved so popular that his station gave him a three and a half hour show everyday. Since radio derived its profits from local business advertisements, station managers were easily persuaded to give airtime to shows that generated public excitement.

In addition to his radio program, Hancock also hosted many talent shows at black clubs and theaters. At these show Hancock was introduced to young artists, including Nat “King” Cole, Little Esther, Big Jay McNeely and the Robins, who would become staples of his playlist. In late 1951, Hancock hosted a series of “Midnight Matinee” series featuring local black talent at the Olympic Auditorium and the Orpheum Theater. “By that time my audience was not just blacks. Whites and Chicanos were also listening to “Harlematinee” and coming to my live shows.”<sup>19</sup> In 1955, Hancock had a short-lived television show called “Rhythm and Bluesville” on KCBS, and in 1956 he began a nightly Top 20 show, from 9:00 to 11:30 p.m., on station KGFJ. Hancock bolstered his popularity by employing a black radio sidekick, Marjorie “Margie” Williams; Williams

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<sup>18</sup> Hunter Hancock, “Huntin’ with Hunter,” Doo-Wop Society of Southern California, 1999, <http://www.electricearl.com/dws/hunter.html> (accessed January 6, 2009); William Barlow, *Voice Over: The Making of Black Radio* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1999), 172.

<sup>19</sup> Hunter Hancock, “Huntin’ with Hunter.”

was the wife of Tony Williams, the lead singer of The Platters. In the mid-1950s, a Pulse radio survey reported that over a quarter of black households listened to Hancock's program daily and by the late 1950s, Hancock was also a staple for high school audiences in Mexican-American East Los Angeles.<sup>20</sup>

Johnny Otis also exploited multiple media opportunities to promote R&B music. In 1948, Otis with partner Ali Bardu opened the Barrelhouse Club and helped develop acts such as Little Ester Phillips and the Robins. He then began promoting the Caravan of R&B Stars in 1951 and featured young singers Jackie Wilson, Hank Ballard and Little Willie John. By 1955 Otis involved in managing a record store on Western Avenue, hosting a daily radio show on KFOX, presenting a weekly program for KTTV, and producing Saturday night R&B review shows at El Monte Legion Stadium. Like many of the contemporary DJs, Otis performed shows from record stores and entertainment spots including Dolphin's of Hollywood, Conley's Record Rack and Duffy's Tavern. These DJ performances had a triple payoff; Otis could promote the store, his band's performances, and introduce listeners to new acts. In August 1957, Johnny Otis announced that a free Johnny Otis Show at the Orpheum Theater would be recorded by Capitol Records; initially hatched as a ploy to capture the excitement of teenagers at a live R&B show, Capitol engineers were unable to make successful recordings because Otis's promotion had brought too many loud and boisterous fans. Otis was central in providing opportunities for young musicians and yet his own success was based on careful marketing to teen audiences. Hal Ziegler's observation of the "hand jive" fad of teenagers in London coffeehouses inspired Otis's most memorable hit "Willie And The Hand

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<sup>20</sup> Loza, *Barrio Rhythm*, 81.

Jive.”. The story of the “hand jive” reveals the circular route of cultural production. In this case, young people’s subcultural interactions, communication through gesture, were translated through a popular R&B song. The song inspired a dance that packaged these gestures into a memorable sequence and transmitted them back to youth through performances of the song at dances and concerts.<sup>21</sup>

On one of Otis’s DJ appearances at Conley’s in Watts at 111th and Wilmington, Walter “Dootsie” Williams gave Otis a new single, “Earth Angel.”<sup>22</sup> It was on Williams’s Dootone Records label and featured a group known as the Penguins, a vocal group that included Cleveland Duncan and Dexter Trisby from Freemont High School, and Curtis Williams and Bruce Tate from Jefferson High School. Curtis Williams and Cleveland Duncan met at a talent show at the California Club on Santa Barbara Avenue, formed a four-man group and then got the attention of music scout Ted Brinson. The name “the Penguins” was inspired by the Kool mentholated cigarette logo character “Willie the Penguin.” Brison had a backyard-recording studio on 30th Street in between Arlington and Western, and after recording the group brought them to the attention of Dootsie Williams.<sup>23</sup> Williams was reluctant to release the record because his distributor Sid Talmadge thought the Penguins were too pop, but quality of the group’s original material convinced Williams to produce their songs. In the summer of 1954, “Hey, Senorita” and “Earth Angel” were released together. By late summer local DJs Richard “Huggy Boy” Hug, Charles Trammell and Johnny Otis were giving the Penguins major airplay; by

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<sup>21</sup> “The Greatest Johnny Otis Show,” [www.johnnyotisworld.com/music/3/johnny\\_otis\\_cds3e.html](http://www.johnnyotisworld.com/music/3/johnny_otis_cds3e.html) (accessed January 24, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Otis, *Upside your Head!*, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Dootsie Williams’ first recordings were of comedian Red Foxx.

January 1955, “Earth Angel” crossed from the R&B chart and reached as high as #8 on the Billboard Pop chart.

“Earth Angel” became an iconic example of the popular group harmony vocal style that came to be known as Doo Wop.<sup>24</sup> Although the east coast Doo-Wop scene centered in New York City and Philadelphia produced the majority of groups, Los Angeles’s Doo Wop groups were the earliest to record in the style; the promotion of young talent by scouts brought many Los Angeles groups into the studio to record. Most of the artists were of high school age, but singers such as Zola Taylor of the Platters and Trudy Williams of The Six Teens were only 14 and 13 years old, respectively, when they first recorded. Doo Wop was a street corner style of singing that featured a soloist and accompaniment of three to six background singers; Leon Peels’ The Blue Jays were formed at the basketball court at Oakwood Park in Venice and wrote their hit, “Lover’s Island,” under the Venice peer. Walter “Dootsie” Williams discovered Vernon Green, the lead singer of his soon to be popular group the Medallions, singing as he was walking down a street in East Los Angeles.<sup>25</sup> As a regional magnet for Doo Wop, groups came to Los Angeles to record and be produced. The Romancers hailed from San Francisco and The Colts, who toured with Alan Freed’s rock ‘n’ roll show, came from Bakersfield.

Although Doo Wop was performed in public spaces such as bus stops, parks and courtyards, schools were the most important organizers of early Doo Wop groups. The tiled floors of school bathrooms and locker rooms became a special place of refuge for

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<sup>24</sup> Bruce Morrow, Rich Maloof, Neil Sedaka, and T. J. Lubinsky, *Doo Wop: The Music, the Times, the Era* (New York: Sterling, 2007); Robert Pruter, *Doowop: The Chicago Scene* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

<sup>25</sup> Green had polio as a child and became a recognizable stage personality because he performed with a cane and, as the name of his band suggests, wore medallions as a part of his style.

Doo Woppers. Harmonies bounced off the walls “giving the group a satisfying fullness it could not achieve in the schoolyard or other open-air venue.”<sup>26</sup> In an era that was marked by the reduction in the size of musical groups, reverb provided musicians a wider sonic space; reverb provided a common sonic current between youth musical styles coming out of Southern California in the mid-20th century.

White musicians Jan Berry, of the group Jan and Dean, and Phil Spector, the owner of the Phillies label, were also Los Angeles teens who discovered reverb through vocal singing in acoustic spaces of their respective high schools. Berry began singing with Dean Torrence as a duo in the locker room after football practices at University High School and soon formed the group The Barons to play at high school dances. Berry’s first hit was recorded with fellow Baron Arnie Ginsburg. Their song “Jennie Lee” was an ode to a famous Hollywood burlesque performer. Torrence rejoined Berry after the former’s stint in the Army to form Jan and Dean. The duo was discovered by young street producers Lou Alder and Herb Alpert and in collaboration with Jan and Dean, they created 1959’s Top 10 hit “Baby Talk.”<sup>27</sup>

Harvey Phillip Spector was doubly indebted to Doo Wop as his style sought to maximize reverbed and layered harmonized voices and he successfully recruited established Doo Wop singers to form his famous “girl groups.” Spector’s first success came with The Teddy Bears, a group he formed with classmates from Fairfax High School, Marshall Leib and Annette Kleinbard, with the single “To Know Him Is To Love Him.” Todd Schiffman remembered that he had once visited the house of “the head

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<sup>26</sup> Hank Davis, “The Fabulous 1950s: A Doo-Wop Duel –Six Teens vs. Cleftones,” *Goldmine*, April 24, 2008, [http://www.goldminemag.com/article/The\\_Fabulous\\_50s\\_A\\_doo-wop\\_duel\\_-Six\\_Teens\\_vs\\_Cleftones/](http://www.goldminemag.com/article/The_Fabulous_50s_A_doo-wop_duel_-Six_Teens_vs_Cleftones/) (accessed January 6, 2009).

<sup>27</sup> “Jan & Dean,” [http://www.history-of-rock.com/jan\\_and\\_dean.htm](http://www.history-of-rock.com/jan_and_dean.htm) (accessed January 24, 2009).

cheerleader of Fairfax,” Phil Spector, and helped arranged the music of “To Know Him” but refused to join the group. Six months later, to Schiffman’s dismay, the Teddy Bears had the top song in the country. This single stayed on the Billboard Hot 100 for twenty-three weeks and commanded the #1 position for three weeks.<sup>28</sup>

By the age of 17, Spector had written, arranged and produced the best-selling record in the county. With these pop credentials Spector was able to command some of the greatest youth talent in Los Angeles. Spector’s production of Mexican-American singer Vicki Carr’s “He’s a Rebel” brought together arranger Jack Nitzsche and the original members of the studio musicians who became known as the Wrecking Crew: bassist Ray Pohlman, saxophonist Steve Douglas, guitarist Tommy Tedesco, and drummer Hal Blaine. Nitzsche recommended Darlene Love, Fanita James and Jean King as backup singers. Love, James and King became Spector’s Blossoms and were originally a girl group from Freemont High School that recorded Doo Wop hits as The Dreamers with Richard Berry in 1954.<sup>29</sup>

Although the styles of mid-50s youth musical culture encouraged interracial musical participation and collaboration, live performances that crossed racial lines were often the sites of confrontations between police and attendees. When Johnny Otis tried to bring R&B to young Angelinos his audiences were harassed by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department. “The Los Angeles police hounded us in the early days of R&B. They hated to see white kids attending the dances among Black and Chicano youngsters.” As remembered by Otis, “At first the cops would

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<sup>28</sup> Todd Schiffman interview by Alex Cline, 2001, Oral History Program, University of California, Los Angeles, Special Collections, Charles Young Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles.

<sup>29</sup> Fred Bronson, *The Billboard Book of Number 1 Hits: The Inside Story Behind Every Number One Single on Billboard's Hot 100 from 1955 to the Present* (New York: Billboard Books, 2003), 119.

stand around glaring at kids and harassing them with bullshit questions, checking their ID's, and so on. This was damaging enough, but eventually they began to use ancient blue laws against us.”<sup>30</sup> These regulations stipulated the limited interactions between teenagers and adults but became a means to control interracial youth culture. El Monte American Legion Stadium was located outside the regulatory boundaries of the city and county. Beyond the reach of the City and County social control measures, Otis and partner Hal Ziegler were able to promote extremely popular R&B review shows in El Monte until that city’s administration also sought to control the youth cultural scene.

While the County and City tried to control dances in Los Angeles, they did attempt to provide alternatives to the growing private market of youth music. The legacy of progressive control measures promoted by supervisors such as John Anson Ford encouraged public musical performances, and in the early 1950s the County began sponsoring public teen dances. In the late 1940s, the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation (LACDPR) began to sponsor twice-a-year teenage activity days. These activity days promised to offer wholesome public experiences for young people that were outside of the commercial culture of the city. One 1958 activity day at Garvey Park featured hayrides, a square dance, town-hall meeting, and other country-themed activities in order to get the county’s young citizens to think about the differences between rural and urban living. The featured band for the event, the Crescendos, had won a county-sponsored contest at Huntington Park.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Otis, *Upside Your Head!*, 60.

<sup>31</sup> “Garvey Park to Host Teen-agers,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1958, B4.

With the success of smaller “battles of the bands,” the department of parks and recreation decided to hold a countywide contest in 1960 at the Hollywood Bowl. Announced by the departmental director, N. S. Johnson, the “Battle of the Bands” would feature musicians from 13 to 20 years of age in five different divisions: band, dance band (6 to 24 musicians), combo, solo vocalists, and vocal group. Contestants could not be sponsored by a private or public institution or a commercial studio: no contestant could be a member of Local 47. Contestants registered for the contest from November 1959 to January 1960, auditioned at local competitions in the spring, winners advanced to five regional competitions, and finals competed at the finals at the Hollywood Bowl in late June.<sup>32</sup> Like the car clubs discussed in the third chapter, through musical competition not unlike the era’s public car shows, the County attempted to encourage the formation of semi-autonomous youth groups.<sup>33</sup> According to Supervisor Kenneth Hahn, “the battle of the bands is produced to encourage musical interest among talented (non-professional) youths and provides an opportunity for their performance to be seen and heard throughout Los Angeles County.”<sup>34</sup>

The 1960 Battle of the Bands, the first full scale venture of the LACDPR at the Hollywood Bowl, featured over 200 performers and four hours of music for 6,000 fans. The selections ranged from military marches to light opera, but jazz was the most favored musical style. Judges for the contest included elite white jazz musicians Johnny Green,

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<sup>32</sup> The regional contests were held at Los Angeles State College, Valley College, Antelope Valley College, Mt. San Antonio College and Compton College. Local high school newspapers advertised the contest; “Battle of the Bands Contest open to Teen Musicians” *The Garfield High School Log*, Fall 1962, GHSL.

<sup>33</sup> “Valley Teen-agers will Vie in the ‘Battle of the Bands,’ *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1959, D6.

<sup>34</sup> “Battle of the Bands,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, April 5, 1962, B6.

Henry Mancini, Robert Armbruster, and Stan Kenton.<sup>35</sup> As most of the judges for the event were either jazz or classical musicians, the competition was stacked against rock ‘n’ roll; according to a *Los Angeles Times* article, “Only one noise will be missing, Rock ‘n’ Roll is out, wayout.”<sup>36</sup> While the rejection of rock could be attributed to the political cycle of outrage generated by politicians and parents, in fact, many jazz musicians viewed rock as a marketing attempt to sell R&B to white audiences.<sup>37</sup> This lingering ethos of progressive youth policy and its distrust of the private market continued to influence county policy into the 1960s. However, with the chaining of the county’s events to jazz music, the music of the adult generation, the county’s ability to influence local youth culture became increasingly irrelevant.

With the success of the first show, the county announced that the battle of the bands would become an annual event. Two years later, the competition drew 13,000 spectators and a color film was made of the event. Promoting the county’s event, Kenneth Hahn remarked that “Music is one of America’s greatest contributions to Western culture” and that “the young people who annually participate in the Battle of the bands may very likely be the ones who carry on this tradition-the opportunity to play at the Hollywood Bowl is an incentive to further their appreciation and understanding of music.”<sup>38</sup> However, although the county could offer the opportunity to play the Hollywood Bowl, it could not guarantee the excitement and enthusiasm of a contemporary rock show.

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<sup>35</sup> “Bowl Announces Judges for Battle of the Bands,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1960, B26.

<sup>36</sup> “Sweetest noise in Town,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 18, 1960, B1.

<sup>37</sup> Otis, *Upside your Head!* 65.

<sup>38</sup> “Teenagers to Compete in ‘Battle of the Bands,’” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 21, 1963, C1.

While the county battle, like those of its jazz predecessors, promoted contests free from commercial application, by the mid 1960s teenage musical competitions, like beauty pageants, were a part of the merchandizing of youth culture. At a “Teen-age Fair” in Burbank in 1963, a battle of the bands and a folk song competition were mid-day events; the fair also included surfboard demonstrations by Hobie Alter, a hot rod show, Hi-Deb fashion show and a display of outer space equipment including a rocket belt that could propel a man 100 feet into the air.<sup>39</sup> This San Fernando Valley Teen-age Fair worked to fuse the diverse elements of youth culture: cars, space, surf, folk, rock and fashion.

In the 1960s, layered instruments, echo, and reverb became hallmarks of the sounds of Los Angeles’s middle-class youth culture; these elements became trademark techniques for the auteur productions of Frank Zappa, Brian Wilson and Phil Spector. Spector’s “Wall of Sound” was a means of musical integration as individual instruments gave way to a huge cavern-like sound that blended voices and instruments; in these recorded pieces the centrality of the vocals dominated rhythm structures that had provided the basis of earlier dance cultures. This sound could also be found in the dominant positioning of the surf guitar in surf music.

The Los Angeles sound as popularized in the mainstream obscured or disregarded the contributions made by the working-class, the nonwhite and women. Furthermore, as the music of surf culture and Southern California sound was popularized it played a role in sustaining narratives of the cultural superiority of white Americans, albeit not the children of Ivy League trained elites, but the sons of middle-class suburbanites.

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<sup>39</sup>“Teen-age fair Will Have Exhibits for Space and Surf Enthusiasts,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 1963, B8.

## **The Mysto Sound**

Surf music was a direct product of the spatial, racial and gendered ordering of youth culture. The birthplace of surf music, the Rendezvous Ballroom, was near the western terminus of Balboa Island, a summer resort in Newport Beach. As examined in earlier chapters, Balboa and Newport Beach served as the holiday stomping ground for white, Westside Los Angeles youth. The Ballroom itself was set on the beach and stepping outside one could watch young people enjoying the surf and sand. It was the beach and the idea of surfing that provided the filter through which the music was heard; although surf music was rooted in black R&B, this association diminished as the genre became commercially attached to white teen beach culture.

The nation's postwar gaze upon Southern California meant that surfboarding and beach blanket movies became mass marketed representations of local youth culture. The 1958 movie *Gidget* nationalized and popularized surf culture and in doing so parodied clashes between the cultural life of older surfboarders, ukuleles and campfires, and the takeover of the beach by surfing teenagers who listened to the pop stylings of crooners like Bobby Darin or former Mouseketeer Annette Funicello. Regardless of the teen marketing, the generation of baby boom surfers found their own sound, a type of ramped-up instrumental rock 'n' roll played by peers at local venues. According to musician Paul Johnson from the Belairs, "I tend to think of almost everything I have ever done as being

rock instrumental and it's just an accident of history that it all coincided with what other people call surf music.”<sup>40</sup>

Before World War II, surfing was a subcultural pursuit. The surfboard was made of wood, and at an average weight of about 100 pounds few other than adult men could participate in the sport. Surfing was a sport for athletes, but in the cultural traditions of Southern California it also embraced a mystical spiritualism that encouraged the exploration of nature and the embrace of Hawaiian culture. Surfers consumed Hawaiian culture in nightclubs such as the Hula Hut, the Club Zamboanga, Hawaiian Paradise, Sweeny’s Tropicana, the Coconut Grove and the Holo Holo. At these venues, surfers could enjoy and meet Island players brought over on the Matson Steamship Line. The circulation of Hawaiian musicians influenced a number of surfers to learn ukulele and slack key guitar, and these surfers became Hawaiian musical performers themselves.<sup>41</sup>

As a subcultural pursuit, devotion to the sport of surfing was so intense that even in the youthful rush to join the armed services during World War II, a few surfers attempted to resist the draft. George “Peanuts” Larson spent the night before his pre-induction physical in a closet lighting sulfur matches, and an asthma attack the next day kept him out of the war.<sup>42</sup> Like the prohibition of hot rodding on the dry lakes during World War II, much of Southern California’s coast became off limits to surfers. In addition, the war introduced Hawaii and its culture to thousands of servicemen who came through the islands during their service. Hence, at the end of the war there was an increased interest in surfing. Post-war technology also played a key role in the surfing

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<sup>40</sup> Paul Johnson interview, 16.

<sup>41</sup> Don James, *Surfing San Onofre to Point Dume; 1936-1942*, (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1998), 15.

<sup>42</sup> James, *Surfing San Onofre*, 139.

boom. Like the funding of hot rod culture, upon discharge surfing GIs were given resources that were channeled into business interests related to surfboarding.<sup>43</sup>

In the early post-world War II period, key innovations to the surfboard initiated by Gardner Chapin, Pete Peterson and Bob Simmons fused fiberglass, balsa wood and foam to produce a surfboard that was light yet sturdy and not too expensive. In 1957, Dave Sweet of Santa Monica produced the first polyurethane foam surfboard. Polyurethane construction became the standard for mass produced surfboards from leading surfboard companies, including Hobie, Clark, Robertson Sweet and Kransco.<sup>44</sup> By the late 1950s, Southern California teenagers could surf alongside the wood board practitioners of the prewar generation. These technical innovations allowed surfing's most important teenage spokesperson in the late 1950s to participate in the culture. Her name was Kathy Kohner, or as most people know her, Gidget.

In mid-1950, Frederick Kohner decided to write down the story of his daughter's summer exploits at Malibu beach. Written in the voice of a teenage girl and under the title, *Gidget, The Little Girl With the Big Ideas*, the book began with a diary entry, "I'm writing it down because I once heard that when you're liable to forget things and I'd sure be the most miserable woman in the world if I ever forgot what happened this summer." This book became the basis of the Gidget empire, including multiple movies and television series, and had been described by surf historian Craig Stecyk as "the most

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<sup>43</sup> Beth Bailey and David Farver, *This Strange Place: Race and Sex in World War II Hawaii* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> Craig Stecyk and David Carson, ed., *Surf Culture: The Art History of Surfing* (Laguna Beach, CA: Laguna Art Museum, 2002), 230.

successful and longest-running episode of teenage exploitation since *Joan of Arc*.<sup>45</sup> The story of the real Gidget, Kathy Kohner, began in 1956 when her mother would drive a number of neighborhood youth to the beach from Brentwood. Tagging along, Kohner met a set of subcultural vagabond surfers with names such as Mickey “Da Cat” Dora, Mysto George, The Fencer, Moondoggie, Golden Boy, Scooter and Tubesteak. From this company, the 95-pound girl midget, Gidget, learned to surf. Kohner translated these stories to her father, a Jewish émigré from 1930’s East Europe, and a screenwriter for Columbia Pictures. Fredrick Kohner would listen to his daughter’s phone conversations and, with careful attention to the special dialect of surfers, articulate the experience of learning to surf within a romantic coming of age story.<sup>46</sup>

Made into a major motion picture movie in 1958, *Gidget* popularized the surfing youth beach culture of Southern California to the nation. While Hollywood had long been an attraction for young people looking for new experiences, Southern California’s beaches became a second magnet for young migrants after the run of beach movies. The spring and summer pilgrimage to Los Angeles brought scores of new surfing recruits, and regionally, many young people from inland towns would become seasonal coastal inhabitants. Often back houses and garages of beach town bungalows could be rented for the season, or if capital was unavailable, one could camp out on the beach.<sup>47</sup> While not a stated rejection of the planned suburban life of many of their parents, the youth culture of

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<sup>45</sup> Stecyk, *Surf Culture*, 119. Stecyk casually estimated that the Gidget spawned related industry was a multimillion dollar affair.

<sup>46</sup> Deanne Stillman, “The Real Gidget,” in Stecyk ed., *Surf Culture*; Linda Chase and Elizabeth Pepin, *Surfing: Women of the Waves* (Layton, UT: Gibbs Smith, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> Tom Wolfe described this nomadic youth surf culture in his story “The Pump House Gang.” Tom Wolfe, *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1968).

surfing offered an escape from the managed and privatized spaces of planned community.

The Pacific Ocean was a great blue mystery that everyone had the right to experience.

As the youth wave of the California beach rush crested, Dick Dale and his Deltones began playing at the Rendezvous Ballroom on Balboa Island. In the postwar period, dance bands had become smaller, and by the mid-1950s seven or eight instrumentalists was a common dance band size. Advances in the amplification of sound, including electric guitars, basses and organs, allowed a handful of musicians to make as much sound as a group twice their size. Location and timing allowed Dick Dale and his Deltones to become the music of a surfing youth culture.

Dick Dale was born Richard Monsour in Beirut, Lebanon, in 1938. As a small child he moved with his family to Quincy, Massachusetts. During high school, his family moved again to El Segundo, California. Monsour began working at Hughes Aircraft and joined the National Guard. Nonetheless, music was his passion and as a childhood fan of Hank Williams, Monsour began competing in local country music contests. At one contest 400-pound DJ “T. Texas Tiny” recommended the country-sounding name Dick Dale to the young musician.<sup>48</sup>

Dale began performing for free with his cousin Ray Samra at the Rinky Dink Ice Cream Parlor on Balboa Island. The owner soon promised Dale and his growing band free sodas and eight dollars a night. In 1961, Dale moved to Costa Mesa and opened a record shop next to the dormant Rendezvous Ballroom. In time, Dale convinced Thelma Neufield, the owner of the Rendezvous, to allow him to perform there for a split door charge. On their first night, July 1, 1961, seventeen surfers showed up. However, from

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<sup>48</sup> Jack Wood, *Surf City: The California Sound*, (New York: Friedman/Fairfax Publishers, 1995), 8; Rob Burt, *Surf City, Drag City* (New York: Blandford Press, 1986).

this small start, the Deltones's fanbase mushroomed, and by August the band was performing for crowds of three or four thousand every night.<sup>49</sup>

A musician with eclectic tastes and an ego to match, Dick Dale wanted to have a fat, thick guitar sound. Dale recalls, "I wanted to make it sound like Gene Krupa."<sup>50</sup> In the process of achieving his sound, Dale developed a close relationship with Leo Fender. Fender supplied Dale with new amps and "after blowing up about 48 amps and speakers that would literally catch on fire, we went on to the Showman (amp)." The Dual Showman followed: two 15-inch speakers powered by an 85-watt transformer. That gave Dale enough sound to "break the sound barrier" in front of 4,000 fans at the Rendezvous. Fender would also provide Dale with the first outboard reverb unit for guitar. Dale had originally intended to use the unit for his voice but once he began using it with the guitar there was no turning back.<sup>51</sup> Reverb became the definitive sound of surf music and allowed listeners to distinguish surf music from instrumental rock predecessors such as the music of the Ventures and Link Wray.

While surfers would soon be identified in their Pendletons and white Levi's jeans, Dick Dale enforced an R&B fashion, coat and tie, sensibility for his audience. Although identified as the originator of the surf sound, Dale's music had no allegiances to the Hawaiian music or modern jazz associated with the older generation of surfers. Playing guitar and trumpet on stage, Dale's style was both choppy and powerful, another attempt to create a wall of sound not unlike contemporaries Phil Specter and John Coltrane. Although Dale is often given the credit for drawing crowds to the Rendezvous, his

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Mark Brown, "Surf's Up-Again," *The Orange County Register*, August 11, 1996, 9. Krupa was well known for his loud and kinetic jazz drum solos.

<sup>51</sup> John Blair interview by author, July 15, 2006.

backing band included key players from the interracial R&B music scene including brothers Rick and Barry Rillera. Rick Rillera and the Rhythm rockers had been the first band to feature Richard Berry as their lead singer, and their cover of Rene Touzet's "El Loco Cha Cha" gave Berry the rhythmic base for his rock classic "Louie Louie."<sup>52</sup>

The excitement generated by Dale and his Deltones quickly produced a slew of imitators. Like the Belairs, Liberty Records recorded the Marketts' "Surfer's Stomp" in 1962 which became a quick regional hit. Directed by the producer of the Ventures, Joe Saraceno, the Marketts were made up of Hollywood session musicians. The band signed with Warner Brother Records and "Surfer's Stomp" made it to #31 on the national chart. Young musicians soon began performing surf music in such groups as the Surfaris, the Chantays, the Trashmen, and the Rip Chords. Instrumental surf bands continued to chart hits through the mid-1960s, that is, until the British Invasion turned the nation's gaze temporarily from Southern Californian shores.

In 1964, the Pyramids' "Penetration!" made it to #18 on the Billboard Top 20. The band formed in 1962 when Long Beach Polytechnic High students Will Glover and Skip Mercier began teaching each other Venture songs. The Long Beach-based Pyramids were known for their raucous live performances, and at one show at the Rendezvous they doffed their trench coats and fake pants legs and performed in their shorts. Afterwards they were banned from playing at the Rendezvous. The Pyramids would also attempt to upstage groups like the Beach Boys and later the Beatles. If the Beach Boys would arrive in the limo to a show, the Pyramids would arrive in a helicopter or infamously riding

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<sup>52</sup> Dave Marsh, *Louie Louie: The History and Mythology of the World's Most Famous Rock 'n' Roll Song* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).

elephants. In protest of the Beatles, they began shows with mop-top wigs and in mid-show ripped them off to reveal cleanly shaven heads.<sup>53</sup>

The Pyramids' were also unique among surf bands in that lead singer and rhythm guitarist Will Glover was black. The band's repertoire included many R&B songs on which Glover sang lead. While he experienced a few encounters with racism while touring the Southwest, Glover's biggest disappointment occurred during the filming of the 1964 Frankie Avalon and Annette Funicello movie *Bikini Beach*. The director, William Asher, asked Glover to sit out of the scenes that featured the band with bikini clad girls on the beach. "California's beaches were supposedly integrated then, but I guess they were thinking about theaters in parts of the county where people didn't want to see that," remembered Glover.<sup>54</sup>

While Glover was excluded from the beach party, the Beach Boys' lyricists Gary Usher and Roger Christian frolicked as extras with the bikini-clad youth. The writing duo of Usher and Christian, like that of Terry Melcher and Bruce Johnston, provided most of the lyrics, production and promotion to the vocal pop music that like instrumental surf music became associated with Southern California youth culture. Ironically, both Usher and Christian had come to California from the East Coast in the late 1950s, and neither had much experience with surfing or local youth. Nonetheless, Usher and Christian translated their impressions of teen life in Southern California into lyrics. Usher's songs

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<sup>53</sup> Jim Washburn, "The Secret History of Surf," *OC Weekly*, June 23, 2005, <http://www.ocweekly.com/2005-06-23/music/a-secret-history-of-surf> (accessed January 9, 2009).

<sup>54</sup> Washburn, "The Secret History of Surf"; Tom Lisanti, *Hollywood Surf and Beach Movies: The First Wave, 1959-1969* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2005).

included “In My Room” and the “Lonely Surfer,” and Christian’s hits numbered “Surf City,” “Little Old Lady From Pasadena,” and “Don’t Worry Baby.”<sup>55</sup>

Terry Melcher was the son of actress Doris Day and had contacts throughout the entertainment industry. With a solid lineup of studio musicians, known to many as the “wrecking crew,” Melcher and Johnston were able to produce multiple pop hits with the same personnel by changing the name of the group but not the musicians. Joe Saraceno had been following this same strategy in the late 1950s and had been central to discovering and shaping the Beach Boys and producing the Marketts, who were at one time or another also members of the “wrecking crew.” This form of production gave control of the music industry to a handful of key players. Through market research, record companies would determine the popularity of different groups and decide which group seemed most popular at the moment. As the popularity of a particular ensemble began to decrease, the label would discontinue that group and move on to a new name. This system guaranteed both maximum profits and instant obsolescence.<sup>56</sup>

In the summer of 1963, the Beach Boys’ “Surfin’ U.S.A.” became the number two song on the national pop charts, eclipsed only by Jan and Dean’s “Surf City,” written by Beach Boys founder Brian Wilson and Roger Christian. California’s beach culture, as portrayed in Hollywood movies, became a trend in American youth culture, and by association the Beach Boys became symbolic representatives of Californian and American youth. The Beach Boys seemed to promote what was fun about being a young

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<sup>55</sup> Burt, *Surf City, Drag City*, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Denny Tedesco, dir., *The Wrecking Crew*, Lunchbox Entertainment, 2008; Hal Blaine, Mr. Bonzai, Rebeats Publications, and David Goggin, *Hal Blaine and the Wrecking Crew: The Story of the World's Most Recorded Musician* (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard Corporation, 2003); Kim Cooper, Daivid Smay, and Jake Austen, *Bubblegum Music is the Naked Truth: The Dark History of Prepubescent Pop, from the Banana Splits to Britney Spears* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2001).

American in the early 1960s—cruising, surfing and dreaming about romantic crushes. But the Beach Boys' music was also built upon multiple layers of deception. In the representation of Southern Californian youth culture to the nation, the regions' multiracial and working-class music culture was sanitized, whitened and made appropriate for middle-class audiences. Furthermore, the Beach Boys were the product of marketing forces, not the authentic subcultural representatives of either hot-rodding or surfing. Nonetheless, their songs became quickly identified with these subcultures, and the songs' distribution turned these formerly regional, locally-defined subcultures into mass culture.

The story behind the song “Surfin’ U.S.A.” was itself more complicated than its seemingly frivolous title suggested. Out of the five members of the band, only Dennis Wilson surfed, but he had the foresight to suggest the theme to his brother Brian. When the demo of “Surfin” was sent to Candix Records, Joe Saraceno and Russ Regen deliberated on different monikers and then suggested that the band change its name from the Pendletones to the Beach Boys. On December 29, 1961, the band played two songs at the Rendezvous during an intermission of a Dick Dale show also featuring the Challengers and the Surfaris. On New Year’s Eve 1961, the group performed its first set as the Beach Boys at the Long Beach Municipal Stadium at a memorial concert for Ritchie Valens. It took months before the song climbed the pop charts, but as it did it caught the attention of Chuck Berry, who recognized the song as his “Sweet Little Sixteen.” Berry’s suit against the Beach Boys was resolved by giving Berry credit on the song and a piece of the overall publishing royalties. As a product of the commodification of Southern California youth culture, the vocal pop music created by the Beach Boys was

marketed under the genre of surf music to the dismay of instrumental surf musicians such as Dick Dale. The music of the Beach Boys and Jan and Dean provided a means by which corporate producers of youth culture could develop a sanitized white pop music that fused a rich regional subculture with black American music. In this way, the production of the Beach Boys represents a turning point in the history of American rock music and youth culture in the 20th century in which corporate programs sought to monopolize youth culture.<sup>57</sup>

### **Musical Middlemen: From the Dance Floor to the Control Booth**

While controversy over the publishing rights to “Surfin’ USA” caused some difficulties for the Beach Boys, these problems were minor compared to strife caused by the management of the business end of the group by Murry Wilson, the father of Beach Boys Brian, Carl and Dennis Wilson. In 1962, Murry created Sea Tunes Publishing Company in order to control the income generated in collaborations between Brian and Gary Usher. As manager of the company, Murry could choose which songs to license. He also received a third share of all income generated through the Wilson-Usher songs. By late 1964, Murry had badgered Brian to verbally agree to relinquish all publishing rights.<sup>58</sup>

The consequence of Murry’s business activities was an ongoing series of father and son confrontations that continued through the 1960s and flashed at the end of the decade when Brian found out that his father had sold the publishing rights to Brian’s

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<sup>57</sup> Jules Siegel, “Good Bye Surfing Hello God!—The Religious Conversion of Brian Wilson,” in Theo Cateforis, ed., *The Rock History Reader* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, 2007), 87-102.

<sup>58</sup> Francis Davis, *Like Young: Jazz, Pop, Youth and Middle Age* (New York: Da Capo Press, 2002), 260.

music to Irving Almo Publishing for \$700,000. The controversy over the publishing rights continued beyond Murry's death. Finally, in 1994, Irving Almo settled with Brian Wilson for an undisclosed amount after the discovery that much of the documentation for the transfer of the catalogue was forged, including Brian Wilson's signatures on documents claiming that he had transferred the publishing rights to his father.<sup>59</sup>

Many parents participated in nurturing their children's music talents as a privilege of their middle-class status. Working-class families did not have the time or the resources to spend on their children's musical careers and this enabled music entrepreneurs to wield power and influence in working-class communities. Robert Keane and Eddie Davis, white middle-class and middle-aged men, for example, sustained successful careers promoting young black, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islanders. Both Keane and Davis had been performers as young men, but like Dootsie Williams and Phil Spector, they turned to promotion, publishing, and production. Both found success by paying close attention to young listeners and catering to their desires. Keane's and Davis's careers were shaped by the terrain of Southern Californian youth culture, and they built their success on the work of the teenagers who themselves developed local rock 'n' roll music scenes. Keane and Davis discovered youth music created and consumed by young people in Los Angeles and sought to translate these local practices into the mass market. The work of Keane and Davis had a two-fold effect: their sponsorship of local youth cultures created expanded opportunities for young artists and, as entrepreneurial middlemen, their roles in popularizing local youth cultures allowed corporate producers to appropriate the products

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<sup>59</sup> Wood, *Surf City*, 27.

of local scenes, tooling the product for maximum returns and remarketing them to teens as authentic youth cultures.

Keane was born Robert Kuhn on January 5, 1922, in Manhattan Beach, California. In 1938, Kuhn played his first show as a clarinet player in front of a big band at Glendale Junior College. The show was broadcast on KFWB, and very soon afterward an agent from MCA offered him a recording contract as “The World’s Youngest Bandleader.” MCA dropped him in 1941 because the label feared that Kuhn would be drafted. After World War II, Kuhn returned to Los Angeles and found work as the conductor of *The Hank McCune Show*, an early television and radio situation comedy. The similarity of the names McCune and Kuhn prompted the show’s management to suggest a name change, and Kuhn changed his surname to Keane, inspired by a Woody Herman song “Peachy Keen.”<sup>60</sup>

In 1955, Keane and John Siamas became partners in a recording label, Keen Records. As the company’s A&R man, Bumps Blackwell gave Keane the acetate of two songs, “Summertime” and “You Send Me” by Sam Cooke, recorded while Cooke was singing with the gospel group The Soul Stirrers. Fortunately for Keane, Cooke’s music fell between current recording genres defined by race and style. According to Keane, “You realized that kind of music didn’t exist then in the black market. That’s why I got it: because the majors had turned it down. I said, ‘Screw the black market, this is a pop record, daddy-o.’”<sup>61</sup> On November 25, 1957, “You Send Me” reached #1 on the

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<sup>60</sup> Bob Keane, *The Oracle of Del-Fi: My Life in Music With Ritchie Valens, Frank Zappa, Barry White, Sam Cooke and Other Legends* (La Vergne, TN: Lightning Source Inc, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Colin Devenish, “Del-Fi’s Kean Opens Door,” Rolling Stone, September 28, 2004, [http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/ritchievalens/articles/story/6525866/delfis\\_keane\\_opens\\_door](http://www.rollingstone.com/artists/ritchievalens/articles/story/6525866/delfis_keane_opens_door).

Billboard chart, but never recorded oral contracts with Siamas resulted in Keane's failure to profit from Cooke's success.

With inspiration from his wife, Keane decided to begin another label, Del-Fi Records. His next big success was with the teenage Pacoima musician Richard Stephen Valenzuela, known as Ritchie Valens. In May 1958, with a tip from a young musical promoter, Keane saw Valens performing at a weekend matinee show at a movie theatre: "when I saw him for the first time, he was at this theatre in Pacoima, and these kids were going bananas. He had such command just playing his bunch of riffs. I said to myself 'If I can put that guy on record, and get these girls like this, I'm going to have something.'"<sup>62</sup> After Keane worked with Valens on his material, "Come On Let's Go" was recorded at Gold Star Studios in July 1958. Quickly, this song as well as the subsequently released "Donna" and its B-side "La Bamba" became hits. Valens's life ended in a tragic plane crash in February 1959, and Keane never made any profits from Valens short career.<sup>63</sup> However, Del-Fi began to flourish as a label because of the notoriety of its most famous performer.

After the death of Valens, Keane was reluctant to provide upfront promotional expenses for the bands that Del-Fi recorded under his label. However, with an open door policy in which he was willing to consider any artist who showed up at Del-Fi's office on Record Row, near both RCA and Columbia, Del-Fi became the first to record such stars as Frank Zappa, Bobby Fuller, and Leon Russell. However, many musicians were disenchanted with Del-Fi's marketing strategies. While offering the opportunity to

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<sup>62</sup> David Reyes and Tom Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances, Chicano Rock 'n' Roll from Southern California* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), 8.

<sup>63</sup> Bob Keane, *The Oracle of Del-Fi*.

record, Del-Fi failed to provide much economic or promotional support. The label's success was based on young musicians' thirst for recording opportunities and their willingness to settle for minimal economic returns. Keane's business strategy was different from that of the larger studios. The majors spent months promoting teenage heartthrobs and thereby created demand for their products. Keane found success by producing and distributing the music of regional subcultures, music whose popularity was already confirmed by local teens.<sup>64</sup>

Like Keane, Eddie Davis was a white middle-class producer of Angelino African-American and Chicano pop music known as the West Coast Eastside Sound. From the late 1950s onward, Davis dedicated himself to the management, production and promotion of young Doo Wop, pop and rock musicians. His groups included Delbert Franklin & The Mixtures, Barry White & The Atlantics, Chick Carlton & the Majestics, Cannibal & the Headhunters, The Romancers, The Blendells, The Premiers and El Chicano. As the owner of numerous recording labels and multiple publishing companies, Davis was at the center of music production in East Los Angeles and his industry connections provided opportunities to young working-class Eastside musicians who were routinely ignored by the Hollywood recording establishment. Furthermore, Davis produced multiethnic bands such as the The Blendells and The Mixtures and promoted an integrated youth culture that challenged the entertainment industry's and popular culture's racial boundaries. Unlike Keane, Davis offered support and financial assistance

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<sup>64</sup> Colin Devenish, "Del-Fi's Kean Opens Door."

to his musicians, but although he was able to produce a number of regional hits, his music rarely moved outside of the Southern California market.<sup>65</sup>

Davis was born to a Jewish father and a Catholic mother in 1926 and grew up in East Los Angeles near First and Boyle Streets in an area called Primera Flats. As a young boy his grandmother auditioned him for the Robert Mitchell Boys Choir. The premier Catholic boy's choir in Los Angeles, the Mitchell Boy's Choir was featured on a weekly broadcast on radio station KFI. Throughout the 1930s, the boys choir was also featured in multiple Hollywood films such as *Boys Town*, *Angels with Dirty Faces*, *The Frontiersman*, *The Major and the Minor*, and *The Tower of London*. In many of these films, the boys choir became the means of group and individual rehabilitation. It was an organization that promoted social order and regeneration, or in the least a glimmer of hope for impoverished youth. For the boys involved, participation gave them the opportunities to break into L.A.'s entertainment business, and a lucrative source of income for parents and/or other adult guardians.

Davis's success as a child entertainer did not translate into an adult career. Although he had hoped to become a jazz singer, he soon abandoned that goal and entered the restaurant business, using the money he had earned as a child performer to finance his new career. But he did not abandon his artistic drive, and he turned that energy toward the promotion of young musicians in the Eastside community. To this end, he partnered with producer Billy Cardenas, who had been introduced to the music business when Bob Keane allowed him to watch several of Ritchie Valens's recording sessions.<sup>66</sup> Eventually,

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<sup>65</sup> Chuy Varela and Hector Gonzalez, "Eddie Davis Biography," 2007, from Hector Gonzalez Personal Collection [hereinafter HGPC].

<sup>66</sup> Ben Quiones, "The West Coast Eastside sound," *Los Angeles Weekly*, December 30, 2005, 26.

Davis owned three record labels, Faro, Linda, and Rampart, a recording and manufacturing firm, and, with Cardenas, a Fullerton nightclub known as the Rhythm Room. Weekend dances at the Rainbow Gardens in Pomona featured the labels' recorded talent and were promoted by radio station KRLA and hosted by DJs Bob Eubanks and Dick Moreland. Often records, reels, and contracts could be found in the kitchens and back rooms of his restaurants, and Davis was known comment on the number of hamburgers he flipped to fund his recording business.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, Davis's experience as a service industry entrepreneur put him close to many young working-class people, and for many he became an advocate.

Within this environment Davis and Cardenas encouraged young Chicano groups to record R&B songs. In 1964, Cardenas suggested that the Mexican-American group, the Premiers, cover "Farmer John," a song first recorded by Los Angeles R&B duo Don and Dewey. The Premiers had come together as a group of high school students who played in the San Gabriel backyard of brothers Lawrence and John Perez. These backyard practice sessions turned into wedding gigs managed by Perez's mother, and soon their popularity brought them to the attention of Cardenas.<sup>68</sup> Lawrence Perez remembered that Cardenas had encouraged the Premiers to record "Farmer John" in the style of the current hit "Louie Louie," itself a cover of a song by African-American R&B musician Richard Berry, but recorded and made popular by a white group from Portland, Oregon, the Kingsmen.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Hector Gonzalez interview.

<sup>68</sup> Reyes and Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances*, 77.

<sup>69</sup> Dave Marsh, *Louie Louie*; Warren Gill, "Region, Agency, and Popular Music: The Northwest Sound, 1958-1966," *Canadian Geographer* 37.2, (June 1993): 120-131.

Like “Louie Louie,” the Premiers’s cover of “Farmer John” sought to retain a live and edgy style. The key touches to the song were provided in post-recording by the all-girl Chevelles Car Club. Davis remembered that “we had a party at the studio and had all the kids come down. Everybody was having a good time and we put the record on—in those days they had three-track recording—and while everybody was having a party we recorded the crowd on top of it.”<sup>70</sup> Adding to the confusion, in the beginning of the song one can hear Cardenas asking, “Has anyone seen Kosher Pickle Harry?” referencing an old neighborhood friend of Eddie Davis. The careening excitement captured in “Farmer John” sent it to #19 on the Billboard chart.

More than just marketing to multiracial East Los Angeles, Davis’s interests placed him at odds with the established color lines in the entertainment business. Davis represented the Mixtures, who were an integrated group that had white, Chicano, black, and Asian members. The Mixtures, who hailed from Oxnard, California, were not afraid of combining musical genres and according to leader Del Franklin, “had the Latin Feel, the black soul feel, and the white surfing sound.”<sup>71</sup> As talented instrumentalists, the Mixtures became the house band at the Rainbow Gardens in Pomona, backing singers such as Lou Rawls and Chris Montez. At one point the band was picked to perform on the television show “Parade of Hits.” When the show’s producer found that the group contained a black member, he refused the band access to the sound stage. Davis filed a complaint with the Los Angeles County Labor Relations Commission and won a

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<sup>70</sup> Chuy Varela, “Liner notes,” *The West Coast Eastside Sound Vol. 3*. Varese Sarabande, 1993, HGPC.

<sup>71</sup> Reyes and Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances*, 64.

discrimination suit against the station. Afterwards, the Mixtures became regular performers on the Parade of Hits.<sup>72</sup>

While Davis's activities worked to break the color line in music, young street promoters provided the groundwork for integrating diverse musical dance scenes. In 1958, 15-year-old Johnny Jimenez approached Alex Esquier, the manager of the Catholic Youth Organization Hall located on Brooklyn and Gage Avenues, about renting the hall for a "battle of the bands." Jimenez and his group, the Imperial Social Club, were given an open Friday night. The turnout was substantial, and the doors closed within the first hour. The club continued holding dances at the CYO Hall until a cleavage arose because of plans to hire black performers. The majority of the club members believed that they should not book black entertainers because they were thought to be outsiders to the East Los Angeles Mexican-American community.<sup>73</sup>

In response, Jimenez decided to go it alone and began promoting concerts under the name of Johnny Jay. His decision to promote R&B was sound because the East Los Angeles community had been actively listening to "race" music since the early 1950s, and the Doo Wop musical culture of the 1950s had brought black and Chicano singers together in vocal groups such as the Storytellers. Jimenez did not have to go far to find black entertainment, as disc jockey Hunter Hancock's KPOP record hops at Laguna Park and at Lourdes Hall featured some of the best young black musical groups of the day, including Vernon Green and the Medallions. Johnny Jay would meet the musicians at the

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<sup>72</sup> Steven Chavez and Hector Gonzalez interview by author, April 15, 2007.

<sup>73</sup> Juan "Johnny Jay" Jimenez interview by author, June 18, 2008. Information in the next three paragraphs is from this interview.

park and offer each musician \$10 to perform at his dance and a chance to compete for a best band prize of \$100.

As the crowds grew, Johnny Jay moved his dances from the CYO Hall to the Casa Mexicano, and then to Carpenters Hall on Soto Street. Concurrently, Al Perez, the print instructor at Roosevelt High School, began having dances at the Big Union Hall. During this period, most attendees to local dances came by foot or public transportation; however, the Big Union Hall in Vernon and the Little Union Hall in the City of Commerce became attractions for car clubs, and like the Montebello Ballroom, drew crowds from around the region for Friday night dances. The raucous scene at the Big Union Hall was memorialized by the 1966 Four Tempos' tune "Showdown" in which the lead singer promised to "cut down" a dancer who was coming from out of town. Johnny Jay decided he needed a better venue and convinced the owner of the Paramount Ballroom to reduce his rental costs because of the fact that the majority of attendees were minors. The Paramount Ballroom dances were a success, but the local police threatened to shut the dances down on account of the lack of adult supervision. In response, Johnny Jay began enrolling every attendee in a private club in which membership dues were paid at the door. Off-duty police officers handled the entry, thereby effectively sidestepping future police harassment.

Although Johnny Jay booked many popular black entertainers such as Chubby Checkers, the Meadowlarks, the Medallions, the Temptations, Coasters and Platters, he often top billed lesser well-known Mexican-American singers from the local community. Furthermore, these dances would feature a house band of instrumentalists made up of local high school musicians. Johnny Jay's house band, the Romancers, were from

Salesian High School. Top billing at a dance became a goal for many local singers and although singers, such as Lil' Willie G fought for featured spot, Frankie Cannibal Garcia remained Jimenez's top-billed singer because both he and Cannibal were from the same gang from Primera Flats. Jimenez's promotion brought Cannibal to the attention of Billy Cardenas and Eddie Davis. Both were very excited by the young singer because of his popularity with female attendees.

Cannibal and the Headhunters would become one of the most popular groups out of East Los Angeles from the mid-1960s. They were equally popular with white, black and Chicano audiences across the nation. The band was made up Frankie "Cannibal" Garcia, Richard "Scar" Lopez, and brothers Bobby and Joe Jaramillo. At the beginning, Bobby and the Classics, comprised of Lopez and Bobby Jaramillo, would get together in at the Jaramillo residence and harmonize to songs by black vocal groups. One day while singing the Bluejays' "Lover's Island," thirteen-year-old Joe Jaramillo added his falsetto to the mix and was added to the group. Bobby and the Classics were schooled in Doo Wop by a black vocal group, Zulu and the Warriors, residents of the mixed-raced Ramona Gardens Housing Project in which they all resided. With the addition of Frankie Garcia as lead, the group spent hours rehearsing songs and dance moves patterned after their Doo Wop idols. Cannibal and the Headhunter's recording of R&B musician Chris Kenner's "Land of a Thousand Dances" became their signature hit and inspired Wilson Pickett to record the song in 1966. Pickett's version went to #1 on the R&B charts and #6 on the pop chart. During the recording of the song, Cannibal was mesmerized by the beat and had forgotten the lyrics and scatted the now famous "NaNaNaNa" over a Stevie Wonder-inspired drum track. This song and group, both of which were embraced by

white popular culture, became Davis' biggest success. The Headhunters performed “Land of a Thousand Dances” on local and national television appearances. One musical spot filmed in Santa Monica featured the Headhunters cooking young women in pots and then getting attacked by Herman Munster. The Headhunters rode this popularity and went on to perform with the Rolling Stones and then with the Beatles on their second tour of the United States, including playing for a packed audience at the Hollywood Bowl.<sup>74</sup>

### **Chicano R&B: Integration of Youth Culture Through Music**

While Cannibal and the Headhunters were the most popular group from the Eastside, Thee Midniters, named after R&B group Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, were the most popular group in East Los Angeles. Initially, the band were friends brought together by local promoter Eddie Torres in the early 1960s. Torres had attended East Los Angeles College and specialized in sociology and gang prevention. After graduation Torres took a job working to deter Chicano youth from gangs. Part of Torres’ plan was to promote dances and car club competitions to encourage middle-class cultural aspirations in the community’s youth population, and he partnered with disc jockey Dick “Huggy Boy” Hugg to promote these shows. One of his first dances at St. Alfonso’s Church in East LA featured a group titled the Fabulous Gentiles. Torres encouraged the group to change their name, and the band chose Benny and Thee Midniters. Musician Max Ubález remembered Torres’s organizing:

We met this guy, Eddie Torres, who says to us, “Can you help some guys out? They are a bunch of hoods, always in trouble.” Well we all were. So we helped

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<sup>74</sup> Chavez and Gonzalez interview.

them out. These guys became Thee Midniters. Soon it began to snowball. It grew a lot quicker than we realized. Before we knew it we had dances all over town.<sup>75</sup>

In the early 1960s, the band began to transform into an all-star East Los Angeles ensemble and featured Willie “Lil’ Willie G” Garcia on lead vocals, Benny Lopez on bass, Larry Rendon on saxophone, George Domiguez on guitar, Romeo Prado on trombone, and Roy Marquez on rhythm guitar.

Thee Midniters found their break in 1964 at a Salesian High School rock ‘n’ roll show produced by the school’s music teacher Bill Taggart. Taggart recorded each show and released a live recording. The live recordings of these shows were popular with local teens and helped sustain Salesian’s band program. As the Headhunters were a vocal group, Thee Midniters were scheduled to back up Cannibal for the second half of their set. However, the Headhunters had gotten stuck in Fresno so Thee Midniters went ahead and played the songs it had prepared to play with the Headhunters, including “The Land of a Thousand Dances.” Torres had paid some girls to sit in front and scream, and the audience wildly responded by pulling lead singer William “Lil’ Willie G” García from the stage. Taggart captured the energy of this exciting show, and Thee Midniters’ “The Land of Thousand Dances” became a regional hit and marked the beginning of a diverse performing and recording career for the band.<sup>76</sup>

In 1965, the band recorded a rock instrumental “Whittier Boulevard” that became an instant hit with young cruisers in East Los Angeles. Fan Gene Aguilera remembers, “From my tiny transistor radio, out came blaring ‘Let’s take a trip down Whittier Blvd., Arriba Arriba!, and when I found out the group was Thee Midniters from East L.A., it

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<sup>75</sup> Loza, *Barrio Rhythm*, 98.

<sup>76</sup> *Salesian Rock & Roll, Dance and Show, Program* (Los Angeles: Salesian Alumni Association, 2007), 5, HGPC.

made me proud to know these guys were from my turf, walking the same streets as me. They were like the Beatles to us. Here they were, Chicanos, competing on the Top 40 playlist, and giving us hope for the future.”<sup>77</sup>

Thee Midniters were the first Chicano band conscious of the fashion of rock ‘n’ roll, and according to Romeo Prado, “We were the first band from East LA to grow long hair.”<sup>78</sup> Although Thee Midniters followed the fashion trends set by the Beatles, their musical style was extremely diverse. The group could mix soul with psychedelic, rock and bolero, Latin-jazz instrumentals and R&B ballads. Bassist Jimmy Espinoza saw the music of Thee Midniters as representative of the integrative spirit of the era: “The ‘60s were integrated. The whole peace, love, black, white, brown, we’re all the same: that’s who we were. We were a crossover group, and we really loved it.”<sup>79</sup> Eddie Torres promoted this style consciousness and saw it as a means to reach a wider teen audience. In the mid-1960s, Torres and “Huggy Boy” also brought white groups to East Los Angeles including Them, Sonny and Cher, the Righteous Brothers and Dusty Springfield.

Coordinated by Torres, by the mid-1960s Thee Midniters played an incessant string of shows, sometimes numbering four concerts a night spread over a hundred mile territory. Thee Midniters would perform for diverse audiences. They performed both at the Palladium in Hollywood for Latin-jazz promoter Chico Sesma and at the Rose Bowl with white bands such as Herman’s Hermits, the Lovin’ Spoonful, the Turtles, and the Bobby Fuller Four. Thee Midniters also played in white suburban neighborhoods and

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<sup>77</sup> Domenic Priore, “Thee Midniters: Pounding 1964-67 East L.A. Rock ‘n’ Roll!” liner notes from, *Thee Midniters—In the Midnite Hour*, Norton Records ED 315, 2006, HGPC.

<sup>78</sup> Reyes and Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances*, 88.

<sup>79</sup> Richie Unterberger, *Urban Spaceman and Wayfaring Strangers: Overlooked Innovators and Eccentric Visionaries of ‘60s Rock* (San Francisco: Miller Freeman Books, 2000), 197.

according to Prado their success was because, “We would cover songs by those [black] artists, and the kids would be in awe, because the white bands at the time were playing nothing but surf music.”<sup>80</sup> During the mid-1960s, Thee Midniters released three albums *Thee Midniters* (1965), *Love Special Delivery* (1966) and *Unlimited* (1967). Thee Midniters were welcomed as a successful rock band on the Sunset Strip and met up-and-coming artists such as John Sebastian of the Lovin’ Spoonful, David Crosby from the Byrds, Richie Furay from Buffalo Springfield. A 1966 show by the Paul Butterfield Blues Band at the Trip in Hollywood influenced Thee Midniters to record the bluesy driving tune “Jump, Jive and Harmonize.”<sup>81</sup>

By 1968, Torres decided that the band needed to respond to the Chicano movement or lose the core of its audience. The band recorded two songs, “Chicano Power” and “The Ballad of Cesar Chavez,” and Torres created a new label La Raza Records. At this point the band was playing regularly at college campuses and antiwar rallies and no longer at regional high school dances. Many in the band were unsure about the political direction of the group. According to band-member Prado, “Eddie was into the Brown Beret movement at the time. That’s why we recorded ‘Chicano Power.’ He’s the one that added the lyrics.”<sup>82</sup> Around the time of “Chicano Power,” Torres was fired as manager and although the band continued until the early 1970s, it never found the success it had in the earlier period.

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<sup>80</sup> Reyes and Waldman, *Land of a Thousand Dances*, 90.

<sup>81</sup> Domenic Priore, “Thee Midniters: Pounding 1964-67.”

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

## **From Public Dances to Private Clubs: The Corporate Takeover**

In mid-20th century Los Angeles, the music of Doo Wop, surf, and Eastside rock was sustained and motivated by a public teenage dance culture. Youth musical groups, promoters and consumers were the primary organizers of local music scenes. For working-class youth, schools, religious charities and unions provided the space for this public dance culture to flourish. Well-funded high school bands became the training grounds for young musicians, and high school teachers such as Bill Taggart and Al Perez organized musical competitions to encourage and give opportunity to local musicians. In most cases, young people labored to create these scenes without any promise of monetary compensation. Instead, they sought local recognition and a chance to participate in the vibrant regional youth culture of the period.

For many of the teenage male musicians, as well as promoters and dancers, the chance to meet girls was a central goal and obsession of weekend dances. Eddie Davis and Bob Keane used young women's tastes as a yardstick to measure the popularity of up-and-coming singers. Nonetheless, like the youth car culture of the period, women's participation in the music of the period was limited. Although girl groups in both Doo Wop and pop rock allowed young women to participate as vocalists, almost all of the supporting musicians and management were men.<sup>83</sup> However, the sponsorship and chaperoning of dances by organizations such as churches and schools created greater opportunities for young women to participate in public nightlife, and many girl clubs organized local events.

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<sup>83</sup> Only one female instrumentalist, Carol Kaye, played with the thirty or so musicians that made up L.A.'s Wrecking Crew.

By the time Thee Midniters had disbanded, the integrated high school dance world of the mid-1950s and 60s had come to a close. By the late 1960s, private dance clubs had replaced the public dance venues of the 1950s. Advertisements for teenage dance clubs such as The Score in Alhambra and Pandora's Box in Hollywood, billing itself as "the swingest coffee house in town," were printed in local high school papers.<sup>84</sup> Many of these private clubs replaced bands with disc jockeys and sought to brand themselves through the marketing to a single youth subculture. The Whiskey a Go Go, the most famous Los Angeles rock club in the 1970s, was emblematic of these new venues and it featured scantily clad go-go dancers in cages to guarantee that if the music was bad at least customers would have the pleasure of watching the dancers. Furthermore, the hypersegregation that accompanied suburban growth made the regional high school more racially homogenous, and although multi-racial rock groups continued to bridge racial divides in the early 1960s, fewer youth bands toured regionally, largely replaced by pre-recorded music at dances.

While in the 1950s, suit and tie jazz dinner clubs like Dino's Lodge, Ciro's and the Interlude characterized the Sunset Strip scene, by the mid-1960s rock clubs had begun to take over sections of Hollywood and these teenage dance clubs and coffee houses became steppingstones to an age-integrated Hollywood rock scene. Many of these new clubs helped finance their new businesses through the booking of youth groups that would demand less money, as they would play for exposure and the excitement of participation in the local youth culture. As Hollywood became established as a new hub for rock, regional venues such as the Rendezvous and the Big Union Hall closed their

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<sup>84</sup> The *Garfield High School Log* featured advertisements from these two establishments in 1962.

doors. The speedy transformation of Hollywood as a regional youth center led to clashes between police and young people that led up to the Sunset Strip Riots discussed in the next chapter. By this point, the era of progressive youth policy supported by the County Board of Supervisors had come to an end, and the private market became the *de facto* youth culture control mechanism.

Young entrepreneurs seeking to challenge music business practices in Los Angeles also facilitated the transition to the Hollywood-centered rock ‘n’ roll scene. As a young booking agent, Todd Schiffman noticed that rock acts were paid less per night than pop artists like Harry Belafonte; Schiffman was sensitive to this practice because he had been in a youth music group in the early 1960s that had been exploited by a struggling club owner.<sup>85</sup> According to Schiffman, the older generation of booking agents kept rock at bay because they negotiated good fees for older acts and allowed promoters and venues to bleed profits from youth rock groups. By negotiating for a percentage of the door rather than a flat appearance fee, Schiffman was able to triple the amount of money paid to rock bands. With this financial strategy, by 1967, Schiffman became the go to agent for booking popular rock groups in Los Angeles. As a manager and promoter, like Keane and Davis, Schiffman sought groups in which “at least one member” had sexual appeal and could thereby excite fans. Schiffman was drawn to the Doors and after a period of time became their manager because “I saw something incredibly unique there, not only in music but in the performance of Jim Morrison. There was sexuality. There was theater.

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<sup>85</sup> Todd Schiffman interview, 75-76.

There was incredible movement. Yet with that particular act, they could be incredible one night and terrible the next.”<sup>86</sup>

While adults had always been involved in sanctioning youth dances and concerts, by the mid-1960s, corporate agents embraced the substantial profit of rock ‘n’ roll youth culture. Schiffman found new acts at small Hollywood venues such as Bido Lito’s and brought them to new rock clubs such as London Fog, The Trip, Kaleidoscope and most famously, the Whiskey A Go-Go, the go-to L.A. spot for touring rock bands in the 1970s. Bido Lito’s had initially been a bar to the Ivar Theater, but in 1965, an elderly couple and their two grown children decided to open a countercultural club; the family had little business expertise but their club became a draw for underground rock music. The entrance was down a Cosmo alley off of Selma, and according to musician Michel Stuart-Ware, “It looked more like an adult bookstore than a nightclub. A hand-printed piece of cardboard resting on the lid of a garbage can near the gate announced, ‘Bido Lito’s Presents’ and the name of group appearing. Tickets were sold by an old man in a trench coat who occasionally accepted whispered advice from his wife on how much to charge and who to let in for free.” Bido Lito was known on the strip for its drug culture but it was equally known for the exploits of its house group Love; the band according to rock critic Barney Hoskyn’s was a “unique phenomenon,” “an interracial ‘two-tone’ group playing an extraordinary hybrid of R&B, folk-rock and psychedelic pop.”<sup>87</sup>

Love’s front man, Arthur Lee, had grown up in Watts and graduated from Dorsey High School. In 1963, his instrumental soul combo, the LA Gs, recorded ‘The Ninth

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>87</sup> Hoskyns, *Waiting for the Sun*, 120.

Wave'/'Rumble-Still-Skins' for Capitol records. Afterwards, Lee recorded and produced for Bob Keane's Selma label with artists like Chicano heart throb Lil' Ray. In 1965, Lee saw the Byrds play at Ciro's and, "it all just clicked in terms of my own creativity. Up until then, everything was rhythm and blues, but they were doing their own material and it sounded like the music I was writing on my own." Love brought together bassist Ken Forssi, who had honed his chops in a surf band, Johnny Echols, formerly from the LA Gs, and Brian Maclean, a former roadie for the Byrds who became Lee's compositional counterpart. Lee and Love's music merged psychedelic rock, pop, and proto-punk elements. The band's onstage performance and fashion matched; when the band's future drummer first saw Love, "Arthur was decked out in his signature multi-colored sunglasses, combat boot (only one) and scowl."<sup>88</sup> Released in 1966 and 1967, Love's albums *De Capo* and *Forever Changes* were signature product of the integrative spirit of the youth music of Los Angeles. Elements such as mariachi brass, cinematic strings, Bacharach-style chord change and acid rock guitars fused to provide a backdrop for Lee's lyrics that like Los Angeles's noir hinted that something was rotten with the sun-soaked Southern California utopianism. While Love's albums have been regarded as some of the greatest recorded rock music, due to Lee's eccentricities the band would never sustain a touring schedule outside of Los Angeles and would be eclipsed in popularity by its Elektra label-mate The Doors.

Although Lee's personal unwillingness to tour may have contributed to the demise of Love, Love's lack of success may have been tied to the fragmentation of Los Angeles's integrated youth music scene. In the midst of black and Chicano power and the

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<sup>88</sup> Michael Stuart-Ware, *Behind the Scenes on the Pegasus Carousel with the Legendary Rock Group Love* (London: Helter Skelter Publishing, 2003), 33.

anti-Vietnam war movements, musicians and fans sought music that directly expressed new racial and social identities. The Watts Prophets' album "Rappin' Black to a White World" spoke clearly about the causes of prejudice and poverty in Los Angeles, while the talented War's "Why Can't We Be Friends?" humorously tackled issues of race relationships. In many ways, War's rhythmically driving tune "Lowrider" returned to Los Angeles's R&B and Latin roots, poly-rhythmic and danceable grooves that had been suppressed by Spector's "Wall of Sound."

The Vietnam War was unkind to many of the youth musical groups of the early 1960s. Many bands came apart when members were drafted into military service and more dissolved as members returned to find that the music scene had changed. The era of independent rock labels, like Keane and Davis, and "teen casuals," youth bands that would play for school dances, weddings and mitzvahs, had offered many opportunities to young musicians but these opportunities had begun to wane because of a turn to pre-recorded music and the cooptation of rock by corporations. As we will see in the next chapter, the mid-1960s also marked a high point for independent youth scenes. Fears of delinquency re-emerged in the late 1960s and a cycle of middle-class outrage directed at the culture of young people limited the opportunities for young Angelinos to participate in public life. By the late 1960s, the strategies of spatial and cultural segregation, each based on exploiting race for revenue, worked hand-in-hand with a new color-blind suburban populism to simultaneously obscure the common grounds of youth culture and limited grassroots opportunities for interracial collaboration. Nonetheless, as described by cultural historians and theorists George Lipsitz, W.T. Lhamon and Glenn C. Altschuler, rock music and its teen practitioners and fans contributed to creating the grounds of a

new powerful cultural cycle that allowed young American to share a common experience grounded in a critique of middle-class lifestyle and politics.<sup>89</sup> In Los Angeles, this youth culture was supported by public mechanisms and patterns of regional development. In late 1970s Los Angeles, the youth cultural critique of middle-class mores would come to the forefront once again and the punk music scene in offbeat venues in Hollywood, Orange County and East Los Angeles offered young musicians the autonomy to challenge the parameters of musical composition, live performance and the control of youth culture by adult businessmen.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> See George Lipsitz, “Ain’t Nobody Here But Us Chickens,” *Rainbow at Midnight: Labor and Culture in the 1940s* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed*; Glenn C. Altschuler, *All Shook Up*.

<sup>90</sup> Marc Spitz and Brendan Mullen, *We Got the Neutron Bomb: The Untold Story of L.A. Punk* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2001).

## Chapter Six

### Burn Baby Burn: Youth Spaces, Civil Rights and the Counterculture in Los Angeles, 1959-1967

Friday afternoon here in L.A.  
No place to go. No pot to blow.  
Think I'll go down to the movie show.  
Walk through the streets  
miss the bus, cuss like a life-long sailor.  
Write a poem, a flaming one.<sup>1</sup> —Quincy Troup, Watts Writers Workshop

In 1960, the Los Angeles City Yearbook boasted of sixteen consecutive years without major communal violence, asserting that “the juvenile population, which is often responsible for these conflicts, is watched closely for evidence of tension or impending violence.”<sup>2</sup> The Yearbook argued that the city government established order over its youth through containment strategies that relied on the deployment of a well-trained and mobile police force that could quickly respond to sources of chaos. Although the Yearbook tried to describe the control mechanisms of the juvenile population in terms of a watchful disciplinarian, overall this policy offered protection and security at a cut rate, because fewer officers were required to police a larger terrain. While these interventionist practices quelled youth outbreaks in the 1950s, the scale and character of youthful unrest in the 1960s radically challenged policing practices. In the 1960s, teenagers began to reject the control mechanisms established in the 1950s, and in mass public demonstrations young Angelinos signaled their desire for greater autonomy and mobility.

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<sup>1</sup> Quincy Troup, “A Day in L.A.” *Antioch Review* 27:3 (Fall 1967), 342.

<sup>2</sup> *The City of Los Angeles Yearbook, 1959* (Los Angeles: Police Printing Bureau, 1960), 16.

These demands became key elements of the Los Angeles youth culture of the 1960s and were reflected in two important events: the Watts Uprising of 1965 and the Sunset Strip Demonstrations of 1966.

During the 1950s, small outbreaks of violence erupted in schoolyards and in neighborhood parks throughout the Los Angeles region. These so-called riots included spontaneous schoolhouse rumbles based on competing school or neighborhood loyalties, ethnic and racial identities, as well as on the structured activities of incorporated gangs looking to increase territory or reputation.<sup>3</sup> In the popular press, however, all of these outbursts, most of them minor, fell under the rubric of gang activity. But toward the end of the decade, the youth versus youth character of these conflicts took on a new dimension. In describing his last gang fight in 1959, Samuel Mendoza recollected creeping up to a contested park on a Saturday morning at 2 a.m. with only handful of friends in order to avoid detection. After two hundred or so of his gang had arrived in similar fashion, the seven leaders of his gang met to discuss potential diplomatic strategy before White Fence, the rival gang, arrived. Following a round of failed negotiations with the White Fence gang, a bloody melee ensued that ended abruptly when the police arrived. This was a decisive moment for Mendoza because, “You no longer have an enemy cause he becomes your friend because now you got one common enemy and that’s the cops. And it’s just, it’s hard to explain you have to really feel it when all of the sudden it seemed like the whole world is your enemy.”<sup>4</sup> And yet, instead of both gangs turning on the police officers with overwhelming numbers, everyone fled the

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<sup>3</sup> For more information on Los Angeles gangs, see Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity*. See also Alex Alonzo’s website - [www.streetgangs.com](http://www.streetgangs.com).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Mendoza interview by Eleanor Flores, May 19, 1972, 24, O.H. 1138, COPH-CSUF.

scene—neither gang wished to test the police authorities. But that reluctance was soon to change.

In the early 1960s, a number of confrontations between young people and police occurred that defied characterization as gang activity. Beginning in the spring of 1961, at recreational, entertainment and consumer spaces across Southern California, from beaches to drag strips, young people rejected the paternal heavy hand that kept order on the ground. Unlike gang activity, these confrontations occurred in public and during daylight hours. For example, in May of 1961, a 17-year-old African American youth was arrested in Griffith Park for riding a merry-go-round without a ticket, and two hundred young black men attending the park confronted the police and several were injured.<sup>5</sup> A week after this incident, radio station KRLA invited listeners to a “grunion derby” at Zuma Beach. Although the organizers expected around two thousand participants, 25,000 young people came to the event. When the police tried to close the beach at midnight, they pelted the authorities with sand-packed beer cans. According to historian Mike Davis, “in the spring of 1961, Southern California suddenly erupted from the valleys to the beaches in angry generation conflict. There were eleven so called ‘teen riots’ in six months.”<sup>6</sup> These “riots” were confrontations over young people’s access and use of space and were almost all sparked by the mistreatment of a young person by the police. Rather than isolated events, seen as a whole this period of conflict between young people and the police indicated an emergent youth culture that was willing to challenge *en masse* the authority of law enforcement.

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<sup>5</sup> Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 173.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Davis, “Wild Streets: American Graffiti Versus the Cold War,” *International Socialism Journal* 91, 2001.

In examining and comparing the parallel and interlocking history of the Watts Uprising and Sunset Strip Demonstrations, this chapter argues that anti-authoritarian youth cultures created the grounds for the initial challenges that sparked both events. The Watts Uprising was not a riot, as it is so often described. Seen from within, the Uprising was a communal response to years of police abuse and public neglect. Consistent with this perception, the Uprising created the grounds for communal consolidation and neighborhood self-help programs. The Sunset Strip Demonstrations, again not a riot, was, in fact, a negotiation between young people, the police and shop owners; a negotiation that took place over many months, not just on a single night. In both cases, the label riot deflected responsibility from politicians who failed to deal with the root causes of unrest and to characterize each event as a reflection of aberrational behavior by the respective participant populations. Underneath both the Watts Uprising and the Sunset Strip Demonstrations were the failed visions of city planners and proposed freeways that never came to fruition; Watts, Hollywood, and Venice to a lesser extent, were slated to be sites of new freeways. Local commerce responded by creating short-term economic geographies that exploited local communities; these businesses shared little civic attachment to their community, as a result of freeway economies depressing local property values. Many businesses owners, following the trends of white flight, had moved out of these communities and sought to be bought-out by government speculators making way for the freeways. While this economics of development created pockets to allow jazz, R&B and rock clubs to flourish on Central Avenue and the Sunset Strip, the politics of race, age and class produced significant and unanticipated outcomes.

The participants in both of demonstrations were young citizens who had inherited a cityscape that enabled the market to pre-eminently determine the geography and use of youth spaces. In the period of rapid post-WWII expansion, city and county leaders surrendered their obligations to provide equally dynamic and growing public spaces for young Angelinos, while profits from an increasing youth market trumped any attempts to re-introduce the progressive and social democratic youth policies practiced by policy makers of the 1940s, such as Mayor Fletcher Bowron's well-intentioned plan to make neighborhood schools functioning community centers.<sup>7</sup> Instead, Los Angeles politicians claimed to make up for the lack of neighborhood youth spaces with monumental private-public works such as Dodger Stadium, and touted Disneyland and Pacific Ocean Park as viable private alternatives. However, Supervisor Kenneth Hahn and Councilperson Rosalind Wyman, both proponents of Dodger Stadium and *de facto* representatives of youth on their respective governing bodies, failed to recognize how the market created a spatial imbalance in which commercially oriented youth spaces tended to concentrate in a few locations that were inaccessible to poor and nonwhite youth.<sup>8</sup> Mid-century urban policy in Los Angeles and its promotion of suburban communities, shopping malls, and freeways created spatial and economic inequities that encouraged the growth of a youth culture of mass resistance.

The rejection of police authority and age-based regulations became central themes of youth culture in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s. Moreover, cultural distrust of authority and the desire for greater autonomy was both inspired by and invigorated contemporary

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<sup>7</sup> Bowron, "Introduction," *Semi-Annual Blue and White*, 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Identified as youth's representative because of her young age, City Councilwoman Wyman proposed commercial youth resolutions such as the city's Disneyland Day.

social and cultural movements that sought transformative changes to local communities. This chapter examines how youth culture in 1960s Los Angeles synchronized with both the civil rights movement and the counterculture.

The language and promise of civil rights radically changed the discourse of youth in Los Angeles. A city that had promoted itself as the nation's "white spot" before World War II was the site of some of the nation's largest civil rights demonstrations in the 1960s.<sup>9</sup> From World War II through the 1970s, a large number of southern blacks migrated to Los Angeles. Cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Crawford v. Board of Education of the City of Los Angeles* put young peoples' rights at the center of civil rights debates. African American author Walter Mosley describes the 1950s as a period of oppression for the Los Angeles black community, but the events in the South, such as the murder of 14-year-old Emmett Till, furthered activism and community organizing in Los Angeles's black community in the mid-1950s and provided the struggle for a civil rights narrative partly sheltered from claims of communist conspiracy. Local CORE activism, mostly initiated by students of the regional universities, provided a spark to this form of political engagement and highlighted the means by which youth activists chose to fight against inequality in a suburban metropolis. The overwhelming rejection of the Rumford Fair Housing Act by white Californian voters nearly eliminated the possibilities of integration and has been identified by many as one of the causes of the Watts Uprising.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, local struggles between police and young people gave personal

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<sup>9</sup> In 1960, 80 percent of the population was non-Hispanic white. During the 1960s and 1970s, the proportion of non-Hispanic white population continued to decline and by 1980 it was 53 percent. Dowell Meyers, "Major Changes in the Los Angeles Metropolitan Area Between 1960 and 2000," [www.rcf.usc.edu/~dowell/new/changes.htm](http://www.rcf.usc.edu/~dowell/new/changes.htm) (accessed January 26, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Borden Olive interview by author, June 15, 2006.

experiences in which young people could identify with both the emergent Black Power and counterculture movements.

Youth involvement in the civil rights struggle in South Central Los Angeles, and how city authorities again and again failed to address the social inequities that eventually led to the Watts Uprising, begins this analysis. Although the warning signs of social unrest were clear, city leaders failed to promote preventative social measures and remained entrenched in their reactionary deployment of police officers. The takeover of streets during the Uprising was a direct challenge to the control of the spatial and economic order of the city and a demand for participation within that order. The cultural spaces created by activists in South Central Los Angeles after the Uprising represented communal attempts to create alternative public spaces for young people. In addition, after the Uprising, the recognition of the need for autonomy fostering youth spaces became a central program of the Economic and Youth Opportunity Act, a key policy tool of President Johnson's War on Poverty.

The second half of the chapter will examine the history of the Sunset Strip Demonstrations. As youth spaces became more commercially oriented, coffeehouses opened a new public sphere for young people free from overt exploitation of the youth market. These spaces invited young Angelinos to participate in local artistic folk cultures and alternative political discourses. As establishments on the Strip transferred from adult to youth spaces, tensions with police officers led to conflicts and eventually to demonstrations. Battles over space engendered a youth culture that was discursively positioned against the overt authority of the police and the policies of L.A. regional

planners. As argued in the final portion of the chapter, these negotiations over the control of youth spaces invigorated Vietnam War demonstrations and the local counterculture.

After the Watts Uprising and the Sunset Strip Demonstrations, many young people felt that the events had generated a generational solidarity, a feeling of “we’re in the same bag.” Demands for spatial and cultural recognition became central themes of a shared youth culture in the 1960s that bridged class and racial differences. In Los Angeles, new sites of sociability, from coffeehouses to civil rights organizations, allowed young people to create communities that crossed racial and class boundaries. These new spaces allowed young people to understand their perceived common exploitation and their common need to seek alternatives. By the late 1960s, these sites began to sustain networks of unusual diversity by linking people who would have never met within the increasingly segregated geography of the city.

In the spring of 1963, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations (LACCHR) published a study of the growth of residential segregation. The report revealed that the County population had increased 45.5 percent from 1950 to 1960 and that the minority population had increased 113.7 percent. Yet out of a population of 335,000 black Angelinos, only 21,000 lived outside of the central district. While the black population of the central district had increased by 151,410 persons by 1960, there was a white population loss of 206,509. Conversely, the San Fernando Valley’s population had grown from 311,016 persons in 1950 to 738,831 persons in 1960.

Nonetheless, there was an overall decrease in black residents of the Valley during this same period.<sup>11</sup>

The figures provided ample evidence for the LACCHR to “document the fact that the City of Los Angeles, in particular, is becoming a much more highly segregated community than it had ever been before.”<sup>12</sup> The LACCHR report argued that segregation confined many of the black community to areas with dilapidated and rental housing stock. In 1960, Los Angeles County had about 7.5 percent deteriorated and dilapidated housing stock. In contrast, the mostly black communities of Watts and Willowbrook were about a quarter dilapidated.<sup>13</sup> Rather than a *de facto* product of market forces, historian Josh Sides has argued that “Continuing a prewar trend, the Los Angeles city government consistently diverted municipal funds for traffic safety, sewage, and street repairs away from the city’s poorer black neighborhoods and ignored or relaxed zoning ordinances to accommodate commercial growth in residential areas.”<sup>14</sup>

While the LACCHR outlined the growing problem of residential segregation in Los Angeles, the Mayor’s Office, the City Council, the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) and Board of Education failed to address the situation. Instead, the attention of civic leaders focused on the perceived threat posed by the civil rights movement. In the city’s yearbook, civil rights activism and critiques of the LAPD were characterized as demagoguery, and the yearbook’s authors hoped that, “the people did not fall prey to

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<sup>11</sup> *Population and Housing in Los Angeles County: A Study in the Growth of Residential Segregation* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations, 1963), LACCHRA.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>13</sup> *Condition of Housing by Census Tract* (Los Angeles: Los Angeles County Committee on Human Relations, 1960), 3, LACCHRA.

<sup>14</sup> Sides, *L.A. City Limits*, 113.

subterfuge.”<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, as recorded in the *California Eagle* and *California Sentinel*, the black community in South Los Angeles was increasingly frustrated with harassment by the police, the lack of jobs and the slow pace of school integration. In the early 1960s, youth activists in CORE began participating in an array of campaigns designed to challenge the spatial inequities caused by residential segregation.

### **Black Muslims as Catalyst to Civil Rights Activism**

Following *Brown v. Board of Education*, the NAACP in Los Angeles pursued legal remedies to end segregation in Los Angeles’s public schools. The Urban League, on the other hand, organized campaigns and employment programs to create greater opportunities for minority workers in growing industries, including the entertainment industry. Lastly, united civil rights groups labored for the integration of city neighborhoods. This last tactic was seen as the final solution to *de facto* segregation. In all of these campaigns, the student chapters of CORE provided manpower for civil rights demonstrations, and thereby young people became the public representation of the civil rights movement in Los Angeles. Thus, young activists in CORE camped out at non-integrated housing developments, demonstrated outside of commercial, government and entertainment buildings, and risked arrest and incarceration for their activities. In addition, Los Angeles youth also participated in the Freedom Rides in the South in 1961.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> *The City of Los Angeles Yearbook, 1960* (Los Angeles: Police Printing Bureau, 1961), 8.

<sup>16</sup> Raymond Arsenault, *Freedom Riders: 1961 and the Struggle for Racial Justice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 384.

In the spring of 1962, a serious confrontation between Black Muslims and the Los Angeles Police Department brought the struggle for civil rights home and invigorated local activism. On April 27, 1962, police killed one and wounded six Muslims outside of their mosque on South Broadway.<sup>17</sup> Afterward, fourteen members of the mosque were arrested for resisting arrest and assaulting officers. Initially a grand jury requested by Mayor Samuel Yorty and District Attorney William B. McKesson indicted nine of the members for conspiring to enact violence, but Superior Judge Alfred Peracca set aside the politically motivated conspiracy charges.<sup>18</sup> As the criminal trial progressed, it was clear that the police officers involved deemed black males and Muslims as criminal, and that fear of this group was encouraged by the Police Department's administration.<sup>19</sup> During the trial, Malcolm X visited Los Angeles and told a crowd that he was impatient that eight years had passed and the *Brown* decision had only been extended to about 8 percent of the nation's schools; offering his interpretation of events at the mosque, Malcolm X continued, "we are brutalized because we are black people in America."<sup>20</sup> In response to the violence at the Broadway mosque, the United States Commission on Civil Rights offered a community forum, the first federal response to a complaint against the LAPD. The chairman of CORE, James Farmer, responded to the violence indicating that "CORE stood shoulder-to-shoulder with the NAACP and other human rights organizations 'in condemnation of such police brutality'."<sup>21</sup> Local CORE leader Earl Walter saw the

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<sup>17</sup> For a full analysis of this event, see Frederick Knight, "Justifiable Homicide, Police Brutality, or Governmental Repression? The 1962 Los Angeles Police Shooting of Seven Members of the Nation of Islam," *The Journal of Negro History* 79.2 (March 1994), 182-196.

<sup>18</sup> "Muslims Deny Guilt, Ask for a Jury Trial," *California Eagle*, February 7, 1963, 1.

<sup>19</sup> Sides, *L.A City Limits*, 174; Knight, "Justifiable Homicide," 186.

<sup>20</sup> "Police Shootout at Mosque," *California Eagle*, May 30, 1963, 1, 4.

<sup>21</sup> Knight, "Justifiable Homicide," 192.

struggle against police brutality as a means to integrate struggles in the local black community. However, because of a cleavage within the black community led by conservative black ministers who distanced themselves from Muslims in exchange for political patronage from the mayor, Walter was unable to establish a unified front against police misconduct.<sup>22</sup>

Instead, CORE took its fight against segregation to the new tract developments in South Los Angeles, specifically, the Don Wilson housing tract in Dominguez Hills. In November 1962, eighty-five people, many of them students, participated in a “dwell-in” and “dwell-out” demonstration on the site of the building tract. CORE had been alerted to the developer’s racist market practices when one of Wilson’s salesmen bragged to a white CORE member that no public FHA-VA financing was available for the new homes in order “to keep the niggers and Mexicans out.”<sup>23</sup> Throughout the fall of 1962, CORE members successfully harangued potential buyers of the Don Wilson tract and in February 1963, Wilson sued for damages but lost in court. Following President Kennedy’s suggestion to youth to attempt a 50-mile hike, twenty CORE members, including high school student and chairman of San Fernando Valley CORE Marc Pally, trekked for two days from the Pacoima Playground to the Don Wilson tracks in Dominguez Hills. The spatial politics of this march were significant; the trek began at the black outpost in the San Fernando Valley and crossed through many Los Angeles communities that were actively closed to nonwhites.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> “Core, 85 Persons, Sued by Tract Builder,” *California Eagle*, February 7, 1963, 3.

<sup>24</sup> “50-Mile Walk Completed by CORE Marchers,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, March 21, 1963, A11.

The media coverage generated by housing activism across California pushed the administration of Governor Pat Brown to act. On February 14, 1963, Brown began to lobby for the passage of the Rumford Fair Housing Act—a law that protected California renters and buyers from racial discrimination. Governor Brown reported that the fair housing ordinance could serve to find the “end of the racial nightmare” in California. On the heels of the announcement of the Rumford Act, on February 20, CORE students demonstrated outside of the Statler-Hilton Hotel for an end to real estate sponsored segregation during a meeting of the Los Angeles Realty Board attended by over 900 members. The students urged the Board to “make a public declaration in support of the letter and spirit of California’s housing laws,” admit minority members to the Board, and halt the practice of threatening and blackballing realtors who would sell homes to nonwhite families.<sup>25</sup>

After the passage of Rumford, and in response to events in the South, the civil rights activism in Los Angeles gained further momentum. On May 26, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke to 40,000 gathered at Wrigley Field—a minor league baseball stadium in Hollywood—to support the victims of Birmingham’s misrule. Activists and celebrities at the event included Reverend Ralph Abernathy and entertainers Dick Gregory, Sammy Davis Jr., Joanne Woodward and Paul Newman. The cross collaboration of activists and popular members of the entertainment industry seemed to suggest the possibilities of internalizing civil rights within the popular culture of the period; on March 25, the first black television station, KIIX, debuted in Los Angeles. Furthermore, successful local voter registration drives showed results in citywide

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<sup>25</sup> “Pickets Ring Statler in Realty Row,” *California Eagle*, February 21, 1963.

elections in 1963. Before the election, the council appointed Gilbert Lindsey to fill the vacated Ninth district seat and then Tom Bradley and Billy G. Mills won council races in the Tenth and Eight districts respectively. At the beginning of the year, Stanley Saunders also became the first black from west of the Mississippi to receive a Rhodes Scholarship.<sup>26</sup>

On June 24, 1963, over a thousand civil right demonstrators trekked from First African Episcopal Church, through the heart of downtown Los Angeles, and finally to the Los Angeles Board of Education. Reverend Maurice Dawkins told the press that the demonstration signaled the need for “total community integration,” and although the marchers met a contingent of white anti-integrationist counter-protestors, the event remained nonviolent. Four days later, nearly a thousand members of NAACP and affiliated civil rights organizations marched toward the boundaries of Torrance, California into a “lily white” housing tract. The marchers met 350 white men women and teenagers massed at the entrance of the tract.<sup>27</sup> A blockade of the tract by the assembled white neighbors was briefly attempted, but the blockade eventually dissipated and the march continued. Thirty-five white teenagers instigated minor flurries and staged a counter-demonstration with signs that read “Committee Against Integration and Intermarriage.” A week later it was discovered that the city of Torrance had hired 25-year-old Roger Jacobson to spy on the NAACP march. For the event Jacobson was “dressed as a carefree, young surf rider, in shorts and a loose-fitting T-shirt, with long blond hair swept back from his face.” Jacobson’s primary role at the march was to

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<sup>26</sup> “First Black to Receive Rhodes From West,” *California Eagle*, February 7, 1963, 1.

<sup>27</sup> Grace Simons, “1000 Tell Torrance Integration’s Coming,” *California Eagle*, July 4, 1963.

encourage counter-demonstrators.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the open racism experienced in the southern civil rights movement, Jacobson's activity suggests the ways that local governments in Southern California and their police forces secretly campaigned against integration and also instigated local white youth to "spontaneously" organize counter-demonstrations.

Although the Kennedy Administration was advancing programs to fight delinquency, Los Angeles County's Group Guidance, a program that brought trained social workers into contact with gang members, began to withdraw its services from gang intervention projects. Often gang workers were at odds with law enforcement, and Police Chief Parker characterized the gang workers as "hoodlum preachers."<sup>29</sup> However, the change in funding was predicated on research that showed that the gang worker interventions often increased gang coherence. This change of policy is significant; in the 1950s, social workers sought to encourage positive group identification through the transformation of gangs into democratic youth groups that would foster citizenship. By the early 1960s, this policy was reversed and workers sought to disaggregate youth groups and isolate individual members in order to break gangs apart.<sup>30</sup> After the announcement of the program reduction, the Rebel Rousers Social Club, at once a gang and activity club, and the County Federation of Parents Club participated in the protest of the suspension of Group Guidance at the Hall of Administration.<sup>31</sup> Foreshadowing grassroots welfare activism of the late 1960s, withdrawal of funding for gang programs led to a coalition of community members and gang participants that demanded an

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<sup>28</sup> "Armed Police Snooper held for Robbery," *California Eagle*, July 11, 1961, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Borden Olive interview.

<sup>30</sup> Malcolm Klein interview by author, August 20, 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Robert Farrell, "Gang Wants to Keep Sponsorship Plan; Parents Aid Pickets," *California Eagle*, April 4, 1963, 1.

expansion of youth services. Unfortunately, only after the Watts Uprising would the program be fully reinstated and moved from the Probation Department to the Human Relations Commission; it was found that without gang workers, the county administration had no information about the everyday conditions of juveniles on the street.

Although unified civil rights organizations were able to advance the case of fair housing, the struggle for school integration continued to produce limited results. After *Jackson v. Pasadena*, in which the California Supreme Court found that school boards had an obligation to take positive action in eliminating racial segregation, the Los Angeles School Board introduced a modest plan to allow five black students to integrate the underenrolled and white South Gate High School.<sup>32</sup> Additionally, although interracial progress and the assimilation of the black community continued apace, each success in housing reform was accompanied by threats, violence and harassment. In the first month of 1963, two police officers assaulted rock ‘n’ roll-singer Little Richard Penniman at a MTA, bus station, and four white youth threw a teargas grenade into a Knights of Columbus meeting at the interracial St. Albert Church in Compton.<sup>33</sup>

On July 19, 1963, the police beat 24-year-old black male Henry Kincey in front of his home. Kincey’s white wife Marcia had called the police to report that her husband was drunk. In taking Henry to the car, a scuffle ensued and the police began beating and choking Kincey with nightsticks. As the beating continued a crowd gathered around the scene and began heckling the police officers. Worried about a riot, a neighbor called the

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<sup>32</sup> “Five to Integrate South Gate,” *California Eagle*, July 8, 1963, 1.

<sup>33</sup> “Hurl Bomb at Church ‘For Kicks’”, *California Eagle*, January 31, 1963, 3; “Morals Case Preacher Says Police Beat Him,” *California Eagle*, January 31, 1963, 3. In a similar case four white youth were caught firing darts at black youth on Western Avenue and received 3 years of probation. These four young men were also required to take a class on black history and attain a ‘C’ average. “White Youth Learn History - and Manners,” *California Eagle*, March 21, 1963, 1, 4.

police and their first response was, “well maybe he deserved a whipping.” Three minutes after his second call over 20 squad cars and motorcycles arrived at the scene.<sup>34</sup> Two years later a similar incident of police brutality would spark the Watts Uprising.

### **Keeping Up Good Appearances: Suppression of Local Activism**

During the summer of 1963, the Los Angeles City Schools prepared for an incoming student population of 745, 000 students.<sup>35</sup> On July 18, the Board of Education voted down a proposal to effect immediate integration by assigning a group of tenth grade students from three black schools to three white schools.<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1960s, both the city and county were seeking remedies to education budget shortfalls. At the beginning of the school year the School Board announced that many elementary students would be placed on half-day schedules. Moreover, restrictions on the district’s budget as a result of the failure of a school bond in 1962 led to a cessation of school construction and facility development. Without additional classrooms, schools were faced with the increasing problem of overcrowding. Responding to the controversy over *de facto* segregation, the Los Angeles School Board and officials offered a permit policy that allowed students to transfer from one school to another. Transfers were allowed according to Superintendent Jack P. Crowther, “as long as space is available” and parents assume the responsibility of transporting their child to the new school. However, this program failed to guarantee access and in the beginning of the school year under-enrolled South Gate High School, which had initially advertised fifty

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<sup>34</sup> “Neighbors Protest Beating by Police,” *California Eagle*, July 25, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> “745,000 Going Back to School,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1963, G1.

<sup>36</sup> Only School Board Members Mary Tinglof and Ralph Richardson supported immediate integration.

openings, rejected all thirty black students from Fremont and Jordan high schools who had applied for a transfer. In response to this stalemate over integration, Nathaniel Colley, of the State Board of Education, replied that he could take people to schools “in Oakland and Los Angeles where you can’t find a white child even if you look under the chairs.”<sup>37</sup>

Challenging the slow pace of the School Board’s integration policies, CORE proposed a school walkout in September to highlight the segregation of Los Angeles City Schools. A “study-in” was proposed, a strategy in which students would leave schools they were assigned and attend classes in under-enrolled white schools. Although, Jordan High School was 99 percent black and South Gate High School was 97 percent white, the majority of the School Board claimed *de facto* segregation as the cause of segregation and beyond its power to remedy, including the proper enforcement of the transfer policy.

Inspired by the March on Washington, on August 29, 1963, over 3,000 Angelinos marched through downtown from Olympic and Broadway to the Civic Center. The march was the culmination of Freedom Day in Los Angeles and small demonstrations including sit-ins occurred throughout Los Angeles County’s municipal and federal buildings. At the end of the march over 5,000 individuals collected to hear speeches by local activists. Mayor Yorty did not address the marchers but sent his assistant Frank P. O’Sullivan. During O’Sullivan’s speech the crowd began to demand the end of police brutality and chanted “Fire Parker.” O’Sullivan avoided responding to the charges of police brutality by changing the subject. O’Sullivan asked, “why do we spend \$2.5 billion to support a

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<sup>37</sup> “Colley Calls School Bias ‘Serious’” *California Eagle*, March 7, 1963, 3.

regime in South Vietnam and cannot spend a few billion to eliminate disease, chronic unemployment, school dropouts and inadequate housing at home.”<sup>38</sup>

During meetings in August, CORE’s school boycott plans were reduced and instead members sought the approval to stage a walkout at Jordan High School. However, the chairman of the County Human Relations Commission, John Buggs, played an important role in moderating CORE’s walkout plan in favor of a wait and see approach toward the actions of the school board; Buggs calculated that if the students withdrew their plan to walk out, the Board would consider stepping up integration plans. This was a miscalculation on Buggs’s part because the chair of the board, Mrs. Georgiana Hardy, personally doubted students would really stage a walkout because “because they have a good football team and wouldn’t want to lose practice sessions.”<sup>39</sup>

Nonetheless, students were far from inactive, and on August 15th between 350 and 400 students demonstrating against *de facto* segregation marched with Martin Luther King Jr. and James Farmer from Wrigley Field to the Board of Education downtown. Concurrently, eight CORE demonstrators staged a hunger strike at the Board of Education office in which three demonstrators lasted two weeks. Forty-nine-year-old Martin Goldsmith, brother in-law to Anthony Quinn, staged the fast with two twenty-year-old students. Attempting to invoke the policy of age segregation, Chief Parker responded to the fast and school activism by trying to convince the District Attorney that CORE was conspiring to contribute to the delinquency of minors, a felony offense. E.L White, chairman of CORE, responded to Parker’s claims: “The marchers are not now and

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<sup>38</sup> Paul Weeks, “L.A. Has Its Largest March for Civil Rights,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1963, 2.

<sup>39</sup> “Jordan School Strike Plan Meets Opposition,” *Los Angeles Times* September 5, 1963, 10.

will not become school dropouts, criminals and the like because they have found something positive and creative to believe in and use their energy for.”<sup>40</sup> Although the DA rejected Parker’s strategy, the effort highlighted the police chief’s dismissal of the goals of the civil rights movement. The city authorities smugly characterized civil rights demonstrators as “false prophets” who “failed to consider that many conditions which contributed to chaos in other parts of the county did not exist in Los Angeles.”<sup>41</sup> Publicly, Parker doubted that Los Angeles would become “part of the battleground of the racial conflict,” because “the city was 10 years ahead” of the other cities in the nation in assimilating blacks.<sup>42</sup>

During the 1963 and 1964 school year, students in Boston, Chicago and New York boycotted classes to express dissatisfaction with the slow pace of integration. In the first days of February 1964, a demonstration initiated by Bayard Rustin organized nearly a half million students to boycott class in New York City out of a total school population of a million. In response, New York City School board President James B. Donovan argued, “this silly boycott didn’t accomplish anything. Let a child know he can stay out of school all day with parental consent, and sure, he’ll not show up.”<sup>43</sup> Very effective in generating media coverage, citywide boycotts had an immediate effect in bringing public attention to the problems of inner-city students; in New York, students were invited before the school board to discuss problems within the school system. Nonetheless, Los

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<sup>40</sup> “Ruling on Delinquency Asked in Bias March,” *Los Angeles Times*, September 21, 1963, 20.

<sup>41</sup> Los Angeles Mayor’s Office, “Your City at Work,” Los Angeles City Yearbook, 1964, 20.

<sup>42</sup> Malcolm Klein interview.

<sup>43</sup> “Civil Rights: 464,362 Boycott N.Y. Schools,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 9, 1964, 15.

Angeles remained quiet and the school board promoted the limited transfer of students from Jordan High School to Westchester Schools as a token success.

Faced with increasing mobilization of poor communities across the nation and a poverty level close to 20 percent, the Johnson Administration announced the War on Poverty during the President's State of the Union Address on January 8, 1964. On May 22, 1964, Johnson clarified his vision of the Great Society as one in which people would be mobilized to find answers for their communities and nation. On August 20, 1964, Johnson signed the Economic Opportunity Act that established the Office of Economic Opportunity led by Sergeant Shriver. The EOA was the cornerstone of the War on Poverty and the bulk of its programs were directed toward young people. Initially federal funds were issued to the Youth Opportunities Board of Greater Los Angeles, organized to distribute grants from President John F. Kennedy's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime.<sup>44</sup>

While Los Angeles's civil rights community failed to organize school boycotts in 1963, the fight against Proposition 14, the repeal of the Rumford Act, offered many young Angelinos their first taste of grassroots political work. Proposition 14 was sponsored by the California Association of Realtors, who argued that the Rumford Act allowed the state to interfere with private business affairs. Proposition 14 proposed to amend the California constitution so that the state could not "limit or abridge" the "absolute discretion" of property owners to sell or lease to whomever they choose.

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<sup>44</sup> "History of the Youth Opportunities Board of Greater Los Angeles," Youth Opportunities Board File, 20C-SCLSSR.

Proposition 14 was initially sponsored by the John Birch Society, California Republican Assembly and an array of groups promoting racial segregation.<sup>45</sup>

Youth Against Proposition 14, a statewide youth organization, mobilized students at UCLA and USC to volunteer for a door-to-door voter education campaign to defeat the proposition. In the first three weeks of August, volunteers from Californians Against Proposition 14 registered over 10,000 black voters in South Los Angeles.<sup>46</sup> The local leader of CAP14, Walter Hyman optimistically predicted that volunteers could register enough voters to “offset the crude vote from Orange County” and then “even up the election in Southern California.”

Although the fight against Proposition 14 had indeed enfranchised new voters, Hyman’s optimism was misplaced and Proposition 14 passed with almost a two-thirds majority in the Californian elections. In response to the repeal of the Rumford Housing Act, an event that many predicted would increase racial tensions in the city, the City Council began debating the need for a Human Relations Bureau. Alex Mann thought the \$60,000 annual cost low compared to the “\$1 million damage in New York City because of racial unrest.”<sup>47</sup> Governor Brown’s “end to the racial nightmare in California” was short lived, and in Los Angeles the City Council also found it unnecessary to prepare for the effects of continuing segregation.

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<sup>45</sup> “No on 14 Battle Booms,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, September, 10, 1964, 1.

<sup>46</sup> Jim Blanchfield, “An Evaluation: Ghetto Vote Drive,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, August 20, 1964, 1.

<sup>47</sup> “Human Relations Vote Postponed by Council,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 26, 1.

## **Young People as Social Dynamite**

The incident that caused it was pushing this kid in the Street and his mama got involved and all that, but what the underlying thing was, all this creativity in Watts with no area of expression.<sup>48</sup>

On the hot summer night of August 11, 1965, California Highway Patrol officer Lee Minikus stopped Marquette Frye on the pretext that Frye appeared to be driving erratically. Halted just blocks from the Frye family home, Marquette's mother Rena became involved in the negotiation over her son's arrest and the disposition of the family car. During the negotiation, a struggle ensued and Marquette, Rena and brother Ronald were arrested. As a consequence of the rough treatment of the family, the crowd that gathered began to protest the police officers' methods. As the officers left, a few of those gathered began throwing rocks and bricks at the departing police cars. So began the Watts Uprising.

The word of the arrest spread across the community. The Los Angeles Police Department's response to the events on the evening of the 11th was to retreat from the area of the incident and allow things to cool off. As police authority retreated, organized youth took over the streets. In the beginning, young people played the important role of carrying the news and rumor of the Frye arrest from corner to corner.<sup>49</sup>

Reflecting on the summer of the Uprising, Sonora McKeller described the season as one in which a large number of underemployed black youth from around the region had gathered in Watts. Although its youth population had increased, additional spaces and services for its young people never materialized; private investments failed to

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Dedeaux, Interview with Watts Prophets by Val Zavala, KCET, August 11, 2005.

<sup>49</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

develop new commercial enterprises and employment opportunities, and there was little support for expanding public services and recreational spaces for Watts's youth population. Within this atmosphere of neglect, the street became the primary site of socialization for young blacks. Lacking jobs, welfare, and civic opportunities, many young black Angelinos had the responsibility of negotiating with local shop owners over prices of daily consumer items; many believed that shop owners exploited racial containment and the lack of competing commercial ventures by offering inferior goods at higher than market prices.<sup>50</sup> Within these daily interactions a climate of distrust developed between young consumers and local retailers.<sup>51</sup> One black youth called the merchants' practice "their hustle" and explained "they would charge you \$20 for a pair of shoes. You can go to Huntington Park [a white suburb] or anywhere else and get it for \$8.01 or so."<sup>52</sup>

During the Uprising, these disaffiliated youngsters became social bandits. After looting stores they drove the neighborhoods "without loud speakers, voices shouted, 'Come and get it! It's all yours!' Over and over the cars made this run and repeated the call."<sup>53</sup> One teenager, initially reluctant to participate, decided to because he "never owned a suit in my life and this excited me. And when I got there [103rd St], everybody was running with stuff, tape recorders, and record players; people were—even little

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>51</sup> Historian Josh Sides writes of the mistrust of merchandisers and directs us to Loren Miller's quote, "The disadvantaged buyer is in no position to reject shoddy merchandise or haggle over prices. He must take what he can get and pay what he is asked." From U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, *Hearings Held in Los Angeles and San Francisco, January 25-28, 1960* (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1960), 261.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Bullock, *Watts: The Aftermath* (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1969), 48.

<sup>53</sup> Sonora McKeller, "Out of my Window," *Antioch Review* 27.3 (Fall 1967), 346.

kids—pushing washing machines down the street.”<sup>54</sup> Within the timeframe of the Uprising, the normal order of authority was reversed and young people began stopping passing cars and harassing drivers. Surveying the riot scene, County Supervisor Kenneth Hahn’s car was stoned and he sustained a minor head injury.<sup>55</sup>

In the next day’s papers, journalists characterized the situation in Watts as a “New Negro Riot.” Between the lines, however, easy characterization as a race riot told only half the story. One confused but thoughtful officer commented to a *New York Times* reporter, “It’s a race riot and yet it isn’t.”<sup>56</sup> Although contemporary reports contained numerous suggestions that the riot was manned and coordinated by rioting black youth, race and not age became the primary means to understand the riot.

On August 12, the attacks on cars continued and by the time a curfew was imposed on Watts and the surrounding area, local residents had begun to burn stores around East 103rd Street. In this moment, the initial breakdown in the relationship between residents and the police transformed the activity into one of the many consumer insurrections that occurred in this period. On August 13, at 5:05 p.m., the National Guard was activated to pacify Watts and over two thousand Guardsmen arrived just after 9 p.m. At its peak, 13, 393 well-armed Guardsmen were mobilized to re-establish order in South Los Angeles.

The Watts Uprising represented the failure of city planners and policy makers to understand the mass effect of the containment of a poor and black population within the

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<sup>54</sup> Bullock, *Watts*, 41.

<sup>55</sup> Phil Pennington, “Edited Typescript of Pennington’s Testimony Regarding Wednesday Night August 11 and Thursday Morning August 12, 1965,” Box 317.1, Watts Riots Events, Kenneth Hahn Collection, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA [hereinafter KH-Hunington].

<sup>56</sup> Peter Barts, “New Negro Riots Erupt on Coast; 3 Reported Shot,” *New York Times*, August 13, 1965, 1.

city. As the scale of this containment increased in the 1950s, promoters of Los Angeles's real estate erroneously endorsed the idea that lower density tracks and single-family homes provided a design remedy to urban street demonstrations. However, the Human Relations Commission's report argued that the neighborhoods of Watts was deceptive in that many of the single-family homes were rental properties in poor repair.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, although authorities as politically divergent as James Conant and John Buggs predicted unrest and riot as the outcome of the concentration of an under-employed black youth population, city leaders neglected and callously disregarded the Commission's warnings and failed to address real solutions. Public services for blacks Angelinos continued to deteriorate in South Central Los Angeles as the community became increasingly racial homogenous. Furthermore, only fourteen percent of Watts's families owned cars compared to fifty percent ownership in the rest of Los Angeles County.<sup>58</sup> This factor combined with the lack of bussing increased community isolation for the residents of Watts. City leaders did not create ample employment and/or opportunities for civil engagement that could have engendered a greater sense of civic partnership for the poor black youth of Watts. As a result and by default, many young people in South Central L.A. challenged the inequities inherent within the city's social geography by attempting to take control of their own streets, neighborhoods and community.

In Watts, containment allowed neighborhoods to establish countercultural orders and in many tracts, young people were the overwhelming majority and out of necessity

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<sup>57</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the information from the next two paragraphs are from, *Population and Housing in Los Angeles County*, LACHRCA

<sup>58</sup> John F. Kain, "The Spatial Mismatch Hypothesis: Three Decades Later," *Housing Policy Debate* 3.2: 373.

developed their own methods of social control. The Watts youth population, figured here as nineteen and under, increased from 41 percent to 53 percent between 1950 and 1960. According to the Human Relations Commission research, the population of the Jordon Heights tract was 75 percent nineteen and under, and after the Watts Uprising the young people in this community became the acknowledged protectors of the community good. Jordan Heights was located on the east side of Watts, and its population was poorer than the black neighborhoods to the west; Freemont High School, on the Westside, was for the black middle class, while, Jordan High School, to the east, was for working-class students.<sup>59</sup>

While metropolitan leaders failed to provide any remedy to the conditions of poverty in Watts, the federal government and local community agencies began to support new social service strategies to impoverished urban communities. Following on the heels of the EYOA, Congress passed the Elementary and Secondary School Act (ESSA) on April 9, 1965. Drafted by the Commissioner of Education Francis Keller, the act was formulated as to redress the effects of *de facto* segregation in that it recognized that children of low-income neighborhoods required greater educational services than those of affluent communities. A billion dollars was allocated to schools with a high concentration of funds earmarked for low-income children. Head Start, Follow Through, Bilingual education, guidance and counseling programs were all program initiatives of the ESSA. President Johnson's education policy was a shift from general aid to a program that tied funding to national policy concerns such as the war on poverty, national defense and/or

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<sup>59</sup> John Meigs interview by author, August 6, 2008.

economic growth.<sup>60</sup> The funds also organized a great increase in state and local bureaucracy and although the city of Los Angeles became major recipient of these funds, by mid-summer 1965, local residents had not seen the benefits of the federal largesse because the distribution mechanism were still being put into place.

Concurrent with the War on Poverty and new education initiatives and research, local labor activists and their unions began to support community programs in Los Angeles County. Started in the early 1965, the Watts Labor Community Action Committee began with a staff of five people and a budget of five dollars. Initially, the WLCAC sought to beautify the Watts community and provide job counseling to residents. Nonetheless, like the War on Poverty programs and the ESSA, the scope of the WLCAC program was limited in the summer of 1965. The Watts Uprising in August immediately enhanced the scope, character and delivery of both labor and governmental programs.<sup>61</sup>

In response to the first night of the Uprising, the Los Angeles County Human Relations Commission decided to hold a town meeting with members of the Watts community, the police and government officials. Parker refused to attend the meeting citing that he would not negotiate with “hoodlums.”<sup>62</sup> Although the meeting remained peaceful, the youth represented took the stage and in a moment of passion spoke of how after Watts the world would know the suffering of black youth in Los Angeles. Within a culture that both denied and hid the cultural expression and experience of young black Angelinos, the youth representative was captured uttering one sound bite, “Burn, Baby!

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<sup>60</sup> Elementary and Secondary School Act, (Pub.L. 89-10, 79 Stat. 27, 20 U.S.C. ch.70, April 11, 1965).

<sup>61</sup> “Watts Labor Community Action Committee,” Watts Vertical File, History And Genealogy Department, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, California.

<sup>62</sup> Borden Olive interview.

Burn!”<sup>63</sup> Although “Burn, Baby! Burn!” was the catch phrase of popular Los Angeles DJ the Magnificent Montague, this memorable phrase revealed the worse fears of many white Angelinos, as it threatened race war and black militancy. Nonetheless, young black anger was turned upon the Watts community and shops along Central Avenue became targets. Federal programs to the black community after Watts clearly sought to address this situation by promoting programs that offered educational services to black youth and thereby made them clients of the state.

In response to the Uprising, President Johnson sent a special envoy to Los Angeles to coordinate relief efforts. After Watts, Los Angeles’s federal funds were directed through the Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency of Greater Los Angeles. The Watts Uprising transformed the local EYOA and made Los Angeles a site of national concern and a pet project of the Johnson administration. The Uprising increased federal funding to Los Angeles and stimulated the formation of a federal task force to study poverty in Los Angeles. Inheriting the goals of Kennedy’s delinquency agenda, youth enrollment and success in government programs became the baseline litmus test of the War on Poverty.

Like the changes in federal funding and interest in Los Angeles, in the years following the uprising community organizing also matured. The staff of the WLCAC expanded to 120 members, operated a poultry ranch, a Federal credit union, two service stations and grocery store. The WLCAC received funds from the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and federal government. A core component of the WLCAC mission was to provide projects for young people. These included the Neighborhood

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<sup>63</sup> Nathaniel Montague and Bob Baker, *Burn, Baby! Burn!: The Autobiography of Magnificent Montague* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

Youth Corps programs, a job recruiting office for teenagers, the Community Elite Corps (CEC), a summer art program and the Community Cadet Corps (CCC). The CCC was a youth organization that served hundreds of children 7 to 13 and offered remedial education, tutoring, work experience, and recreation. The CEC was comprised of boys 16 to 17 years old. The uniformed CEC helped build pocket parks, plant trees along the streets, paint and renovate buildings, and provided security at community events. According to Watkins these programs were essential because “We aren’t dealing with kids out of work, but out of society...”<sup>64</sup> On land once worked by firefighting youth a generation earlier, the WLCAC opened an Urban Residential Educational Center, a large vocational school with a farm, on 581 acres in Saugus, California.

Local community activists also tapped into post-Watts Uprising funding for programs that allowed for the experimental integration of young people into community organizations. Social worker Billy Tidwell recognized this opportunity and organized the Sons of Watts Improvement Association. The SWIA was an outgrowth of the Watts Summer Festival. The security for Festival was to be run by the Community Alert Patrol, but they had insufficient members. Approached by the CAP and Tidwell, young men at the notorious parking lot at Jordan Downs Housing Project agreed to provide security. Ninety youth referred to as “The sons of the stronghold” and the “parking lotters” became the core of the SWIA. The majority of this group admitted to being part of the “hard-core” group that had perpetrated the Uprising. Given the responsibility to provide security at the festival the group performed admirably and the festival went without incident. Afterwards, local business interests validated the group’s performance at the

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<sup>64</sup> “Watts Labor Community Action Committee,” Watts Vertical File, LAPL.

festival and they were encouraged to incorporate, and soon they had formed a viable organizational structure including a president, a secretary, a treasurer, and a number of committees.<sup>65</sup>

As caretakers of their community, the SWIA proposed to provide neighborhood security, engage in community cleaning programs, erect traffic signs to protect children playing in unsafe areas, and install lighting in the community to begin what was characterized as a “festival of lights.” In addition, the SWIA sought to improve the lives of neighborhood youth, provide assistance as crossing guards, and provide counseling for delinquent youth and potential dropouts. Regarding the latter program, Tidwell explained that the SWIA would provide superior counseling to local youth because “they have been revered and identified with by these youngsters.” The integration of the “parking lotters” to a mainstream organization provided Tidwell with the evidence to argue, “It cannot be over-emphasized that the members of SWIA were previously classified as ‘unreachables.’ It is obvious now that such a classification was unjustified, the fact is that they had never been afforded substantive, meaningful opportunities to act responsibly.” Tidwell continued, “A vast pool of leadership abilities and organizational skills can now be tapped.”<sup>66</sup>

The leadership skills Tidwell recognized were honed in the organizational structures of youth gangs. The corporate form of these gangs introduced working-class, black and Latino youth to organizational structure, goal setting and community meetings. As Tidwell recognized, these groups needed to be synchronized to the community good

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<sup>65</sup> Douglas G. Glasgow, “The Sons of Watts Improvement Association. ‘The Sons of Watts’: Analysis of Mobility Aspirations and Life-styles in the Aftermath of the Watts Riot, 1965,” (D.S.W. Thesis, University of Southern California, 1968).

<sup>66</sup> Billy J. Tidwell, “Who is it? What is it? What will it do?” 8, Watts File, SUB-SCLSSR.

rather than the black market of the city, the underbelly of growth liberalism and/or the commercial orientation of middle-class youth culture. The Young People of Watts served as a second example of how young people desired to better their community. It was organized by youth and with very little funding opened a lawnmower repair-shop that generated enough funds to sustain the organization. Unlike the SWIA, YPW was interracial and consisted of both blacks and Latinos and promoted labor and community service as tools for self-improvement. The formation of the SWIA and YPW was part of the long trajectory of the Watts Uprising and young people's public display of political identity through group work to reclaim their community.<sup>67</sup>

The citizens of South Central Los Angeles also participated in the development of new cultural spaces for young people. Jimmie Sherman described his difficulties finding work in his early 20s and he found himself sliding into an ambitionless world of pool halls and panhandling. Nonetheless, after the Uprising, Sherman found an outlet in his writing and a newspaper job with the *Watts Star Review*. With a newfound conviction of contributing to his community, Sherman helped organize the Watts Business and Professional Association, Watts Happening Coffee House, which later became The Mafundi Institute art-center, and his own theater group, The Theatre of Watts.<sup>68</sup>

The desire for community spaces and organizations can be seen in the history of the Watts Writers Workshop. After the riot, established screenwriter Budd Schulberg, writer of *On the Waterfront*, opened the non-profit workshop. In the course of a couple of years, the Workshop helped develop artists such as Ojenke, Johnny Scott, Jimmie

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<sup>67</sup> "Young People of Watts," Young People of Watts Organization Papers, CSWA-USC.

<sup>68</sup> Jimmie Sherman, "From the Ashes—A Personal Reaction to the Revolt of Watts," *Antioch Review* 27.3 (Fall 1967), 285.

Sherman, Quincy Troupe, and Sonora McKeller. The Workshop also became the meeting grounds for a performance poetry group known as the Watts Prophets. The rap/spoken-word style of the Watts Prophets trio, Amde Hamilton, Otis O'Soloman and Richard Anthonus Dedeaux, provided a new cultural vehicle for the black people of Watts to express the contours of racism and the resultant suffering of their community. Moreover, in the late 1960s, the Watts Prophets toured the independent coffeehouse scene and spread their message to middle-class white youth who often had no personal experience of the structural conditions of racism or poverty; their first album in 1971 was titled, "Rappin' Black to a White World."<sup>69</sup>

### **Uneven Urban Development, Policing and A Youth Public**

When I referred to Venice, Calif., as slum by the sea, in my book, 'The Holy Barbarians' (affectionately since slums have always been the refuge of the artist and the disaffiliate), the Venice Civic Union, a camorra of patrioteers, Fundamentalists and assorted realestateniks, summoned me to appear before them and show cause why I should not be ostracized from their neighborly love for the crime of libeling their slumlord paradise.<sup>70</sup>

The paradoxical outcome of increasingly *laissez-faire* market centered youth policy was that unrestrained by regulations, sub-cultural markets promoted an alternative public for middle-class and white Angelinos. Suburban development had left in its wake less than desirable retail properties that became economically viable for coffeehouses and other non-corporate youth oriented spaces. Along Hollywood and Sunset Boulevards, as a consequence of new suburban competition, retail rents remained static or decreased

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<sup>69</sup> Amde Hamilton, "The State of Art in Watts," August 15, 1998, <http://www.forests.com/caaghist.html> (accessed January 9, 2009).

<sup>70</sup> Lawrence Lipton, "The Wasp," *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 24, 1964, 2.

during the 1950s.<sup>71</sup> These factors also contributed to the consolidation of a thriving gallery scene on La Cienega Boulevard—coffeehouses and their ilk became legitimated as entrances to LA’s growing pop art scene.<sup>72</sup> With low overhead, no licenses, and small operating costs, new commercial and often community-operated establishments offered an alternative to the strictly for profit ordering of Los Angeles youth spaces.

By 1960, Venice, California, Albert Kinney’s Coney Island of the West, was ripe for a cycle of property redevelopment, and a new artistic community arose in the decaying structures of the early 20th century beach playground. Author Lawrence Lipton recognized the potential of Venice, in particular how Venice became a destination for those seeking an alternative to the cultural norms of the period. Invoking a conflict within American civilization that opposed middle-class norms with participants of the Beat movement, his book, the *Holy Barbarians*, insinuated that, "when the barbarians appear on the frontier of a civilization it is a sign of a crisis in that civilization. If the barbarians come, not with weapons of war but with songs and ikons of peace, it is a sign that the crisis is one of a spiritual nature."<sup>73</sup> The frontier of the direct manifestation of American civilization, the suburban landscape of Los Angeles, Venice, and to a lesser extent Hollywood and the beach canyons, became places that sheltered artists and activists. As artistic places that encouraged community participation, these cultural borderlands also expanded the public sphere for young Angelinos.

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<sup>71</sup> As a first ring suburb dealing with increasing competition, North Hollywood’s business district property values decreased from \$4 a sq. ft. in 1956 to \$2 a sq. ft. in 1960. See “Commission Approves North Hollywood Plan,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 30, 1963, A8. The rent of Sunset retail rent was based on the authors’ survey of 25 classified ads in the *Los Angeles Times* with Sunset Strip addresses.

<sup>72</sup> Whiting, *Pop LA*.

<sup>73</sup> Lawrence Lipton, *The Holy Barbarians* (New York: Julian Messner, Inc., 1959). For a discussion of the development of the art scene in Venice, CA, see John Arthur Maynard, *Venice West: The Beat Generation in Southern California* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

From Venice to Hollywood, coffee houses and countercultural boutiques became community centers for Lipton's "holy barbarians." These spaces elevated discourses of freedom of expression, authenticity and search for truth. Lipton and an older generation of artists acted as defenders of these establishments from the profit driven urges of redevelopers looking to replace these alternative cultural spaces with beach apartment high-rises. While in earlier periods, many of these alternative spaces would have been closed because of concerns of public morality, by the late 1950s, the private market's pre-eminence in ordering the culture of young people through rituals of consumption trumped local anti-bohemian measures. Business interests in dialogue with the City Council, the Mayor's office and County Board of Supervisors promoted commercial youth spaces that quietly allowed a range of establishments, from drive-ins, to drive-thrus, and amusement parks, to ignore or stretch the interpretation of youth control measures such as the curfew and age separation ordinances. Throughout the mid-century, the City Council and the Board of Supervisors had focused on dancehalls as a site of moral concern but as dancehalls became antiquated, new commercial establishments began to offer weekend alternatives.<sup>74</sup> For example, from 1948 to 1958, the state of California went from having 44 to 223 drive-in theaters.<sup>75</sup> A site of teenage sexual exploration, the drive-in provided cover and privacy for young people who had access to an automobile. Proprietors of these new commercial enterprises policed and regulated their establishments, and in

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<sup>74</sup> In 1956 the City Council ordered that all dances for teenagers within the city needed to be pre-approved by the Board of Education.

<sup>75</sup> Dennis Cozzalio, "Drive-In Movies: A Primer," [www.greencine.com/central/guide/driveinmovies](http://www.greencine.com/central/guide/driveinmovies) (accessed January 24, 2009).

return the state turned a blind eye to the abridgement of moral standards, curfew laws and loitering provisions.<sup>76</sup>

Beginning in the mid-1950s, small business owners began to open coffeehouses and within the dominant culture these establishments went largely unnoticed. However, the move of bohemians to Venice, and later the canyons north of Hollywood, led to a greater policing of this new breed of establishment. Combating “longhairs,” i.e., people whose political, sexual or moral practices clashed with middle-class standards, was a familiar terrain to Los Angeles City Police Chief William Parker.<sup>77</sup> In addition, federal and state money dedicated to ghetto clearance provided funds that allowed for the flattening of some of the buildings in which some of the initial coffeehouses were located. Lipton fought unsuccessfully against the demolition of artistic centers located at St. Mark’s Hotel and the Gas House in Venice. However, although federal funds enabled local development interests to clear out bohemians in a few cases, within the scope of Los Angeles’s urban development in which publicly sponsored redevelopment was a limited experiment within the dominate ethos of private suburban development, the city’s sprawling geography offered numerous offbeat sites for coffeehouses, clubs and alternative spaces. While the artistic community lost some of the first skirmishes in Venice, in the long run conservative leaders could not stem the tide of young artists and intellectuals moving to the community.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Kerry Segrave, *Drive-in Theaters: A History from Their Inception in 1933* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1992).

<sup>77</sup> Daniel Hurewitz , “Goody-Goodies, Sissies, and Long-Hairs: The Dangerous Figures in 1930s Los Angeles Political Culture,” *Journal of Urban History* 33.1 (2006); 26-50.

<sup>78</sup> For a social history of the city’s counterculture see, David McBride, “Death City Radicals: The Counterculture in Los Angeles,” in John McMillian and Paul Buhle, ed., *The New Left Revisited* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2003).

By the early 1960s, there were over 70 independent coffeehouses in Los Angeles.<sup>79</sup> Some provided structured entertainment, but the majority held spontaneous poetry readings, jam sessions and political discussions. These establishments, along with the emergent alternative media and countercultural boutiques, including book, clothing and record stores, expanded the range of community participation and public sphere for young people.

The Fifth Estate, open from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., was a refuge for young people in Hollywood.<sup>80</sup> Its owner, Al Mitchell provided very little structure for his patrons. According to Mitchell, “People come in here, and as long as they buy one item, they can stay all night. I won’t bug them. I believe a coffeehouse should be an extension of a university.” Located at 8226 Sunset Boulevard, the Fifth Estate had an art gallery, multiple chess tables and a large round table for group meetings. The Fifth Estate was not alone in offering post-curfew services to young people. Around the corner on Melrose Boulevard, The Coffee House offered astrology, juices, and sandwiches until 3 a.m.<sup>81</sup>

Journalist Harvey Siders found that compared to coffeehouses in Boston, which in his opinion were actually nightclubs for professional acts, at Los Angeles’s establishments, “the patrons would rather entertain than BE entertained. Which means that a great many customers bring their own guitars or banjos to the coffeehouses, and literally swap notes.” Coffeehouses provided a participatory environment and a haven for

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<sup>79</sup> Harvey Siders, “The LA Coffee House Scene,” *The Boston Globe*, August 28, 1964; Ed Pearl interview by author, August 15, 2007. Pearl remembered a map that showed the location of 72 coffeehouses in Los Angeles.

<sup>80</sup> Mike Davis claims that The Fifth Estate was “owned” by Robert Petersen, the publisher of *Hot Rod Magazine*. Mike Davis, “Riot Nights on Sunset Strip,” *In Praise of Barbarians: Essays Against Empire* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2007). If this claims turn out to be true, one can show that Petersen financed new subcultures/youth scenes through the co-optation of an older youth subculture.

<sup>81</sup> Siders, “The LA Coffee House Scene.” Information in the next paragraph is also from Siders.

young people from curfew and age segregating polices—the relaxing of laws to encourage a commercial youth culture also had the inverse effect of providing shelter to developing alternative cultures.

Similar to The Fifth Estate, Ed Pearl's Ashgrove sought to expand cultural offerings for Los Angeles youth. Open in 1958 as music venue that embraced the internationalist culture of the Old Left with performers such as Pete Seeger, by 1964, Pearl had transformed the Ashgrove into a school of American folk music. At the lip of the stage, young patrons sat directly underneath folk and blues musicians and learned techniques by watching the hands of masters. A teenage Ry Cooder came early each evening to the Ashgrove and reserved a place at the bar to absorb the music of folk masters from Appalachia and small Southern crossroads. According to Cooder, “it was if a magic conveyer belt was bringing musicians from all over the place to Los Angeles.”<sup>82</sup> In addition, the Ashgrove’s front room was an unstructured space that featured local art, and by the late 1960s it was a popular site for antiwar meetings.<sup>83</sup>

City authorities had very little control of public life of Los Angeles’s coffeehouses. Coffeehouse proprietors did not need to pay the cost of liquor and entertainment licenses, and they required very little capital to open compared to other entertainment spaces.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, places such as the Ashgrove hired dedicated young musicians and political enthusiasts to run the establishment, and this practice both reduced labor costs and tapped into richer networks of youth culture.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Aiyana Elliott, dir., *Ash Grove Burning*, currently in production.

<sup>83</sup> Ed Pearl interview.

<sup>84</sup> Lenny Potash interview. According to Potash alcoholic syrups in coffee could substitute as weak alcoholic drink.

<sup>85</sup> Ed Pearl interview.

In September 1964, the police arrested John R. Haag, the owner of the Venice West Café, because he advertised poetry at his establishment without an entertainment license. According to the police, “If a patron stood up in a public place and started reading a poem because he was drinking or extroverted, we would not consider it a violation.”<sup>86</sup> However, since Haag advertised poetry as a part of his establishment and rang a bell to initiate a round of poetry reading, he was in violation of the city code. Haag, President of the Westside Chapter of the American Civil Liberties Union and Chairman of the Westside Section of the Ad Hoc Committee to End Police Malpractice, interpreted his arrest as retaliation to his “posting notice of the Ad Hoc Committee’s plan to demonstrate against police malpractice.” Eventually, the courts decided in favor of Haag, concluding that any owner of an establishment in which patrons came to view or meet other patrons could be subjected to arrest under the LAPD’s broad interpretation of the law.

A month later, three police officers entered the Fifth Estate and searched and detained customers and owner Al Mitchell. Nonetheless, the police “couldn’t decide on what he could be arrested for” and the three officers released Al Mitchell and a patron after “additional haranguing and threats of arrest.”<sup>87</sup> These episodes of police harassment in Venice and Hollywood foreshadowed events that would lead to the Sunset Strip Demonstrations in 1966. While earlier episodes of police harassment would have gone unnoticed, by the mid-1960s, the *Los Angeles Free Press* (LAFP) provided a critical

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<sup>86</sup> “Venice Poetry Den Raided,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 24, 1964, 1.

<sup>87</sup> “Sheriffs at the Fifth estate,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, October 15, 1964, 3.

media outlet that chronicled battles among police, young people and proprietors of alternative venues.

Like the coffeehouses, the *Los Angeles Free Press* played an important role in challenging the strictly commercial orientation of Los Angeles youth spaces. As the paper developed, it became a central means of distributing information about youth spaces, culture and events, and thereby played a role in the expansion of a youth public. The *LAFP* began as a free flyer at the KPFK radio May Renaissance Faire in 1964. As Los Angeles was without an alternative media outlet like the *Village Voice*, printer Art Kunkin decided to create a parallel newspaper in Los Angeles. Primarily the mission of the paper was to reflect local concerns, publish a calendar of events, “provide a place for free expression and critical comment,” and cater “to the community needs of the liberal-intellectual population of this city.”<sup>88</sup>

The *LAFP* created a new forum in which young Angelinos could consume thoughts outside of the moderate to right-wing press, and indeed contribute to a dialogue that hailed youth as active political participants. In his regular *LAFP* column, Lawrence Lipton instructed young people on the proper usage of the words “Bullshit” and “Asshole,” and Ridgely Cummings provided an insider’s look at downtown redevelopment not found in the pages of the *Los Angeles Times* or the *Herald-Tribune*. Cummings chronicled the efforts of the “hero of Pershing Square,” Eugene “Diablo” Butler, who lay in front of bulldozers attempting to defend the vestiges of open public space in downtown Los Angeles.<sup>89</sup> In addition, the *LAFP* offered a calendar of events and

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<sup>88</sup> “Dear Reader,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, May 16, 1964, 2.

<sup>89</sup> Ridgely Cummings, “Pershing Square Dedicated,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 19, 1964, 2.

advertisements for concerts and “happenings” that sought to appeal to young people. Concurrently, station KRLA began to publish the *KRLA Beat* that as a local precursor to *Rolling Stone* magazine contained rock band reviews and concert information.

Articles in the *LAFP* also provided narratives that connected the pulp of comics, specifically the fight against Nazis, with actual fights against racist and fascist movements in Southern California. In September 1964, the *LAFP* reported on the reactionary racist activities taking place in Glendale. The office of a citizens group to stop the repeal of the Rumford Housing Act was ransacked, and the American Nazi party set up its Western headquarters in Glendale.<sup>90</sup> These stories served as a bridge for radical and anti-fascist youth culture between the street brawls of the Old Left and the rumble between racist and non-racist skinheads in the late 1970s and 1980s.<sup>91</sup>

The *LAFP* also offered opportunities for young journalists and authors. In the first issue of the *LAPF*, high school student Jimmy Garret questioned his future as a young black man. Garret wrote, “As I grew older I found that my very existence belied the American myth that every family has two cars and lives in a suburban tract home.” Garret saw opportunities in the trades and feared being called to serve in fights against “Communism” in North Vietnam or Cuba. Garret concluded, “To grow up in a world which is constantly on the edge of total annihilation is a terrible thing, but it is no worse to me than living in a society which has tried to destroy me since my birth. The future means nothing to me unless I can change America.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Deena P. Metzger, “Glendale CAP 14 HQ Harassed by Racists,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, September 17, 1964, 3.

<sup>91</sup> Spitz and Mullen, *We Got the Neutron Bomb*.

<sup>92</sup> Jimmy Garret, “Black Future,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, 1964. Jimmy Garret would become a primary leader of the Black Student Union at San Francisco State University in 1966.

By 1965, as an alternative youth press began to flourish the conservative local presses began to shape the image of the young political participant. Not featured as black, Latino, or working-class, “the empty one’s” were described as poorly dressed, barefoot and bearded. The *Venice Evening Star-News* sought to portray demonstrators as a flamboyant minority, but not minorities within the civil rights movement.<sup>93</sup> Instead, political youth were described as privileged white youth who should be chastised for making too much clamor; the *Evening Star-News* reported that the Berkeley Free Speech Movement was communist inspired. Adopting the rhetoric of FBI director, J. Edgar Hoover, conservative editorials predicted eminent revolution led by a “hard-core” faction of campus radicals.<sup>94</sup>

Although local papers characterized political youth as dangerous, television documentaries such as Kent Mackenzie’s “The Teen-Age Revolution” presented a more balanced view. Released in October of 1965 and narrated by Van Heflin, “The Teen-Age Revolution” investigated teenage society and proposed that in the early 1960s the feeling of a generation mobilized teenagers in the streets, schools and as a cultural force within the market. The film questioned a culture dictated by the desires of teen-age society and proposed that the increasingly problematic flood of partying teenagers to Newport Beach each weekend represented the spatial result of twin developments: consumerism and leisure unique to the Baby Boom generation. Nonetheless, the show argued that the mass consumer roots of the generation also became a point of critique and for many young people initiated a search for authenticity within the characterless market of youth

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<sup>93</sup> “Flamboyancy Reflects Minority,” *Evening Star-News*, May 24, 1965, 3.

<sup>94</sup> “Campus Subversion Dangerous,” *Evening Star-News*, May 29, 1965, 3.

consumerism. The documentary concluded by borrowing from the Kennedy rhetoric of community service and portrayed teenagers volunteering to work for the San Fernando Youth Foundation with underprivileged children as the hope of the generation.<sup>95</sup>

### **Profit and the Generation Gap**

In the mid-1960s, the orientation of Hollywood's nightlife began to transition from the adult culture of jazz-oriented dinner and dancing clubs to the youth culture of teen rock clubs and coffeehouses. According to Rodney Bingenheimer, in the early 1960s "the Sunset Strip was like Las Vegas. People would actually walk from La Cienega to Gazzari's at 2 and 3 in the morning. It was a 24-hour party, but it was all very innocent." However, as the Strip began to cater more exclusively to the young, increasingly violent clashes between police and youth developed into weeks of youth-led protests of police harassment. The transition between adult and youth zones strained relationships between police and young people, as the "blue-law" age regulations that once enabled the LAPD the freedom to remove young people from the Strip were less clear in a commercial environment that welcomed young consumers. "The adult clubs began to die and began catering to rock 'n' roll and the youthful audience," remembers Bob Gibson, who was the manager of the Doors. Gibson concluded that, "If you had to put your finger on an event that was a barometer of the tide turning, it would probably be the Sunset Strip riots."<sup>96</sup> On the weekend beginning on Saturday, November 12, scores of young people took over sections of the Strip and held it for hours as the LAPD and the Los Angeles County

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<sup>95</sup> Kent Mackenzie, dir., *The Teenage Revolution* (David L. Wolper Productions, 1965), FTA-UCLA.

<sup>96</sup> Roy Trakin, "A Special Time in Rock: 1966 on the Sunset Strip," *Los Angeles Times*, 1991, <http://www.whiskyagogo.com/articles/660000.html> (accessed January 9, 2009).

Sheriff's Department waited for a break to disperse the crowd; the *Los Angeles Times* labeled the weekend events the "New Youth Riot on Sunset Strip."<sup>97</sup>

After the Zoot Suit Riot, regional authorities made great efforts to control public youth activities, whereas in the 1950s the County Board of Supervisors spent numerous sessions debating the morality of teenage dances. By the mid-1950s, a host of regulations limited the geography of youth dances and drove many promoters and young people out of the County and City to find less regulated clubs and dancehalls. However, in the early 1960s, a new group of entrepreneurs sought to capture the youth market in Hollywood through the establishment of dance clubs limited to underage consumers. In 1962, the first "exclusively" teenage nightclubs began to open in Los Angeles. The first, the Peppermint Stick Nightclub, was opened in the spring of 1962 and by late summer it was packed six nights a week with teen patrons. Soon thereafter, disc jockey Bob Eubanks transformed Larry Potter's Supper Club into the teen-oriented Cinnamon Cinder in Studio City. Similarly, a jazz club on the corner of Crescent Heights Boulevard and Sunset Boulevard was reborn as a rock club known as Pandora's Box. According to one young patron of teen dance clubs, "Some places you ask a girl to dance and she really freezes you. But here at the Stick you say 'Wanna dance?' and she jumps right up and says 'Yeah, sure.'"<sup>98</sup> Whereas in the 1950s, teens would flock to Hollywood to cruise the strip and frequent its movie theaters and restaurants, teen-age dance clubs provided a shelter for young people to connect with others of their generation outside of school and out of the watchful eye of parents and law enforcement.

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<sup>97</sup> "Metropolitan," *Los Angeles Times*, November 14, 1966, 2.

<sup>98</sup> "Teen-Age Nightclubs," *Time Magazine*, September 7, 1962.

Local teen musical television programs reinforced the popularity of these new clubs within the local youth culture. Al Burton, who introduced the concept of the Battle of the Bands to the Teenage Fair, produced a string of shows including *Hollywood A Go Go*, *POP Dance Party*, *9th St West* and *Malibu U*. In 1958, Burton had met Wink Martindale and the two conceived and produced *Wink Martindale's Dance Party* that eventually became the show *POP Dance Party*, filmed with teens on location at Pacific Ocean Park in Venice. Burton's experience producing the show convinced him that an organized event that fused the various facets of teen consumer culture could offer an alternative to the disorders caused by young people without supervision. Burton's first teen fair attracted 300,000 teenagers and although the fair could be fairly described as carefully orchestrated advertisement, the fair's Battle of the Bands created the opportunity for local teens to competitively perform rock 'n' roll for their peers and validated the market for teenage dance clubs.<sup>99</sup>

By 1964, teenage consumerism centered on rock dance clubs began to bolster the sagging economy of Hollywood to the chagrin of established property owners. In the 1950s, state and local planners had created a plan that would bisect Hollywood with two new freeways, the Beverly Hills Freeway and the Laurel Canyon Freeway. Supervisor Ernest E. Debs, who had replaced John Anson Ford on the Board in 1958, promoted a plan that would transform Hollywood into the new financial core of Los Angeles; Debs thought this new financial district would develop through a combination of new

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<sup>99</sup> Al Burton interview by Luke Ford, June 11, 2002, [www.lukeford.net/profiles/profiles/al\\_burton.htm](http://www.lukeford.net/profiles/profiles/al_burton.htm) (accessed January 24, 2009).

highways, land speculation and high rise development.<sup>100</sup> The established glitter of dinning clubs and cocktail lounges would provide a draw for businessmen seeking to relocate their enterprise into a community that had established its “hip” credentials through the silver screen.<sup>101</sup>

According to Jim Dickson, the manager of the musical group the Byrds, “the County Supervisors were in the process of depressing the area. Jazz places like the Renaissance, and coffeehouses such as Chez Paulette could afford the rent because of that depression.”<sup>102</sup> In the early 1960s, the County had begun to condemn and destroy houses along the proposed freeway path on San Vicente. However, on account of the declining status of the community, Dickson noticed that the formerly posh Ciro’s, which later transformed into the rock club It’s Boss, was nearly empty and saw a unique opportunity to book his band on the Strip. Dickson was not alone in taking advantage of the market irregularities caused by development plans. The adult jazz club scene was dying out, and Paul Coates lamented its passing at Ciro’s watching “ a gaunt little lass doing a frantic Watusi or whatever it is they’re doing currently.”<sup>103</sup> By 1964, redevelopment plans and freeway economics collaborated to produce a thriving youth rock scene in Hollywood.

Debs, with the cooperation of Sheriff Peter J. Pitchess and the Sunset Plaza Merchants Association, sought to address the inflow of teenagers by enforcing curfew and loitering laws. This group worked together to try to limit youth offerings on the strip.

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<sup>100</sup> Ernest Debs served on the Los Angeles City Council for nine yeas prior to his election to the Board of Supervisors.

<sup>101</sup> Jerry Cohen, “Big Beat Drives Adults From Erstwhile Haunts;” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1966, A1.

<sup>102</sup> Dominic Priore and Arthur Lee, *Riot on Sunset Strip: Rock ‘N’ Rolls Last Stand in Hollywood* (London: Jawbone Press, 2007), 242.

<sup>103</sup> William Overend, “When the Sun Set on the Strip,” *Los Angeles Times*, November, 1981, <http://www.whiskyagogo.com/articles/811100.html> (accessed January 9, 2009).

In the spring of 1966, the county closed the rock club the Trip as a result of code violations, and in July the police raided Gee Gee's restaurant and Cantor's Deli—a well-known 24 hour deli and hangout for rock enthusiasts—for underaged patrons and arrested over 200 young people. Soon thereafter, Gee Gee's went out of business. Beginning in 1965, local landowners, brothers Francis J. and George Montgomery asked the West Hollywood Sheriff's Office to "enforce the curfew and loitering laws" because of the rush of teenagers "all over the place causing commotion."<sup>104</sup> In the fall of 1966, police harassment increased sharply and juveniles were routinely picked up and brought to the West Hollywood Sheriff Station on San Vicente. According to a *West* magazine article, the station was filled with waiting teens and "indignant parents retrieving teenage daughters who had been swinging along the Strip in hiphuggers when they were supposed to be at slumber parties in Tarzana."<sup>105</sup>

Al Mitchell, proprietor of the Fifth Estate helped fund flyers for a demonstration against police harassment in front of Pandora's Box on the night of November 12th. Although estimates vary, more than a thousand demonstrators lined the sidewalks of Sunset Boulevard and listened to speeches by local youth. At 10:35 pm police began marching down the sidewalk trying to force the crowd off the street. However, this drove the crowd into the street and a group of young men took over a city bus stuck in traffic. Without the sidewalk to corral demonstrators, the police were unable to restrain the crowd and as order was established on one block, young people would take the street on another block. The events on November 12th sparked a standoff between the police and

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<sup>104</sup> Ken Reich, "Brothers Could Influence Future of Sunset Strip," *Los Angeles Times*, November 3, 1966, 12. On the strip, Montgomery's popular restaurant Ben Franks had been closely identified with the Strip's rock youth culture and during casting for the Monkeys agents advertised looking for "Ben Frank types."

<sup>105</sup> "A Hard Days Night On The Strip," *West*, October 16, 1966.

young people in the strip, and the 10pm curfew was carefully enforced over the following weeks during additional demonstrations outside of Pandora's Box.<sup>106</sup>

According to Art Kunkin in an editorial in the *LAFP*, the demonstrations were really the product of an encounter between two sets of businessmen. Kunkin argued: "Because the traditional Strip nightclub was not making money, a few of them converted to licensed teenage clubs and found that they were making more profit than before. The other restaurant owners and property owners began to suffer from traffic congestion. The police, in effect, have been cooperating with one very wealthy group of property owners against a less powerful group of businessmen."<sup>107</sup> Although there was little property damage or injury caused during the Sunset Strip Demonstrations, the County Board of Supervisors decided on November 21 to enact an emergency ordinance to make off limit all dancing clubs to anyone under 21 years of age.<sup>108</sup> Because of the new age limitations, by the end of the year the Trip, the London Fog, It's Boss, Stratford on Sunset, the Action, and Pandora's Box closed.<sup>109</sup>

Although a few teen nightclubs continued to operate in Hollywood until the late 1960s, the era of the Sunset Strip teen scene was over. In the breakdown of the youth establishments, the counterculture began to surface within the vestiges of youth culture on the Strip. After organizing a successful Community Action for Fact and Freedom concert to raise bail money for arrested Strip demonstrators, Alan Pariser and Ben Shapiro went on to organize the Monterey Pop Festival. The Monterey Pop Festival

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<sup>106</sup> Pete Johnson, "400 Youths on Strip Hold 'Brutality' Protest," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 1966, 19.

<sup>107</sup> Art Kunkin, "Editorial," *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 16, 1966, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Los Angeles County Supervisors Board Order No. 195, Urgency Notice No. 9228.

<sup>109</sup> Priore, *Riot on Sunset Strip*, 255-257.

became a defining moment during the Summer of Love in 1967, which turned the nation's gaze from Los Angeles to the growing psychedelic scene in San Francisco.<sup>110</sup>

By 1967, changes in the format of the *Los Angeles Free Press* revealed the evolution of the local counterculture. The Elizabethan/folk woodcuts and the block layout of the first editions of the paper had been replaced with psychedelic drawings and stream of consciousness text. The paper featured advertisements for local rock benefits against the Vietnam War and reports on a number of Los Angeles's "Be-ins." In many ways, the "Be-Ins" of 1967 were a direct result of the closing of the Sun Set Strip. The desire for mass events and unregulated social networking, re-oriented the youth geography away from commercial zones and towards an earlier geography in which young people gathered in public places to celebrate.<sup>111</sup> Nonetheless, Lawrence Lipton was quick to critique the be/love/hug "ins" because unlike Venice or the Strip they did not sustain an artistic community and were drenched in the "drugged tribalism" of the new generation of bohemians.<sup>112</sup>

### The Politics of the "Now Generation"

During much of the late 1960s, journalists sought to figure out why young people seemed so critical of their parents' politics and culture. Like many of her contemporaries, journalist Lola Smith argued that there was an "ever recurring generational rejection pattern" in American history. While Smith thought it was psychologically necessary for young people to challenge the desires of the previous generation, she also worried that

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<sup>110</sup> Priore, *Riot on Sunset Strip*, 257-259.

<sup>111</sup> For more on the "Be-Ins" see, McBride, "Death City."

<sup>112</sup> Lawrence Lipton, "The Wasp," *Los Angeles Free Press*, November 16, 1967.

too much “emphasis on youth and change” created an aimless and neurotic anti-adult society. Similar to many popular discussions of the generation gap, Smith thought the differences between generations were an inevitable part of human conflict.<sup>113</sup>

Journalist Steven V. Roberts attempted to outline the myriad of historical forces that produced youth activism through an investigation of the suburban roots and family of Columbia University’s SDS president Mark Rudd. But ultimately Roberts reduced Rudd to a stereotype, describing him as “a member of a new generation that knew little of the idealism and hope of the early Kennedy years” and “whose parents have given them both the money and the time to fight the world their parents made.” Interviewed by Roberts, the vice-president of Columbia University offered his own negative spin: “The current generation was raised on the permissive doctrines of Dr. Benjamin Spock, lives in a culture that is continually breaking down barriers in such areas as art and sex, has easy access to money, and faces the ‘bureaucratization of every phase of their lives.’”<sup>114</sup> Rudd proposed an alternative view in which he argued that his political consciousness and desire to combat inequality was generated by witnessing the differences between his childhood suburban community and his grandmother’s impoverished and increasingly black neighborhood in Newark.<sup>114</sup>

In discussions of youth activism and culture, both conservative and liberal thinkers collaborated to denigrate and simplify youth culture and to deny young people political autonomy and agency. The former editor of *The Washington Post*, J. R. Wiggins, thought that “the youth of this country have a group libel against the press” in that the

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<sup>113</sup> Lola Smith, “We’ve Bred a Generation Hung Up on Change,” *Washington Post, Times Herald*, August 10, 1969, 34.

<sup>114</sup> Steven V. Roberts, “Leader of S.D.S. Unit: From a Jersey Suburb to the Picket Lines,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1968, 1.

media was quick to label left politics as youth led.<sup>115</sup> This provided “the advocates of disorder and violence the cloak of indulgence and immunity that the adult community customarily extends to the young.” For Wiggins, youth and the social allowances granted by adults were limited to “teenagers” who did not participate in direct political action; student politics were not youth politics because “mature, full-grown, middle-aged and even older men” led campus events. In a similar manner, George Kennan, in a speech at Swarthmore College, argued that the student militants were without a viable program, and he dreamed of a politics that coupled “experience on the one hand, strength and enthusiasm on the other.”<sup>116</sup> Although these two authors had different opinions on the collaborations between adults and young people, both argued that youth itself was unfit for and incapable of leadership.

While the civil rights movement framed many conversations of generational friction in the early 1960s, by end of the decade demonstrations against the Vietnam War dominated discussions of the generation gap. In the eyes of those who had served in World War II, the “kamikaze” activities of young war protesters were deemed “unreasonable, arrogant and self-righteous” and threatened to “physically impede the conduct of the war.”<sup>117</sup> Across the nation, similar characterizations of antiwar demonstrations in the mass media worked to accentuate generational difference and conflict.

By 1966, Los Angeles’s Peace Action Council featured more than 120 separate peace groups and centers, many with public free speech zones and antiwar organizing

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<sup>115</sup> J.R. Wiggins, “‘Youth’ Corrupted by Our Semantics,” *The Washington Post Times Herald*, April 23, 1969, A13.

<sup>116</sup> George F. Kennan, “Rebels Without a Program,” *New York Times*, January 21, 1968, SM22.

<sup>117</sup> Stevens V. Robert, “In the US., Demands,” *New York Times*, January 12, 1968, 49.

sites. In March, the local antiwar arts community began to erect the Artists Tower of Protest at La Cienega and Sunset Boulevard.<sup>118</sup> On February 26, 1967, ant-war leader, ex-Sergeant Don Duncan spoke at the Tower's dedication to a large crowd of onlookers. While the *Los Angeles Free Press* gave young people a media outlet that explained the fusion of hip culture and politics, the format of mainstream newspapers failed to address the cultural market of young readers. In effect, the "fourth estate" further solidified the emerging "fifth estate" of youth culture.

"Dear Mr. President, As the campus voice for one of the largest colleges in the United States, we feel that it is our duty to protest the Vietnam War," wrote the editor of the *College Times*, the California State Los Angeles student paper, on June 23, 1967. "Also, we feel that you have lied to us, when we most needed truth—when our friends were dying in a phoney, trumped-up and economic war."<sup>119</sup> These tensions came to a head in Los Angeles on June 23rd, 1967, when a crowd of 20,000 protesters, many of whom were organized by college campus Spring (later Student) Mobilization Committees, demonstrated against the war at the Century Plaza Hotel. The police were out in force. According to an unidentified hotel official, undercover agents had discovered a plot in which the demonstrators had planned to bomb the hotel. The security for the day included 1,300 police officers and numerous secret agents. Rather than negotiate with demonstrators, the LAPD chose to aggressively remove thousands that had gathered in front of the hotel. The result was a violent clash between the police and the demonstrators in which 45 people were arrested and dozens injured. The arrested at the

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<sup>118</sup> R. Jeffery Lustig, "The War at Home," in *What's Going on? California and the Vietnam Era*, eds. Marcia A Eymann and Charles Wollenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 67.

<sup>119</sup> "Editorial," *College Times*, June 23, 1967, 3.

Century Plaza Hotel demonstration included UCLA student Janet King, a member of the Vietnam Day Committee and Students for a Democratic Society, and sixteen-year-old Steven Lippman. Lippman had allegedly run over a police officer's foot while being dragged from a car. King had defended Lippman with a dummy of President Johnson. Larger protests in other cities had not escalated in violence. Yet the groundwork for the clash between the LAPD and the demonstrators at the Century City Park Hotel had been set by the climate of the Watts Uprising and the Sunset Strip Demonstrations.<sup>120</sup>

Consistent with the media's usual caricatures of youth-led protests, the June 24th front-page headline in the Los Angeles Times read "10,000 in Melee" and printed the picture of white-tux dressed President Johnson and daughter Linda next to the photo of a police officer trying to force a young demonstrator to give up a sit-down strike. The juxtaposition drew a clear line between youth behaving properly and youth out of control.

<sup>121</sup>

Like the reaction to the Sunset demonstrations, activism and organizing following the events on June 23rd were centered on the interconnectedness between the brutality experienced domestically, from the suppression of inner-city insurrections and antiwar demonstrations, and violence in the Vietnam War. In this climate, SDS staged a successful organizing drive of local high school campuses and encouraged draft-age students to consider the connection between the Vietnam draft and domestic police violence and how both violated the rights of young people.<sup>122</sup> In 1968, SDS began

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<sup>120</sup> Harry Trimborn, "Los Angeles Counts Up Profits and Losses of President's Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, June 25, 1967, 1.

<sup>121</sup> Paul Houston, "10,000 in Melee: War Protest Mars LBJ Visit," *Los Angeles Times*, June 24, 1967, 1.

<sup>122</sup> See also Mike Davis, "Riot Night on Sunset Strip," *Labour/Le travail*, Spring 2007; Mark Kleiman interview in Helen Garvey, dir., *Rebels with a Cause*, Shire Films, 2000.

publishing an alternative newspaper the *Worrier* at University High School. Its editor Neil Beger argued that although his paper could have little influence to effect the Vietnam war, “if we continue to publish articles opposing the war in Vietnam, linking it to the racism in American and U.S. imperialism throughout the world, we will have accomplished our purpose.”<sup>123</sup> On July 23rd, police harassed attendees at a “love-in” at Elysian Park organized by the June 23rd Movement. Organizers of the event argued that the suppression of the antiwar movement and the counterculture was one and the same: “we’re in the same bag—the system sucks.”<sup>124</sup>

### **Imagining the Future City**

While the Watts riot was immediately identified as a race riot, demonstrations by white youth in Hollywood in the fall 1966 were labeled youth riots. The stark differences in the reaction of the two events by the police, media and the public provoked one *Los Angeles Sentinel* editorialist, Stanley G. Robertson, to write “the overall attitude towards those causing the troubles [in Hollywood] has been one more of “these are just kids acting up” rather than one of a hoodlum element which needs curbing.”<sup>125</sup> To Robertson, tyranny in the street should be met equally and not be approached with a racial double standard. Although many authorities such as Ernest Debs labeled Strip teens as hoodlums, Robertson’s comparison of the two events needs further consideration.

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<sup>123</sup> Mark Jason Gilbert, “Lock and Load High; The Vietnam War Comes to a Los Angeles Secondary School.” in Kalí Tal and Dan Duffy, ed., *Nobody Gets Off The Bus: The Viet Nam Generation Big Book* (Tucson, AZ: Burning Cities Press, 1994).

<sup>124</sup> “Love-In,” 20th Century Organizational Files, 1912-1980s, June 23rd Demonstration and Movement, Action Council, 1967-1970, 20C-SCLSSR.

<sup>125</sup> Stanley G. Robertson, “Suppose ‘Strip’ Were 103rd Street?” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, December 1, 1966 A4.

Mike Davis has argued that these youth “riots” in the 1960s represent a particular type of class-consciousness spurred on by a growing consumer economy that often made little space for the expression of working-class and nonwhite identities. In response to the riots across the country from 1964-66, Saul Bernstein argued that poverty, the frustration over the slow pace of change and bitterness to systems of youth control created the grounds on which young people physically rejected methods of social control and rebelled. While Bernstein and Davis identify youth alienation as a primary motivator in these skirmishes, neither identified this alienation as primarily spatial in nature in that the metropolitan infrastructure was unable to cope with the mass activities of young people. While suburbia mitigated the street corner society of eastern cities, its planners failed to predict how the spatial concentration of youth would produce friction, unrest, and violence. This concentration of young people also created a generational bond between participants that rejected arbitrary authority and sought recognition for its own uses of space. Moreover, the youth culture of the period encouraged young people cluster in unregulated spaces in the search for both intimate relationships and fun outside of their schools, neighborhoods and family networks. On a whole, the changes to youth spaces and social practices within these spaces, were the result of a mass of young people seeking belonging, autonomy, and unregulated associations in spaces that were free from the mechanism of police authority, parental control, and overt commercial exploitation.<sup>126</sup>

This research suggest that rather than a *de facto* byproduct of market forces, haphazardly conceived urban design strategies sustained the particular geographies in which both the Watts Uprising and the Sunset Strip Demonstrations took place. While

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<sup>126</sup> Davis, “Riot Nights”; Saul Bernstein, *Alternatives to Violence: Alienated Youth and Riots, Race, and Poverty* (New York: Association Press, 1967).

residential segregation led to the Uprising and exclusionary zoning engendered the Strip Demonstrations, the plans for future freeways sustained depressed market values in both Hollywood and Watts; through the slow accumulation of depreciating land, entrepreneurs sought to hold property until the construction of freeways would deliver a host of new investors. This practice was not unknown and in 1961, J. A. Mellon, planning director of the city of Glendale, warned in regards to freeway plans, “the effect of uncertainty is to delay progress of development, exchange of property and perhaps even effect its value because of the shadow cast by the impending freeway development. This shadow does not fall upon the study area but upon the whole community, since the freeway construction and the position of accessways to the facility dictate the traffic pattern of the whole area.”<sup>127</sup> However, in imagining the future city, planners failed to understand the contemporary uses of spaces and the how market inequities created both the spaces for gangs and teen clubs to operate. Planners failed to envision a city in which the economy and political power of the mass of young Angelinos would trump, even if temporarily, the economy of adults. Although the County Supervisors allowed the commercial market greater freedom in organizing youth culture in the 1950s, in focusing on the motivations of teenagers, it failed to understand that it had not produced a vibrant public culture that could balance out the commercial orientation of teenage life. Furthermore, in a post-progressive moment in the 1960s, the quick dismissal of the value of youth culture, by all but a few policy makers, trapped them in anachronism. Ironically, the Sunset Strip Demonstrations convinced homeowners in Beverly Hills to reject the planned freeway, and neither it nor the Laurel Canyon Freeway were constructed; after the Uprising, the

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<sup>127</sup> Art Ryon, “Property Values Little Affected by Freeways,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 22, 1961, B1.

development of Industrial Freeway, which was to run through Watts and Compton parallel to Central Avenue, was also abruptly halted.<sup>128</sup>

In the next chapter, arguments presented here will be extended to consider how similar battles over space and identity created the grounds for the East Los Angeles Walkouts in 1967. In 1966, the Young Chicanos for Community Action opened La Piranya coffeehouse in East Los Angeles to offer a youth community center in which young people could gather and organize projects to better their neighborhoods. YCCA was the forerunner to the Brown Berets, and police harassment at La Piranya precipitated the transformation of the group into the Berets. The Los Angles County Sheriff's department constantly hassled patrons and workers of La Piranya and according to sociologist Rona Marcia Fields, intimidation and surveillance experienced at La Piranya channeled the YCCA's world-view and pushed the organization towards the militarism of the Brown Berets and their critique of the white power establishment.<sup>129</sup>

Concurrent to the opening of La Piranya, Episcopalian father Peter Luce established a Teenpost at his parish. Although the Teenpost mainly offered recreational and education opportunities to its students, Luce, a proponent of Saul Alinsky method of community organizing, allowed the basement of the parish to turn into a print shop for newspapers, *La Raza* and *Chicano Student News*. This newsletter presented many of the central arguments and critiques of the Los Angles Public schools that led to the East Los

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<sup>128</sup> Priore, Riot on Sunset Strip, 240.

<sup>129</sup> Rona Marcia Fields, "The Brown Berets: A Participant Observation Study of Social Action in the Schools of Los Angeles," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Southern California, 1970), 67.

Angeles Blowouts in 1967. The paper was also the first media outlet to chronicle the development of the Brown Berets.<sup>130</sup>

The attempted techniques of spatial control of youth as represented by the City Yearbook, geographic knowledge and police power, in the beginning of this chapter created a discourse in which youth of different races and classes could describe and critique oppression. The shape of American cities synchronized with the baby boom and mass consumer culture allowed young Americans to issue spatial critiques of their cities and communities.

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<sup>130</sup> Malcolm Klein interview.

## Chapter Seven

### The East Los Angeles Blowouts: From Youth Culture to Identity Politics

Words will not stop bullets, rhymes offer no protection from racist clubs,  
metaphors are not weapons against brutality, adjectives cannot prevent my being  
slaughtered, so ... as a pastime ... I collect bullets.<sup>1</sup>

Maybe some of them are seeking identity, and they wear a Brown Beret, and  
where nobody noticed them before, now people look at them with a kind of awe, a  
kind of recognition, and kind of a silent tribute.<sup>2</sup>

In the fall of 1966, Mexican-American student Yolanda Araiza, one of only fifty Chicana/o students at UCLA, wrote about the search for identity among her fellow classmates. She explained that, “For each child of Mexican descent the search for his identity is a unique journey. He travels his own speed. Sometimes he finds guides along straight roads. Sometimes he gets desperately, hopelessly lost.”<sup>3</sup> As a participant in the UCLA Mexican-American Study Project, Araiza described the “dichotomy of values” that existed between the home and school life of Mexican-American youth. Parents hoped their children would receive *la educación*: manners, politeness, respect for others and graciousness. Araiza thought that this vision of *la educación* was beautiful but not practical in a “technological, competitive, materialistic, go-getting American society.”<sup>4</sup> For Araiza, young Mexican-Americans were caught between two worlds.

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<sup>1</sup> Saavedra, “Dilema of a Revolutionary Poet,” *Chicano Student Movement*, April 25, 1968, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Rudy de Leon interview by Antonio Valle Jr, January 16, 1969, 8, O.H. 103, COPH-CSUF.

<sup>3</sup> Yolanda Araiza, “Mexican-American’s Search for Identity,” *Daily Bruin*, November 23, 1966, 9.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

In general, Arazia was pessimistic about grassroots politics and pointed to the current stalemate at Lincoln High School, located in East Los Angeles. Lincoln had been picketed by a small group of parents and students because the counselors did not speak Spanish and were ignorant of Mexican-American culture. The school's administration responded that all students were required to speak English, so therefore Spanish and knowledge of Mexican culture was not a necessity. Arazia believed that Mexican-Americans needed a charismatic leader such as Martin Luther King Jr. to bring media attention to the problems of the Mexican-American community. However, instead of charismatic leadership from adults, Cesar Chavez, Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales, or Reies Tijerina, East Los Angeles students took the lead. Through the efforts of these activists students, the East Los Angeles high school "Blowouts" of March 1968 served as the primary catalyst for an emergent Mexican-American political and identity. This chapter will explore how youth culture in the mid-1960s encouraged the common struggle of a generation against inequality and worked to fuse the two worlds inhabited by young Chicana/os, creating a key stimulus for political and cultural developments.<sup>5</sup>

The Blowouts mark a significant rupture in the nature of high school activism and youth culture in Los Angeles. As shown in the sixth chapter, by the late 1960s a number of factors contributed to creating new public spaces for young Angelinos from government funded Teen Posts to alternative coffeehouses. These autonomy-generating venues channeled through the civil rights movement, Vietnam War demonstrations and the cultural shifts of the 1960s, encouraged young people to demand fuller participation in shaping their own education. Latino students in particular demanded changes to the

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<sup>5</sup> This framework is a primary argument found in Muñoz's *Youth, Identity, Power*.

culture of their schools, challenging the paternalistic and managerial ethos of a school system that tracked young Mexican-Americans into the laboring classes and thereby maintained the racial and class status quo. In the best-case scenario, young Chicana/os saw their education as one that allowed only a few privileged students to assimilate into the culture of the white middle class. In 1968, Mexican-American high school students rejected these assimilation projects and argued for a new vision of schools, along with a multicultural vision for Los Angeles and the nation.

Only months after the Blowouts, Antonio Valle Jr. interviewed a handful of young Mexican-Americans on their attitudes towards the Chicano movement and its increasing militancy. His interviewees included undergraduate business major Joe Lopez, high school students Evelyn Escalante and Alex Hinojosa, and mother and daughter Alice and Lorene Escalante. Although there was no consensus in the interviews as to *how* Mexican-Americans could redress social inequities, as a group they all knew *who* would make change. Each interviewee argued that it was the destiny of young Mexican-Americans to be the leaders of the Chicano community in its civil rights struggle. This issue of youth leadership was part of the generational consciousness of the Baby Boom, its destiny, which was catalyzed by the civil rights movement and demonstrations against the war in Vietnam.

Joe Lopez was an older student, married and in his late twenties; a business student at California State Fullerton and an organizer for LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens). On examining the lives of his age cohort, his brothers and friends, Lopez remarked, “I have brothers that work in factories. For some reason they just reached a certain age and then got married and then decided that since they could

have a decent car, a decent home, and raise a bunch of kids, drink beer, watch television—this was all they really needed.” In his interview, Lopez rejected the choices of his working-class peers because he thought that they perpetuated class and racial inequality. Lopez believed that Mexican-Americans needed to get into positions of power within American business and politics to create structural change. It infuriated Lopez that Governor Ronald Reagan, in response to campus unrest across California, had stated that the institutions should be given back to the people who founded them, that is, to the wealthy white elites. Joe Lopez did not see the buildings as representations of the grandeur of white capital but rather of the capabilities of “Mexican sweat.” He thought that every Californian deserved equal access to an education.<sup>6</sup>

At the time of her interview, Lorene Escalante was the only Brown Beret at Lincoln High School. She became a Beret after attending the Poor Peoples campaign in Washington, D.C., with her mother Alice, who was a welfare rights community activist.<sup>7</sup> At the march, she witnessed the Berets gallantly locking arms to protect women and children from the police and decided to become a member. According to Lorene Escalante, “I think it’s necessary to have the Brown Berets because we need unity among our people, and it seems that well, I think, we’re going to get around to the young people, because the old people will never change.”<sup>8</sup> As a welfare rights activist, Alice Escalante could rely on the Brown Berets to help in her organization’s activities; the Berets could be relied upon to help canvas and flyer neighborhoods, help set up and take down events,

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<sup>6</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Joe Lopez interview by Antonio Valle Jr., January 10, 1969, 7, O.H. 97, COPH-CSUF.

<sup>7</sup> The Interviews of the Escalatne’s took place at the Welfare Rights Organization at 2222 E. First St., Los Angeles, which also served as the ACLU’s office for police malpractice.

<sup>8</sup> Interview of Alice and Lorene Escalante by Antonio Valle Jr., December 3, 1968, O.H. 73, 9, COPH-CSUF.

and provide protection from police.<sup>9</sup> Sitting next to her mother and without a touch of irony, Lorene then explained that having children became a barrier to full participation in social movements, and that parents often discouraged their children from joining the Berets because they feared for their safety. Her mother did not think that this position was unusual; in fact she authorized her daughter to make her own decisions, and although she worried about her daughter she had “come to the point that I’m more afraid of not doing anything about it [discrimination].”<sup>10</sup> She felt that young people needed to participate politically in order to have a deep appreciation of the structural conditions that caused poverty and racial discrimination.

High school students Alex Hinojosa and Evelyn Escalante were working to form a Brown Culture Society and wanted to have a “happening” at Fountain Valley High School. As young Mexican-Americans in Orange County, neither was able to speak directly about the conditions in urban barrios and both were reluctant to accept militancy as a necessity. In fact, both thought too much militancy would bring the police and that their community was “just boss the way it is.”<sup>11</sup> However, when pressed by the interviewer about discrimination, both argued that their generation would stand up against discrimination and abuses of authority. In describing social inequity, Hinojosa compared white privileges such as good homes, schools and neighborhoods to conditions in his barrio and argued that few Mexican-Americans had jobs that allowed class mobility and community uplift. To the Hinojosa family, the military and labor market

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<sup>9</sup> Interview of Alice Escalante by Antonio Valle Jr., December 3, 1968, O.H. 78, 18, COPH-CSUF.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>11</sup> Interview of Alex Hinojosa and Evelyn Escalante by Antonio Valle Jr., 1969, O.H. 110, 8, 26, COPH-CSUF.

were barriers to social change. In his words, “When I’m eighteen its just a little too late because you have to go through the service.”<sup>12</sup>

As a group, the interviewees saw young Mexican-Americans as the vanguard of social change. Although Joe Lopez saw change coming from working within the system and Lorene Escalante thought revolution was an inevitable necessity, both Lopez and Escalante felt that only young Chicanos had the ability to make change in the long run. These two interviewees and Alex Hinojosa believed that if young people were to accomplish change, they would have to do so before entering the labor market and starting families. The interviewees saw the responsibilities of adult life as a limitation to full participation in social movements. Whereas the generation that migrated to the United States from Mexico labored to achieve both social standing and material wealth, Mexican-Americans of the Baby Boom generation could suspend these activities in order to better the life of their community. Although there was disagreement in the interviews as to method, which ranged from accommodation to militancy, they all shared pride in their cultural heritage. This gave them a language to articulate both historical and contemporary grievances and to frame their activities as contributing to the wellbeing of a group, not simply themselves.

This chapter begins by tracing the local roots of youth activism in the summer of 1967 and in a rough chronological format outlines the elements that contributed to the school “Blowouts” in East Los Angeles in the spring of 1968. As found by Carlos Muñoz and many others, the Blowout is a significant turning-point in American history, but rather than presenting these walkouts primarily from the development of Mexican-

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 30.

American political identity, the Blowouts represent the mobilization of East Los Angeles high schools by an activist Chicana/o subculture. This subculture emerged at a critical juncture in American attitudes towards young people, a moment in which an array of social forces attempted to encourage youth leadership, networking and activism. Furthermore, in the mid-1960s, a liberal Board of Education in L.A. sought to address many of the students' concerns, and parents of the students moved from apathy to communal action. As Vietnam War demonstrations and student activism increased during the late 1960s, conservative politicians began to characterize youth activism as uninformed and anarchistic. After the Blowouts occurred a period of suppression and devaluation of youth activism and culture followed.

The Blowouts reveal both the potential and limits of youth activism. The fallout from the Blowouts and the Chicano Vietnam Moratorium mobilization led to direct suppression of the activist Chicana/o subculture by the police. Paternalistic conservative campaign rhetoric collaborated with increased policing to reduce young peoples' political autonomy. This rhetoric drove cuts to public resources for youth programs and shifted the focus on youth from a progressive rehabilitative agenda toward a conservative disciplinary framework that sought to deliberately incapacitate youth activism. This conservative framework suggested that young people's proper place was within familial contexts and not within intimate subcultural peer groupings.

### **Outside Agitators: Youth Culture in the Cold War**

During the mid-1960s, student activists at San Francisco State College radically changed the context of campus-based racial politics. In 1966, the student government of

SFSC decided to open an experimental school, and with \$7,000 in student funds hired Dr. Paul Goodman, author of *Growing Up Absurd*, to facilitate lectures and classes.

According to Associated Students' president James Nixon, "the State legislature doesn't provide funds to bring visiting distinguished professors to the campus for any length of time, so we decided to do it."<sup>13</sup> Nixon thought it was "the responsibility of students to play an important role in their education, to work with it, and try to supplement it." In the beginning of 1967, Nixon coordinated activities of the Alliance for California Higher Education, a teacher and student group that organized to combat Governor Reagan's proposed higher education budget cuts. In the second semester of the experimental school, the study body allocated nearly \$3000 to film visiting artist and black activist Leroi Jones's plays.<sup>14</sup>

In the fall of 1967, in a climate of growing racial consciousness and expression on the SFSC campus, Black Student Union leaders challenged the school newspaper to drop the term "Negro" in favor of "black" and to devote more space to black student issues.<sup>15</sup> Antagonism between the paper's editor and the BSU resulted in a physical altercation on November 6th between activists and newspaper staff members; this fight led to the disciplining of nine BSU members. Similar action by student activists against their campus papers occurred at Los Angeles City College and San Fernando Valley State College. On SFSC's campus, the reinstatement of suspended BSU members became an organizing point for students and on Wednesday, December 6, students and employees

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<sup>13</sup> "Move Approved; College Students in S.F. Organize Separate School," *Los Angeles Times*, May 23, 1966, A1.

<sup>14</sup> "Bob Kennedy Hears Facts About Watts," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, May 25, 1967, D3.

<sup>15</sup> Stanley G. Robertson, "Regrettable Actions by Student Militants," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, November 27, 1967, A7.

shut down the campus. In the following year, President John Summerskill resigned and Robert R. Smith took over in a climate of anti-administration hostility.

The conservative and red-baiting reaction to student activism at SFSC framed the political and cultural context for events that would later unfold in Los Angeles. Events during the strike were labeled in the *Los Angeles Times* as “Negroes Terrorize S.F. Campus” and evoked racial invasion, gangs and tribalism with descriptions of student participants including a “negro carrying a spear.”<sup>16</sup> As reported in *The Washington Post*, the demonstrations began with 500 mostly white militants gathering in front of the locked administration building followed by students entering classrooms encouraging students to walkout; this report was free from the racist framework presented in the *Los Angeles Times* article.<sup>17</sup>

In response to the events on the SFSC campus, one professor worried that, “Everything we’ve done is being lost. Now (Gov. Ronald) Reagan has got the excuse he needs to takeover.”<sup>18</sup> As a spokesman for Governor Reagan, Caspar Weinberger identified the strike on SFSC campus as the result of outside “professional agitators” who had no objectives but to encourage a cycle of violence in which “the hard-core agitators and disturbers believe they can finally wreck the whole fabric of our society.” According to Weinberger, “The other disturbing thing is that the more meaningless agitation for the sake of agitation continues, the angrier become the general public, the taxpayers, and the political leaders in whose hands decisions as to the future of these vitally important

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<sup>16</sup> “Colleges: Negroes Terrorize S.F. Campus,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 10, 1967, F5.

<sup>17</sup> Nicholas von Hoffman, “Rioting Calif. Students Close College,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, December 7, 1967, A14.

<sup>18</sup> Nicholas von Hoffman, “Rioting Calif. Students Close College,” *The Washington Post-Times Herald*, December 7, 1967, A14.

institutions of higher education are placed.” In this article Weinberger made no mention of race or the issues at hand or of the possibility that students, and not outside agitators, were at the heart of the controversy.<sup>19</sup>

### **Manual Arts High School and a Prelude to the Blowouts**

Although the antiwar movement and campus activism played important roles in creating the climate for the Blowouts, protests at primarily black-attended Manual Arts High School demonstrated both the rewards and dangers of high school activism. In late February 1965, Manual Arts High School students and their parents visited neighborhood houses to collect donations for a new gymnasium, as the old gym was deemed unsafe and too small. The group argued for a gym equal to those built in all-white sections of the Los Angeles Unified School District. Concurrent to the struggle over the gym, Los Angeles’s school superintendent Jack P. Crowther released plans to cut summer school operations at the school.<sup>20</sup> In the next couple of years the student population at Manual Arts High School increased to 3,700 students, and like the gym, the campus in general was inadequate for the size of its increasing student population.

At the beginning of the school year in 1967, Mary Wright, representing the United Parents Council, began picketing Manual Arts High School asking for the ouster of principal Robert F. Denahy. By mid-September 1967, parents and students, the NAACP, Black Congress, politicians Bill Greene, Augustus Hawkins and Mervin

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<sup>19</sup> Caspar W. Weinberger, “The Real Danger of Riots on Campus: Overreaction,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 18, 1967, A5.

<sup>20</sup> “Funds for Gym Sought By Manual Arts High Students,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, February 25, 1965, A10; Dick Turpin, “Lack of Funds Will Curtain L.A. Summer School Classes,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 5, 1965, A1.

Dymally had joined Mrs. Wright. This coalition complained about Denahy's policy of locking most of the bathrooms, unwillingness to conference with parents in suspension and expulsion cases, and the fact that many students were left idle during class breaks.<sup>21</sup> The Board of Education refused to remove Denahy and picketing continued into October. The Board sought an injunction against the protesters outside of the school, and teachers argued that "outside agitators" jeopardized the staff's physical safety.<sup>22</sup> On October 19 and 20, students threw bottles at fire trucks and police outside of the school—20 juveniles and 14 adults were arrested.<sup>23</sup> By late October, half of the student body and half of the faculty were boycotting the school daily.<sup>24</sup>

Concurrent with these events, the federal government took a hand in reshaping local opportunities for youth by announcing that War on Poverty funds that had only begun after the Watts Uprising would be reduced. Specifically, there would be a \$2 million reduction for intervention programs in the city's nonwhite ghettos. This stiff reduction concerned the Community Relations Conference of Southern California, and they lobbied to have the funds re-instated. Williams Elkins, director of the Teen Posts, argued that the project had been operating until midnight keeping young people off the street but that the two-thirds budget cut would severely limit the program's effectiveness. Elkins sited the disturbances at Manual Arts as being a product of the reduced budget.

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<sup>21</sup> Ray Rodgers, "Board Refuses to Oust Manual Arts Principle," *Los Angeles Times*, September 15, 1967, A8; "High School Dope, Booze Traffic Leads To Inquiry," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 21, 1967, A1; Seymour Korman, "Romney Finds Watts Ready With Queries," *Chicago Tribune*, September 26, 1967, 2. In this period, Margaret Wright also successfully petitioned the Board of Education to notify teachers that natural hairstyles were allowed in city schools.

<sup>22</sup> "Board Asks Legal Aid on Troubles at Manual Arts," *Los Angeles Times*, October 21, 1967, B1. John Dreyfuss, "Plea by Faculty to Close School Denied by Board," *Los Angeles Times*, October 20, 1967, 3.

<sup>23</sup> "4 Hurt, 31 Held in Outburst in Negro Area," *Chicago Tribune*, October 20, 1967, A2.

<sup>24</sup> "Faculty to End Brief Boycott at Los Angeles School," *New York Times*, October 24, 1967, 33. Concurrent to the Manual Arts demonstrations students in Chicago also staged boycotts at high schools including Joliet East, Joliet West and Joliet Central.

The local Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency additionally cut funding for youth training programs in Watts, college prep programs in East Los Angeles Youth and gang rehabilitation and intervention programs. The federal pullout occurred at a time when these programs had only begun to operate and potentially demonstrate effectiveness.<sup>25</sup>

The Manual Arts demonstrations and budget cuts coincided with the increasing media attention on black power groups. The *Los Angeles Times* sent journalist Ray Rodgers to report on black power conferences in Newark and Detroit. Within this context, a heated confrontation in South-Central Los Angeles between GOP presidential hopeful George Romney and Tommy Jacquette, of Self-Leadership for All Nationalities Today and Walter Bremond, of the Black Congress, made national headlines. Interest in black power groups also led to the greater policing of black organizations; during the same week as the Manual Arts protests seven members of Ron Karenga's United Slaves were detained by police for infractions, including suspicion of possession of marijuana, and robbery.<sup>26</sup>

The growing militancy of black youth had immediate consequences on Mexican-American youth. At a local Southern California conference in the fall of 1967, Reies Lopez Tijerina, a captivating speaker and leader of a land reclamation movement in New Mexico, argued that militant organizations, black and brown, needed to sign a "non-aggression" pact and create a "mutual defense" treaty. In the fall of 1967, black activists Ralph Featherstone (SNCC), Maulauna Ron Karenga (US), James Denis (CORE), Akku Babu (Black Panther and BSU), and Walter Bremond of the Black Congress signed the

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<sup>25</sup> Jack Jones, "Director of Teen Post Program Hits Fund Cut," *Los Angeles Times*, October 23, 1967, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Bergholz, "Negroes Argue With Romney in South L.A. Tour," *Los Angeles Times*, September 26, 1967, 1; "'Cops Pick on US,' Black Power Claims," *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 14, 1967, A1.

treaty. This call to arms followed Tijerina's takeover of the Rio Arriba County courthouse in Tierra Amarilla, New Mexico, an event which was immediately memorialized in a corrido by Roberto Martinez and received heavy local radio play. Tijerina encouraged both black and brown activists to come to New Mexico for the National Convention of Alianza Federal de Mercedes. Locally, the Young Chicanos for Community Action sponsored talks by Tijerina, Chavez, H. Rap Brown, Stokely Carmichael and Ron Karenga at their coffee house, The Piranya.<sup>27</sup> Within this climate of racial co-operation, the federal government slowly reduced funding from grassroots programs that enabled cross community collaborations. In 1967, based on the success of a smaller crash program in 1966, the OEO approved funding for a Pacoima "Street Scene" that would create community employment opportunities that encouraged young black and brown people to better their neighborhoods together. However, in the fall of 1967, OEO withdrew their support claiming the need for "further program development."<sup>28</sup>

In October 1967, the end of the black community's campaign for new resources for Manual Arts High School concluded with the Board of Education unanimously voting to provide "all possible funds and staff necessary to achieve improved education." This win galvanized Chicano activists who argued that the situation at Garfield High School was no different from the one at Manual Arts. These activists thought that the administration at Garfield was unsympathetic to Mexican-American students, failed to advocate for new funding and had not sufficiently addressed the high dropout rate of

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<sup>27</sup> Ruben Salazar, "Brown Berets Hail 'La Raza' and Scorn the Establishment," *Los Angeles Times*, June 16, 1969, 3

<sup>28</sup> "Street Scene," *La Raza*, October 29, 1967, 3.

students.<sup>29</sup> In the 1965-1966 school year, 57.5 percent of students from 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades dropped out of Garfield High School.

### **Blowouts: Chicano Youth in the Vanguard**

On a rainy Friday morning, March 6, 1968, between four and five thousand students in East Los Angeles left their schools and headed for Hazard Park. Students arrived at the park from Roosevelt, Lincoln, Wilson and Garfield High Schools. According to Louis Torres, the editor of the Lincoln High School newspaper, the event had almost a carnival spirit. “To us, just a bunch of seventeen and eighteen year old high school students, it was very exhilarating, strange, and hopeful kind of experience.” Students demanded changes to their education, a greater emphasis on Mexican culture and history, bilingual classes and teachers, and new classroom materials. For many of the students it was a chance to exclaim “¡Ya Basta!”, enough is enough, and make it clear to the media present at the Blowouts that the public schools in East Los Angeles received meager resources and attention.<sup>30</sup>

The students’ demands generated immediate local coverage and Walter Cronkite reported on the events on the CBS evening broadcast. For the first time, students, whose grievances were routinely ignored by teachers and school administrators, were asked for their opinions by national broadcasters and media outlets. Student activists successfully exposed the everyday experience of education in East Los Angeles within deteriorating buildings and overcrowded classrooms, conditions that they argued led to the highest

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<sup>29</sup> “Garfield High - Another Manual Arts?” *La Raza*, October 29, 1967, 1.

<sup>30</sup> Frank del Olmo, “Blow Out”, 1977, School Walkouts in ELA Schools Collection, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California, [hereinafter ELA-SCLSSR].

dropout rate in the country. Like demonstrations in the civil rights movement, the Blowouts were organized to gain media attention and the events were coordinated to maximize exposure.

### **Professional Educators and Youth Leadership**

In the early 1960s, Mexican-American educators had begun to outline the difficulties young Mexican-American found in the public schools. In January 1963, Dr. Julian Samora published data that showed that in Los Angeles only 26 percent of the Mexican-American students finished high school compared to 60 percent of Anglo students and 44 percent of black students.<sup>31</sup> Samora's data also emphasized the spatial dimensions of the problem. Communities that were predominately Mexican-American had fewer total years of completed school than tracts that were predominately non-Latino.<sup>32</sup> On August 13, 1963, spurred by Samora's research and a conference of Mexican-American educators, Dr. Francisco Bravo submitted fifteen items for consideration to the Board of Education. These recommendations included the teaching of Spanish at all levels, inclusion of material that addressed Mexican culture, the recruitment of bilingual teachers, counselors, and administrators, encouraging participation of Mexican-American parents, and the creation of higher education loans for Mexican-American students. The fourteenth point of the proposal was that the

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<sup>31</sup> Julian Samora, "Table 4: Educational: 4 Years or Less Compared to 4 Years of high school + completed," (presentation, Mexican-American Seminar, Phoenix, Arizona, January 16, 1963, Phoenix, Arizona), ELA-SCLSSR.

<sup>32</sup> This trend was not unique to Los Angeles as Phoenix, Pueblo, Albuquerque, El Paso and San Antonio conformed to this pattern.

recommended program be immediately implemented on a crash basis.<sup>33</sup> At the time, only a minority of Board Members supported these proposals and therefore much of the recommendations were tabled. However, although the members of the ad hoc subcommittee on equal educational opportunity, including Georgiana Hardy, Arthur Gardner, and Hugh Willett, were politically incapable to adopt Bravo's proposals, the subcommittee's reporter ended up in the hands of educator and activist Sal Castro, signaling to Castro desired changes but the lack of political will.

In August 1965, Mexican-American educators created the Mexican-American Educators Association to advocate for and distribute War on Poverty funds in predominantly Mexican-American communities. Director Philip Montez addressed the Sub-Committee on Race Relations and Urban Problems of the California Senate on September 30, 1965.<sup>34</sup> Montez described the effects of a monolingual education on bilingual children—"when we strip a person of a part of his total self, the only sound psychological conclusion that we can make is that this personality is due for involvement in deviant behavior."<sup>35</sup> Henry Johnson's study of the El Rancho School district demonstrated that education motivation decreased with class level for Mexican-American students compared to white students. In Montez's and Johnson's analysis, schools became sites of first correction and then rejection. Bilingual and bi-cultural education was the key to rectify the psychological damage done by monolingual schooling. In this regard, in the first fifteen months of the Association's existence it channeled federal

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<sup>33</sup> "Excerpt From Minutes, Regular Meeting Board of Education, City of Los Angeles, August 15, 1963," ELA-SCLSSR.

<sup>34</sup> Philip Montes, "The Psychology of the Mexican-American Student," (speech, Sub-Committee on Race Relations on Race Relations and Urban Problems, State Building, Los Angeles, California, September 30, 1964), ELA-SCLSSR.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 2.

funds into an evaluation of the Head Start program, sponsored numerous youth cultural conferences and research projects, sought to incorporate educational resources into Teen Posts, created a media center, participated at the Mexican American Youth Conference (MAYC), and produced and distributed a bilingual pamphlet for parents that addressed the “Three Ways that your child’s schooling will determine his success in Life.”<sup>36</sup>

In the early 1960s, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations began organizing camps for minority youth leaders at Camp Hess Kramer in Malibu, a camp operated by progressive Jewish leaders at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.<sup>37</sup> These camps were in large part funded by clothing manufacturer Tobias Kotzin.<sup>38</sup> In 1963, 110 Mexican-American high school and college students spent their Easter vacation discussing the problem of the Mexican-American community. After the conference East Los Angeles Junior College student Lucila Carrasco remarked that many Mexican-Americans were isolated in their families and that the community “must become more aware of our civic responsibilities.” Sixteen-year-old Sally Alfonso thought that the low self-esteem of Mexican-Americans was a barrier to participation but thought that the community should become more aware of how they were “very fortunate in being bilingual and bicultural.”<sup>39</sup> During the annual MAYC events, the future leaders of the Blowouts began to network. High school teacher Sal Castro served as a counselor at the

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<sup>36</sup> “Three Ways That Your Child’s Schooling Will Determine his Success in Life,” Foundation for Mexican-American Studies, October 1966, ELA-SCLSSR.

<sup>37</sup> Rabbi Alfred Wolf created the camp in 1952. Wolf served as president of the Los Angeles Human Relations Committee during the mid-1960s and made Hess Kramer available for black and Mexican youth conferences. Tom Tugend, “Rabbi Alfred Wolf: Summer Camp Pioneer, Dies at 88,” *Jewish Journal*, August 5, 2004.

<sup>38</sup> Tobias Kotzin Co. went public in 1972 and hit a sales volume of \$50 million in 1979 with a large profits made from the Angels Flight disco clothing line. Howard G. Ruben, “Tobias Kotzin Being Closed After 80 Years in Business,” *Daily News Record*, January 1988.

<sup>39</sup> Ruben Salazar and Mario T. Garcia, *Border Correspondent: Selected Writings, 1955-1970* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 113.

camp and helped articulate grievances of the Mexican-American community and proposed potential political strategies.<sup>40</sup>

During the mid-1960s governmental funding of Teenposts had created local spaces for youth activists to continue the work begun at the MAYC. While government programs created funding for youth spaces, Father John B. Luce offered the space of his church for youth organizing efforts. Luce was an outsider to the interfaith coalitions that supported county programs and this autonomy attracted a broad set of radical youth organizers. As the rector of the Church of the Epiphany, Luce brought community-organizing strategies to his parish, encouraged involvement in the civil rights movement, and challenged local cases of police brutality.<sup>41</sup> In the early 1960s, Luce, as the rector of a church in East Harlem, became involved with Saul Alinsky, and had first hand exposure to CORE student walkouts in New York City. He brought this knowledge and background to his Los Angeles parish.

The Church of the Epiphany became the home of a press that published the *East Los Angeles Gram*, a newsletter that featured local justice issues, and *La Raza*, a weekly newsletter that promoted the development of Chicano identity. *La Raza*'s staff initially included Raul Ruiz, Lydia Lopez, Fred Lopez, Elizer Risco and Joe Razo. Father Luce also sponsored work at the Social Action Training Center and programs at the YCCA's Eastside coffee house, The Piranya, on the corner of Olympic and Goodrich Blvd. The YCCA, soon to become the Brown Berets, managed The Piranya. Luce's support was a

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<sup>40</sup> Hector Galan, prd., *Chicano! The History of the Mexican-American Movement*, NLCC Educational Media, 1996.

<sup>41</sup> "Luce, Father John B., II," FBI Surveillance File, November 15, 1967, ELA-SCLSSR. This file indicates that Luce helped charter a bus for October 21, 1967, with members of the Black Panthers, Black Congress, Core, Black Students Union, Black Anti-Draft Unit and US.

key ingredient in providing resources and space that allowed youth organizations to remain nearly autonomous.

By the early 1960s, high school teacher Sal Castro recognized the ways in which public education in Los Angeles was stacked against Mexican-American youth and sought to personally change the educational milieu of East Los Angeles. In 1960, Castro had served as the Southern California chairman of Students for Kennedy and became very involved with Democratic Party politics. As a teacher at Belmont High School in 1963, he proposed a “Tortilla Movement” in which he helped Mexican-American students to run for student body government and encouraged them to use Spanish in their speeches to the chagrin of the school’s administration, which thought candidates should only speak in English.<sup>42</sup> In 1964, Castro suggested a field trip to the Music Center so that students could attend the Ballet Folklorico de Mexico. Nonetheless, both in 1964 and in 1966, Castro’s plans were canceled by the administration of the Los Angeles City Schools. In the summer of 1967, Castro presented his criticism of education in East Los Angeles to the United States Civil Rights Commission (USCRC) and used recently purchased social studies and history texts that failed to include any information on the contribution of Mexicans or Mexican-Americans as evidence. These texts corroborated with teachers and administrators who knew and cared little for Mexican culture and together created an educational culture in which Mexican-American had little room for

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<sup>42</sup> Myra Oliver, “Profile... What Sal Castro Has to Say About it All,” *Herald Examiner*, October 5, 1968, Sal Castro Box, History and Genealogy Department, Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter SCB-LAPL].

academic success. At the end of his presentation, Castro asked the commission how many more years would Mexican-Americans remain “America’s best kept secret.”<sup>43</sup>

During the winter of 1967, the East Los Angeles community supporting educational reform came together with the school board campaign of Julian Nava. Nava was a 39-year-old Harvard trained PhD and a professor of history at San Fernando Valley State College. Nava’s campaign for the third seat was against incumbent Charles Reed Smoot, a notorious fiscal conservative, red-baiter and segregationist. In his years on the School Board, Smoot disapproved the use of federal funding to aid schools in poverty areas and consistently voted down progressive school integration attempts. On January 15, 1967, the United Council of Community Organizations held a meeting in which thirty-six Mexican-American Organizations chose to endorse a single candidate, and after six hours and four ballots Dr. Julian Nava was selected to run for the Board of Education.<sup>44</sup>

During Nava’s campaign a callous *Time* magazine article titled “Pocho’s Progress” created uproar within the Mexican-American community. Beginning with the title, insulting ethnic slurs and misrepresentations about Mexican and Mexican-American culture provided a concrete example of prejudice experienced within American society. The article’s description of East Los Angeles as an exotic landscape in which “tawdry taco joints and rollicking cantinas, the reek of cheap sweet wine competes with the fumes

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<sup>43</sup> Sal Castro, “Schools and the Mexican-American Student” (speech, Committee on Education of the United States Civil Rights Commission, Lincoln High School, Los Angeles, California, June 8, 1967), ELA-SCLSSR.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of the Meeting of the United Council of Community Organizations, January 15, 1967, Julian Nava Collection, Special Collections, California State University Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California.

of frying tortillas.”<sup>45</sup> The multiple misrepresentations within the article offered activists a national stage in which to elaborate shared grievances. Locally, in the spring of 1967, KNXT broadcaster Clete Roberts met with Lincoln High School students to discuss Mexican-Americans within the civil rights movement. After the Blowouts, Lincoln vice-principal, John Childress, argued that Robert’s broadcast “Today Si, Manana No!” had fueled student militancy on campus.<sup>46</sup>

On Saturday, May 13, 1967, one hundred and fifty Mexican-American college students met at Loyola Marymount University to discuss the role of students in their schools and their communities. During the summer of 1967, students from the regional schools met together three times a month to draft constitutions for Mexican-American student organizations. The Mexican American Student Association (MASA) and the United Mexican American Students (UMAS) emerged from these summer meetings. In Southern California, this activity culminated in a UMAS sponsored convention held at USC on December 16 and 17, 1967. At the convention 200 Chicano student activists from around the state met to discuss militant politics, leadership strategies and education reform. In the late afternoon of the first day, those assembled decided to make an immediate public showing of their demands and more than 125 young Chicanos with picket signs paraded around the nearby Los Angeles Coliseum during a Rams-Colts football game. Like Watts, the activism at an Anglo event engendered a sense in participants that “Mexican Americans are alive, and we’re for Real Baby!”<sup>47</sup> A month later, UMAS members protested tuition increases at the University of California and

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<sup>45</sup> “Pocho’s Progress,” *Time*, April 28, 1967, 25.

<sup>46</sup> “Teachers Castigate School Trustees,” *Highland Park News Sunday Green Sheet*, March 31, 1968, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>47</sup> “Time for Studies & Statistic Over!” *La Raza*, December 25, 1967, 3.

California State Universities. The \$156 dollar increase was seen as adversely affecting “students from the economically underprivileged minorities” and could only be interpreted “as a blatant effort at suppression.”<sup>48</sup> Although Mexican-Americans represented 10 percent of the California population in this period, they comprised only 2 percent of the college population. In East Los Angeles, The Piranya began hosting “Educational Happenings,” events in which East Los Angeles youth could learn about the different educational opportunities and resources available to them.

On Mexican Independence Day, September 16, 1967, El Barrio Communications Project Editor Eliezer Risco and his staff published the first edition of *La Raza* magazine. *La Raza* was the central local media outlet that sought to contribute to and report on the potential radical politics of the Mexican-American community. As many of its contributors and readers were young people, much of its material focused on struggles of youth. On the first day, a front-cover political advertisement created by the YCCA and The Mexican American Action Committee, an organization of college students and professional young men from East Los Angeles, attacked Governor Ronald Reagan and argued that he had “worked actively against this community” through cuts to Medi-Cal and proposals to increase state college tuition and admission fees. Following editions included youth-related articles on police brutality of young people, the high rate of Mexican-American casualties in Vietnam, and the sorry state of schools in East Los Angeles. In the third edition of *La Raza*, the editors included an interview in English and Spanish with a returned Mexican-American Green Beret who expressed his personal experiences in Vietnam; his advice to East LA youth considering enlisting, “he should

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<sup>48</sup> “UMAS Protests Tuition,” *La Raza*, January 15, 1967, 1.

remain in school and complete his education. They should think hard. Remember, a live medal on a dead man is rarely worth the price.”<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, *La Raza* and later the *Chicano Student News* published material from the E.L.A. Writers Workshop, providing a forum for young people to publish editorials, stories and poems.

Young people were the creators, consumers and distributors of *La Raza* and its material endeavored to report on issues that were vital to East LA youth. In this way, the magazine created a forum for activists to organize discussions and by smuggling *La Raza* into the schools, promote a culture of Mexican-American youth solidarity.

*La Raza* magazine was highly critical of education associations such as the California Association of Educators of Mexican Descent (CAEMD), whose leadership supported segregationist Charles Reed Smoot over Julian Nava in their contest for the Los Angeles School Board. Editorialist “El Gavilan” sarcastically suggested the class difference between members of CAEMD and the East LA community limited change: “Perhaps it is too much to ask a group of educators to sit with community people to discuss something so vital as education; who knows, they might dirty their shirts.”<sup>50</sup>

In October 1967, Castro visited a joint United Mexican American Students (UMAS) and Mexican American Students Association (MASA) meeting and suggested that a walkout would effectively convey grievances to the Board of Education and more importantly encourage students to be active political participants.<sup>51</sup> Many members of the assembled bodies had been former Camp Hess Kramer participants and former students at East Los Angeles high schools. The students who participated were from UCLA,

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<sup>49</sup> “Interview with Green Beret; Entrevista Con Soldado Chicano,” *La Raza*, October 15, 1967 (second edition), 3.

<sup>50</sup> “El Gavilan: Chicano Educators—Where Are You?” *La Raza*, October 15, 1967, 2.

<sup>51</sup> Castro v. Superior Court, 9 C.A.3d 675, 681.

California State Los Angeles, San Fernando Valley State and ELAJC. In February, Castro contacted the UCLA chapter of UMAS and indicated that the high school student leaders were discussing organizing a walkout. University and college groups took responsibility for monitoring the walkout, providing logistical support, and making rally materials such as signs and flyers. Additionally, discussion with college student groups helped shape the high school students' future demands. Along with family and neighborhood ties, Mexican-American college-student organizations provided a direct connection between high school and college campuses.<sup>52</sup>

In the winter of 1967, non-student youth activists also began to organize in East Los Angeles against the abuses of the Los Angeles County Sheriffs Department. Youth activists from the Emperors, an East LA community protection organization led by Robert Trejo, and the YCCA protested the police beating of George Santoya at the Sheriff's Department on 3rd Street in East Los Angeles. On December 27, after the third demonstration, police officers invaded The Piranya coffee house. Violations of activists' constitutional rights by the authorities led to an increasing sense of militancy for the young Chicanos involved; in this period the YCCA led by David Sanchez and Carlos Montez, transformed into the Brown Berets. Neither Brown Beret was initially thought to be a radical; Sanchez was the former president of Mayor Sam Yorty's Advisory Commission on Youth and Montez was an assistant Teen Post director.<sup>53</sup> Whether by student or community activists, these public demonstrations foreshadowed the Blowouts of the coming year; unlike their adult community, Mexican-American youth in East Los

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<sup>52</sup> This was a common theme addressed by college student activists such as Moctezuma Esparza. See interview of Esparza in Galan, "The Schools," *Chicano!*

<sup>53</sup> Ruben Salazar, "Brown Berets Hail 'La Raza'".

Angeles had begun to demand immediate change to the everyday living conditions of young people in Los Angeles.

Organizers of the Blowouts represent a broad spectrum of Mexican-American youth. Leaders at Lincoln High School included class vice-president and cheerleader Paula Crisostomo and star athlete and senior class president Robert Rodriguez. For Rodriguez leadership was spontaneous and seen as a way to help prevent trouble. On the other hand, organizers at Garfield were the nonconformists of the student body. According to Garfield strike leader Juan (John) Ortiz, “Back then, people said you’d never go to college, never amount to anything, unless you were in the Knights or on the football team.”<sup>54</sup> At Garfield, the Blowouts created leadership opportunities for students like Ruben Gutierrez who was not recognized by administrators as a student leader.

Although Sal Castro had helped solidify and organize the recognized student leadership at Lincoln, it was the nonconformist youth of Wilson and Garfield who initiated the first school walkouts. It is important to note that Castro saw the Blowout as leverage to influence the Board and wanted to present the collected demands before any action was taken. Nonetheless, on Friday March 1, 1968, 300 Woodrow Wilson High School students left their classes at noon to protest the cancellation of a student production of Neil Simon’s “Barefoot in the Park” by the school’s principal Donald Skinner. According to Skinner, “I told the students I thought some of the language and material was in bad taste so I cancelled it.”<sup>55</sup> Skinner’s move may have precipitated the Blowouts. He had been “receiving rumors of proposed walkouts at schools in this area

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<sup>54</sup> del Olmo, “Blow Out.”

<sup>55</sup> “Students in Near-Riot at Wilson,” *Herald Examiner*, March 3, 1969, SCB-LAPL

ever since last week” but disregarded them because “the only other trouble we had was a rash of trash can burnings.” While a fight over the play could have been reduced to youthful defiance of authority, this conflict opened the door for students to demonstrate for broader demands, including lack of good counseling, bad food, and dilapidated facilities. As early as 1958, students at Wilson had attempted to remove the girls’ vice principal, Mrs. Goin, for discriminating against Mexican-American students and the walkout allowed students to restart this campaign. Furthermore, Wilson students had been promised a new campus for 12 years but school redevelopment had stalled as a result of bond failures, although new schools had been built in the Westside during the same period. During the Friday activities, the students assembled rallied outside of the school, many wearing a token walkout and “bare” foot pinned to their sweaters. Initially the police wanted to teargas the assembly but the principal was able to restrain the police and the day ended without much confrontation.<sup>56</sup>

The walkout at Wilson led to a spontaneous sympathy walkout of 2,000 students at Garfield, led by student organizers at noon on Tuesday, March 5, 1968. According to Sal Castro, “Garfield blew-out then because they were tired of waiting for the proposals to be printed up and issued, and circulates, and so forth, and so on. They wanted to act. Like I said, we adults act too slow for them, so they did, they blew-out.”<sup>57</sup> While the previous plan was to present demands to the board before the Blowouts, by Tuesday it was clear that in light of the “pre-mature” use of the walkout at Wilson and Garfield, the other East Los Angeles school would walkout in a show of unity. Nearly 5,000 students

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<sup>56</sup> “Wilson Walkout,” *Chicano Student Movement*, April 25, 1968, 2.

<sup>57</sup> Sal Castro interview by Juan Gomez, KPFK, March 14, 1968, transcribed by Marilyn S. Allen, May 17, 1968, 8, SCB-LAPL.

at Lincoln, Garfield and Roosevelt boycotted classes on Wednesday, March 6. While the situation remained non-violent at Lincoln, police attempting to disperse the demonstrations injured students at Garfield and Roosevelt. On Thursday, 2,000 students boycotted classes at Garfield and Belmont. With momentum gathering, a general walkout was called for Friday morning March 8, 1968. The Blowout concluded with students from Garfield, Belmont, Roosevelt, Lincoln and Wilson high schools rallying at Hazard Park. “There was a feeling that our time had come,” remembered Roosevelt student Kathy Ochoa. “In our small part of the world, we were going to force some type of change and some kind of equality.”<sup>58</sup> On Friday, March 8, 5,000 students met Edward Roybal and Board of Education members Julian Nava and Ralph Richardson at Hazard Park. While the students were welcomed to attend the Board of Education meeting on the following Monday, the student leaders of the Blowouts demanded that the Board hold its grievance meeting at one of the area high schools.

Thus, in less than a week, a spark caused by conflict over a play between students and administrators opened the airing of grievances and pushed into action a communal demonstration that many identify as a pivotal moment in the history of Mexican-American politics in Los Angeles. According to Garfield High School student Eddie Pardo, many of the students who participated in the Blowouts had little knowledge of the overall issues but as students within a system that disenfranchised many, these students saw the Blowout as a means for change and they “wanted to be in on what was happening.” An anti-authoritarian youth culture mixed with a racial critique of white authorities was the catalyst. “The walkout was the students’ bizarre retaliation to the

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<sup>58</sup> Elaine Woo, “’60s ‘Blowouts,’” *Los Angeles Times*, Monday, March 7, 1988, B1.

desperate pleas from his parents not to walkout, not to get in trouble.” Pardo continued, “The walk-out was a direct defiance of authority of the school administration that has used the antiquated methods of handling students.”<sup>59</sup>

While the spark at Wilson led directly to the Blowouts at five primarily Mexican-American schools, it also initiated walkouts at ten other Los Angeles schools. For example, a boycott at primarily black Jefferson High School began on Tuesday, March 5, over cafeteria conditions, but expanded on Wednesday to include protests directed toward restrictions on dress and hairstyle, the cultural insensitivity of teachers, and the need to hire more black counselors and administrators. At a Board of Education meeting on Thursday, March 7, Board member Reverend James Jones promised Jefferson students that a black administrator would be placed at Jefferson High School by the following Monday. The walkout continued throughout the week and on Friday teachers dismissed classes to hold a full-day faculty retreat. After the first week of demonstrations, Superintendent of Schools Jack Crowther tried to limit student demands by arguing that changes would “require huge outlays of funds” and were not economically viable as the school district was in a budget crisis.<sup>60</sup>

On Monday, March 11, 150 students of Venice High School walked out of their classes to express solidarity with other schools and to make demands for school facility improvement, better food, new dress codes and the right to smoke. Police declared an unlawful assembly, and after a struggle with the police twelve students were arrested. On

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<sup>59</sup> Eddie Pardo, “Walk Out,” *Bonds of Justice*, March 15, 1969, 3, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>60</sup> Jack McCurdy, “1,000 Walk Out in School Boycott,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 9, 1968, B1.

the following two days, over a thousand students boycotted classes.<sup>61</sup> Also on Monday, 300 white students left Hamilton High School in a sympathy strike. Speaking to the Board a white student activist from Marshall addressed black and Chicano student activists, “I go to one of those white schools. We got those new buildings you were supposed to get.”<sup>62</sup>

On the evening of the 11, over 500 parents and students attended a three-hour Board of Education meeting. At one point in the meeting, a throng outside the Board’s chambers attempted to gain entrance and were stopped by security guards and board member J.C. Chambers. For years Chambers and Charles Smoot, who had been replaced by Julian Nava, had joined together to block integration attempts and routinely voted to underfund poor and minority schools. By 1968, Chambers was the last segregationist on the Board and his symbolic last stand at the boardroom door barring the entrance of minority students and parents was captured by photographers. At this meeting the Board agreed to a number of the student demands, including a meeting at Lincoln High School and amnesty to the thousands of students who had boycotted classes since the previous Tuesday. While the student leaders recognized gains at the schools, many were frustrated by the increased police presence. Lincoln’s Robert Rodriguez responded by asking the Board to remove police officers from the campuses, “The board should ask the cops to clear out. We can’t have a special meeting until the police are removed.”<sup>63</sup> Rodriguez’s request was not approved. Another rousing moments occurred at the meeting, when Wilson High’s Peter Rodriguez waved his draft card as evidence that the Blowouts were

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<sup>61</sup> “Violence at Venice High for 2nd Day,” *Herald Examiner*, March 13, 1968, 1, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>62</sup> “High School Strike,” *Los Angeles Free Press*, March 15, 1968, 3.

<sup>63</sup> Jack McCurdy, “School Board Yields to Some Student Points in Boycotts,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 12, 1968, 1.

not communist inspired but was instead the collective activity of young American citizens.

A well-attended Board meeting occurred at Lincoln High School on March 26th. For this meeting, student demands were compiled by the Educational Issues Coordinating Committee, made up of Vahac Mardirosian, Oscar Acosta, Juan Gomez, and David Sanchez, and were divided into four sections; academic, administrative, facilities and student rights.<sup>64</sup> Student rights demands included the right for students to bring self-selected literature on campus, the right to invite non-student speakers to campus, reform of dress and grooming standards set by a parent and student committee, the elimination of pre-requisites for student body offices and the organization of campus security by students.<sup>65</sup> However, within the highly politicized nature of Board meetings, issues of student rights were glossed over in favor of securing amnesty for walkout participants. At the March 26 meeting, speaking as a representative for student leaders, Sal Castro asked, “You refused to do anything for Garfield with an enrollment of 3,700, too big for high school, but you gave Fairfax with 2,800, a new school. Why?” The board was unable to answer Castro’s charges that Westside schools got preferential treatment in building materials and equipment over Eastside schools. Although the demands of Blowout participants were many, Castro and the students quickly followed Castro’s comments on school funding inequities to demand guaranteed amnesty to all students involved in the Blowout. In a pivotal moment at the meeting, the Board re-affirmed amnesty for all

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<sup>64</sup> Ridgely Cummings, “School Board Hears Repetition of Demands at Lincoln Meeting,” *Eastside Journal*, March 28, 1969, 1; “Temporary Truce in School Row,” *Herald Examiner*, March 27, 1968, SCB-LAPL. David Sanchez of the EIC was a professor of mathematics at UCLA not the leader of the Brown Berets.

<sup>65</sup> Proposals made by High School Students of East Los Angeles to Board of Education, March, 1968, SCB-LAPL.

students involved but did not support a move by Julian Nava to send a copy of the amnesty motion to the District Attorney, Chief of Police and County Sheriff.<sup>66</sup>

The Blowouts changed the ways many East Los Angeles youth thought about Mexican-American culture, race and social movements. Following on the heels of the Blowouts, on April 29-21, 1968, the Los Angeles County Commission on Human Relations held its sixth annual Mexican-American Youth Leadership Conference at Camp Hess Kramer. While in earlier years the conference's program was designed to facilitate interracial youth leaders like those found in CORE, post-Blowout students were no longer interested in interracial movements and were for the first time very vocal in their criticisms of white racism. The collective struggle against the police and administrators during the Blowouts had forged a new sense of Chicano identity and unity. La Raza offered a collective identity in which students could express cultural pride and organize fights against white racism by all means necessary.<sup>67</sup>

After the Blowouts, Garfield students John Ortiz, Harry Gamboa, Margaret Cuaron and Cassandra Zacarias ran as Freedom Candidates for the leadership of the school, arguing that the administration "ignore, discourage, pushout, flunkout and drop the poor students who never were prepared by their grammar and junior high schools to participate in the high school education curriculum."<sup>68</sup> At Wilson, a student suspended for passing out Blowout material, Ruben Gutierrez, ran for president although he knew his "unofficial" candidacy would be invalidated by the administration. According to Gutierrez, participation in the Blowout and subsequent knowledge of his school's

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<sup>66</sup> "Board Hears Demands," *Eastside Journal - Belvedere Citizen*, March 28, 1968.

<sup>67</sup> "Camp Hess Kramer," *Chicano Student News*, May 18, 1968, 3

<sup>68</sup> "Garfield Blow-Out Committee Election Campaign," ELA-SCLSSR.

deficiencies compelled him to take responsibility for his school and community. An unidentified student at Belmont criticized the co-opted format of high school student government. This student argued, “We vote from a hand-picked list of smacks to elect a group that couldn’t do anything for us if it wanted to. And next semester we’ll still have cops on our campuses, and lousy food, and unbelievable dropout rates.”<sup>69</sup> Brown Beret leader David Sanchez framed the Blowouts as a result of lack of student representation and autonomy, “Student government is no good and there is no communication between the school and the community. The students have no say in the operation of the schools and the teachers tell Mexican-American students, ‘you have nothing to contribute.’”<sup>70</sup>

While the Blowouts politically activated the Chicano community, Los Angeles teachers also followed the students’ lead. On Friday, May 31, around 4,000 Los Angeles teachers participated in an education Blowout organized by the American Federation of Teachers. The teachers rallied to focus attention on the lack of funds for urban schools and argued that materials and courses of Mexican-American and African-American history and culture needed to be quickly implemented. The American Federation of Teachers used this demonstration to push for a school reconstruction program that would involve local communities, students and teachers in projects to better their schools.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> “Student Government,” *Chicano Student News*, May 18, 1968, 8.

<sup>70</sup> Roger Swanson, “Advocate Hell and You’ll All Burn,” *Sunday Green Sheet*, July 21, 1968, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>71</sup> “City Teachers to Get Plan for 1-Day Strike,” Los Angeles Times, May 25, 1968, 20; “L.A. Union Teacher Walk - Out Urged,” Los Angeles Sentinel, May 30, 1968, A4.

## **Blowouts and the Blowback**

These school children should be in school to learn, not teach. They have neither the knowledge nor the maturity to govern themselves, much less dictate school policy.<sup>72</sup>

While student activism in this period had its share of success, the young, nonwhite and poor students had three strikes against them, which provided the basis for conservative attacks against autonomous radical youth politics. Radical youth activity helped inspire and bolster the antiwar movement and the civil rights movement. But as a category for catalyzing political change youth was fragile, and the 1960s generation of activists were indebted to autonomy-generating conditions shaped by the interventions of an earlier generation of progressives. As political support and resources for these programs receded, with youth activism characterized as dangerous, in the 1970s and 1980s young people found fewer opportunities to participate in politics. Furthermore, student activists gained fewer crucial concessions, while administrators shuffled radical students from school to school or waited for a student's future expulsion or graduation. By the late 1960s, a resurgent and conservative rhetoric of authority and moral order emerged that sought to discipline young people who sought to politically challenge the institutional inequalities found in local schools and communities. At the same time, this rhetoric established that young people in the street were adults, and should be treated as such in any criminal proceedings.

In 1967, Bill Lane, columnist for the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, criticized the political and cultural backlash in the mainstream and white media against black youth. The attention to crime in the street, according to Lane, was "actually racial, in that they

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<sup>72</sup> Mr. and Mrs. K. D. Erhardt, "Blame for Truancy," *Los Angeles Times*, March 19, 1968.

connote the belief, to thousands of whites, that crime in the streets is caused and lived in mainly by Negroes.” To get elected, conservative politicians just needed to “tell the voters of white hue you’re gonna get rid of ‘crime in the streets.’” Lane continued by arguing that the average cop “never gets sent to the plush suburban home of the real manipulators.”<sup>73</sup> Instead, the lives of young black men became the target for law enforcement strategies and a politics of racial fear.

Individual reprisals against student and youth activists began soon after the Blowouts. On March 31, community leaders, the LAPD arrested Moctezuma Esparza, Cruz Olmeda, Eliezer Risco and Joe Razzo; policemen also ransacked the offices of *La Raza* and *Chicano Student News*. Next, police raided the home of Carlos Muñoz, the head of UCLA’s UMAS and officers arrested both Muñoz and Sal Castro. Charged with conspiracy, a \$12,500 bail was set for thirteen activists identified as Blowout agitators; curiously no arrests were made for organizers of the initial walkout at Wilson High School.<sup>74</sup> On Tuesday April 23, police charged Brown Beret leaders David Sanchez and Cruz Olmeda with disturbing the peace and a judge sentenced the leaders to jail for 60 days, although this was a first offense for both. During his time in jail, David Sanchez and other Beret leaders became more radical and began to advocate for social justice within prison. The principal of Wilson High School suspended Ruben Gutierrez because of his continued leadership of demonstrators after the walkout. The basketball coach at Lincoln High School refused to promote student leader and all-star athlete Robert Rodriguez to college scouts. Rodriguez lost multiple offers play basketball in college and

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<sup>73</sup> Bill Lane, “The Inside Story,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, September 14, 1967, B8.

<sup>74</sup> Ridgely Cummings, “Claim walkouts were ‘conspiracy’,” *Belvedere Citizen*, June 6, 1968, 1.

recruiters, who had once stated interest in signing the basketball star, told Rodriguez that college campuses already had too many militants.<sup>75</sup>

Although many promises were made to student activists in the late 1960s, by the early 1970s, it was clear that the problems of discrimination within the city schools remained. In fact, the combination of the maturation of a local conservative taxpayer culture, the Northridge earthquake, the decision to implement integration through busing, and the United Teachers of Los Angeles strike in spring of 1971, shifted attention away from youth activism.<sup>76</sup> The 1971 earthquake caused substantial damage to school buildings and this, coupled with declining tax revenues, led to closing of additional school facilities; the school district removed many of the original façades of the progressive era high schools in order to make school grounds safe from seismic danger and damage.<sup>77</sup> Furthermore, the policing of youth was invigorated by computerized data collection and in 1973 the LAPD developed an “Alpha File,” an extension of the County Juvenile Index, in which teachers, school administrators, probation officers, city Parks and Recreation Department officials and Rapid Transit District bus drivers could report on black youth who have been seen committing allegedly violent acts.<sup>78</sup>

The evolution of a framework that denied further autonomy to Mexican-American youth began to develop in response to the Blowouts. At the meeting at Elysian Park, members of the Board of Education, accompanied by councilman Edward Royball,

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<sup>75</sup> del Olmo, “Blowout.”

<sup>76</sup> For a discussion of the changing political climate see, Robert Gottlieb, Regina Freer, Mark Vallianatos and Peter Dreier, *The Next Los Angeles: The Struggle for a Livable City* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

<sup>77</sup> "Classrooms Closed in Six Schools, Fear New Earthquake Danger," *Belvedere Citizen*, March 25, 1971, 1.

<sup>78</sup> Robert Rawitch, “Suit Attacking Police File on Youths Voided,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 4, 1975, C1.

agreed that no student would be punished for participating in the Blowout. Although students involved in the Blowouts were given amnesty, on March 26, the Superintendent of Schools, Jack P. Crowther, announced that further walkouts would not be tolerated.<sup>79</sup> In response to the amnesty, many teachers complained that it had encouraged a lack of discipline in the schools, and forty-eight teachers at Roosevelt High School applied for transfer.<sup>80</sup> William Lambert, the acting executive secretary of the 18,000 members teachers union, stated that teachers were “upset by what appears to be a lack of direction by what appears to be a lack of direction by the Board. The teachers want to hear a clear policy with regard to classroom disruptions with discipline.”<sup>81</sup> Moreover, conservative taxpayer groups began to demonstrate against the Board of Education’s policies. On March 14, 1968, 12 members of the group Parents and Taxpayers of Westchester-Plaza del Rey staged a sit-in at the Board of Education. According to their chairman Joe Thompson, “We’ve had about enough of this jelly-spined, gutless School board. I just hope this (sit-in) calls attention to the vacillation of these gutless wonders who yield to every militant pressure group but never listen to law-abiding taxpayers.” On the co-optation of young people’s demonstration tactics, one demonstrator answered, “I guess we have all been squares . . . out of step with the times. So we have decided to adopt the ‘mod’ and effective methods of getting our way.”<sup>82</sup>

In the spirit of sensationalist journalism, on March 17, 1968, Dial Torgerson wrote in the *Los Angeles Times* that recent Mexican-American student activity was the

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<sup>79</sup> “Crowther Reiterates Stand on Protests,” *Angeles Mesa News-Advertiser*, April 4, 1968, 9, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>80</sup> Ed DeVere, “LA School Amnesty Under Fire,” *Evening Outlook*, March 29, 1968.

<sup>81</sup> Leslie E. Claypool, “Teacher Group Raps School Board Failure to Enforce Discipline,” *The News—Van Nuys*, March 29, 1968, SCB-LAPL.

<sup>82</sup> “Policy Changes Protested,” *Herald-Examiner*, October, 15, 1968, SCB-LAPL.

“the beginning of a revolution.” While this simplistic thesis, toying with the specter of an alleged cold war fifth column, seems ridiculous in hindsight, the late 1960s call for Brown Power did indeed blindside local and national political pundits. Torgerson reported that “with underground newspapers, cooperation with negro groups, plans for political action and economic boycotts, leaders say they will show the country a new type of Mexican-American: one proud of his language, his culture, his raza, ready to take his share of U.S. prosperity.” The article continued with a historical analysis that argued that whereas in the past Mexican-American “kid gangs” participated in “senseless warfare” for, turf these youth were now united in “one big gang.”<sup>83</sup>

A close examination of this period shows that neither Mexican-Americans nor the East Los Angeles community were united into one political front; many Mexican-American political groups promoted the path of assimilation and did not pose radical challenges to the ways Mexican immigrants and their children were acculturated into United States’ society and most often stationed within the working-class. During the Blowouts, many Mexican-American East Los Angeles high school students disagreed with Chicana/o activist student methods and complained about the disruption of classes and school activities. Nonetheless, the Blowouts and the emerging political power of Mexican-Americans represented a threat to the status quo of Los Angeles’s white leaders. Relying on past practices of age segregation, District Attorney Evelle J. Younger, a former FBI agent, Army intelligence officer and Superior Court Judge, brought conspiracy charges against adult collaborators in the Blowouts, a group of thirteen activists that included Sal Castro and college-aged organizers. Under the guise of

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<sup>83</sup> Dial Torgerson, “Start of a Revolution? ‘Brown Power’ Unity Seen Behind School Disorder,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 17, 1968, B1.

protecting students from radicalism, Younger sought to debilitate networks of Chicano activists by removing key organizers. The indictment of the Blowout 13 coincided with his re-election campaign.<sup>84</sup> At the outset, ACLU lawyer A. L. Wirin argued that suit was “an intentional and purposeful discrimination” against exclusively Chicano activists and that three non-Mexican adults, Reverend Vahac Mardirosian, Reverend George Cole and Al Ehrke had met with student walkout leaders before the Blowout, but were not included in the list of those charged.<sup>85</sup>

While the “one big gang” thesis supported fantasies of inevitable racial conflict, conservative media pundits were also quick to argue that the Blowouts had been the work of “outside agitators.” *Los Angeles Times* education writer Jack McCurdy portrayed the Blowouts as “student disorders” and focused on clashes between students and police rather than describing the students’ motivations and the actual circumstances faced by those students.<sup>86</sup>

Activists in East Los Angeles endeavored to diffuse claims that “outside agitators” were the cause of the blowouts. “The ‘outsiders’ are, in essence, college students from all the UMAS (United Mexican American Students) chapters in Los Angeles plus the Brown Berets.” The article in the *Chicano Student News* continued, “These are the .05 percent of the Mexican American students who are lucky enough to survive our high schools and graduate from college.”<sup>87</sup> “Mexican-American college students saw two paths, acculturation or activism, and members of UMAS pledged

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<sup>84</sup> Dave Larsen, “Timing of Arrest in School Walkouts Called Political,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1968, A1; Eric Malnic, “3 Supervisors Seem Assured of Reelection,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Suit Fight LA School Boycott Prosecutions,” *Evening Outlook*, August 24, 1968.

<sup>86</sup> Jack McCurdy, “Student Disorders Erupt at 4 High Schools; Policeman Hurt,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1968, 3.

<sup>87</sup> “Outisde agitators,” *Chicano Student News*, March 15, 1968, 3.

themselves to “bring home the knowledge and skills acquired in college to better the Chicano community.”<sup>88</sup> While it was more difficult to malign Chicano college students, television commentator George Putnam and Los Angeles Police Department community relation officers described the Brown Berets as “communists, junkies, hoodlums, paid by an alien power or gang.” When asked about the Blowouts, Governor Ronald Reagan responded that the troublemakers were “militant forces” that were bent on spreading dissent throughout the United States.<sup>89</sup> The staff of *Chicano Student News* wittily responded to these charges by reprinting pictures of Bobby Kennedy meeting with the Blowout committee with the caption, “Outside Agitator?”<sup>90</sup>

The organized assault on Castro and community activists sustained and further radicalized Chicano activism. In the summer of 1969, a coalition of students and parents staged a week long sit-in at the Board of Education to protest the suspension of Sal Castro; the sit-in concluded with the arrest of thirty-five demonstrators on October 2.<sup>91</sup> In its first newsletter in May 1968, UMAS described its members as “the avant-garde of the young Mexican American liberation movement.” UMAS was committed “toward instilling a consciousness and pride in our young, so that they will bring our people closer to a realization of racial equality, economic stability, political assertiveness, ethnic pride, and fair education which will provide the foundation for all these dreams.”<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, the death of Martin Luther King Jr., signaled to many a need to change

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<sup>88</sup> “UMAS comes homes,” *Chicano Student News*, March 15, 1968, 7.

<sup>89</sup> “Students Walk out of LA talks,” *Evening Outlook*, March 9, 1968, 3.

<sup>90</sup> “Bobbie Joins Blowout Committee,” photo, *Chicano Student Movement*, March 15, 1968.

<sup>91</sup> “Group Stays at School Board Office,” *Daily Signal*, September 28, 1968, SCB-LAPL; “Sit-in Concluded By Arrest of 35,” *Daily Signal*, October 7, 1968, SCB-LAPL. Those arrested included Brown Beret mother Alicia Escalante, Father John B. Luce, and Reverend Roger Wood.

<sup>92</sup> *UMAS Newsletter 1* (May 5, 1968): 1, Chicano Studies Resource Center, University of California, Los Angeles [hereinafter CSRC-UCLA].

tactics from the nonviolent strategies promoted by King. On April 4, 1968, Chicanos marched on the Board of Education to demonstrate for the acceleration of educational improvements for Eastside schools. For those present at the march, King's death seemed like a horrible wakeup call; they worried that peace-oriented civil rights activism was "wiped out by a white racist bullet."<sup>93</sup> Sadly, accompanying the effects of King's death on Chicano students, editors of *Chicano Student Movement* reprinted a telegram from Robert Kennedy that supported "fully and wholeheartedly your proposal and efforts to obtain better education." The editors suggested "that when Kennedy is president, we expect Federal troops on our side and then maybe these honkie racist L.A. cops and Sheriffs will get a few knots on their ugly heads."<sup>94</sup>

A week before his death, Robert F. Kennedy wrote that students in his campaign "have demonstrated to me that they believe in a special mission for their generation. They stir my conscience to tell the American people that the service America needs from its youth goes far beyond their military obligations"<sup>95</sup> Kennedy's assassination served as a second blow to local youth activists; they deemed him a leader who promised to champion the participation of American youth. Many Eastside Chicanos had put their hopes in Kennedy. His religion, support of Caesar Chavez, and willingness to campaign in East Los Angeles indicated that the federal government would in the future, like in school desegregation cases in the South, intervene and protect activists from local authorities. Nonetheless, unlike the death of his brother, which pushed civil rights legislation through Congress, Robert Kennedy's death was commemorated with the

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<sup>93</sup> Guadalupe Saavedra, editorial on Martin Luther King, Jr., *Chicano Student News*, April 25, 1968, 8.

<sup>94</sup> "Bobby Supports Students," *Chicano Student News*, April 25, 1968, 8.

<sup>95</sup> "Kennedy Gave View of Students' Spirit," *New York Times*, June 8, 1968.

passage of an omnibus crime bill; his assassination was a catalyst in getting the differences between House and Senate legislation adjusted and sent to President Johnson.<sup>96</sup> Hubert Humphrey's nomination as the Democratic Party presidential candidate over Eugene McCarthy, whose campaign was run by enthusiastic young people from around the country, demonstrated the limits of youth political power in a period in which adults were increasingly suspicious of the culture and politics of the younger generation. Southern California sustained a conservative suburban law and order populism that underscored the social distancing produced by suburbanization and hyper segregation. This, coupled with fears of an anarchistic, nonwhite, and immoral youth culture became the grounds from which to mobilize voters around conservative platforms in the late 1960s.

On November 8, 1968, thirteen-year-old student Salvador Barba was hospitalized after being beaten by the police. The community responded by picketing the Hollenbeck police station. Whereas many earlier protests against police brutality had only attracted young activists, this case brought together a broad range of community members including many parents. Barba's case coincided with the beating of Jess Dominguez, a parent who sought police assistance to locate his children after a dance and received a rough handling instead. These attacks on ordinary families framed Carlos Vasquez question, "How many of you have seen your father beaten, your mother insulted, and your brothers and sisters punched and choked? How many of you don't want to see it ever?"<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> John H. Averill, "House Rejects Futher Delay on Crime Bill," *Los Angeles Times*, June 6, 1968, 8.

<sup>97</sup> Carlos Vasquez, "Letter," *Chicano Student Movement*, November 1968, 3.

Following a year of struggle after the Blowouts, Julian Valasco Jr. wrote, “the accomplishments of our culture, our art, our literature have consistently been forgotten or downgraded by the Anglo establishment.” La Raza became the means through which to reverse the cultural abuse by white culture; through La Raza young Latina/os could find pride in their past and thereby work for a greater future. The terms La Raza and Chicana/o provided means to express an alternative cultural and racial identity of the Mexican American as a distinct racial inheritor of the new world and simultaneously a fusion of Mexican and American cultures; this identity worked to organize individuals for communal solidarity and radical activism. In the beginning of 1969 and in response to the articulation of new ethic identities, many UMAS and MASA organizations took on the new name MEChA, Movimiento Estudiantil Chicano de Aztlan.<sup>98</sup>

Many feared that race-based identity politics such as La Raza would distance activists from each other within the broader civil rights movement, but student activities at Los Angeles City College indicated the opposite: student groups representing ethnic and racial minorities promoted inter-group co-operation. By the winter of 1968, the Black Student Union (BSU) and UMAS worked together to promote an ethnic curriculum to LACC’s administration. Antiracism was one of the central goals of the UMAS chairman: “to get rid of all the funny little Anglo hang ups. Some of our own people are becoming racists—bad mouthing Black people and people from Mexico.”<sup>99</sup>

As 1969 began, a multiracial aggregation of student activists under the banner of the Third World Liberation Front took over San Francisco State College and demanded

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<sup>98</sup> UMAS Newsletter, *San Bernardino Valley College* 1.2 (April 7, 1969), CSRC-UCLA.

<sup>99</sup> Sandy Ornelas, “UMAS Chairman States Philosophy,” *Machete*, February 18, 1969, 1.

the formation of a ethnic studies program including a diverse ethnic studies curriculum, research agenda and faculty. Additionally, students argued that they should have a say in hiring and admission decisions. Nonetheless, the mass media boiled down the students' demands to one issue, the rehiring of Black Panther George Murray who had served as a temporary lecturer on campus. This simplification enabled Governor Reagan and his handpicked SFSC college president, S. I. Hayakawa, to portray the BSU, SDS and Third World Liberation Front students involved as "bearded, barefoot, dirty, ungrateful... radical revolutionaries."<sup>100</sup> Within this struggle to secure more educational resources, activists became the target for a reactionary representational politics that merged the militant, the countercultural dropout and the minority student activist. Within this framework, the activities of student activists were detached from the long struggle for civil rights. Deliberately ignoring demands for racial equality, Reagan maligned students by framing them as naughty and dangerous children. At the height of campus activity, at the behest of president Hayakawa law enforcement from the surrounding communities stormed the campus and arrested over 700 people on protest-related charges. In the spring of 1969, Reagan sent a letter to the United States Congress that asked that all federal aid be cut to students disrupting classes. In Sacramento, more than 70 campus control bills were floated in the State Legislature. California State Senator John L. Harmer (R-Glendale) argued that his support for stricter measures was predicated on the need to "control the activity of the radical militant revolutionaries who are seeking to use our campuses as a sanctuary to bring chaos to our society."<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> *Herald Examiner*, January 24, 1969.

<sup>101</sup> "Education-Hardened View Toward Unrest," *Los Angeles Times*, March 23, 1969, F5.

Locally, the police and school administrators also sought to limit the power of student activism. On Friday March 7, 1969, the police used batons to club and clear two hundred teenagers staging a sit-in at the administration building at Carver Junior High School. Five female students were hospitalized.<sup>102</sup> The sit-in began in response to the arrest of Joseph Jones, a BSU leader at Southwestern College, who had come to Carver seeking support for BSU demands at his school.<sup>103</sup> In response to charges of police brutality Police Chief Tom Reddin argued that militants were turning schools into an “urban battlefield.”<sup>104</sup> The Black Students Alliance called for a strike of all South Los Angeles schools on account of the police takeover of Carver. The BSA delivered to Mayor Yorty a list of demands, including the removal of police officers from school grounds, the local control of schools, improved black studies, community managed administrators and security guards, and open campuses.<sup>105</sup> Demonstrations against the LAPD’s actions at Carver commenced at 18 campuses across southern California, and both Carver and Manual Arts High School were shut for days. At LACC the 17-member student council authorized a demonstration protesting police brutality, and as police attempted to control the demonstration students erected barricades on campus.

By 1969, the Los Angeles Board of Education also began taking a tougher stance in its relationship to student activism. Two new conservative members, Dr. Donald Newman and Richard Ferraro, won seats. Although activists successfully organized

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<sup>102</sup> Prophetically, high school teacher Richard Arthur described explosive conditions, including overcrowded classrooms, drugs, gambling and Molotov cocktails, at Jefferson High School to the Board of Education the night before the Carver incident. Jack McCurdy, “Jefferson High Teacher’s Diary Tells of Vandalism and Chaos,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1969, 3.

<sup>103</sup> Robert Rawitch, “9 Junior High Students Seized as Sit-in Erupts Into Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 8, 1969, A1.

<sup>104</sup> “The State: Education—Week of Violence,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 16, 1969, 5.

<sup>105</sup> John Kumbula, “Black Student Strike Endorsed by Parents,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 10, 1969.

demonstrations at over a dozen South Los Angeles schools in 1969, the Board was reluctant to give any concessions. Whereas the Board had once validated student activity by creating a forum to discuss grievances, the political will of the Board began to align with administrators and teachers who demanded greater discipline and security in the schools.<sup>106</sup> In mid-October 1969, Jefferson High School's student walkouts over police presence at a high school football match led to the closure of the campus.<sup>107</sup> Dexter Henderson, student body president, claimed that the number one problem at Jefferson was that police parade around the campus and in effect created an environment not conducive to learning. Whereas in the aftermath of the Blowout, the Board of Education offered to visit an East Los Angeles campus, the newly constituted Board refused student requests for a meeting at Jefferson High School.<sup>108</sup>

The changing attitude of the Board also reflects the fact that the local media began to explain school walkouts as connected; every concession to students had the effect of inducing other groups to seek equal rights and resources. For example, when black students at Carver Jr. High School walked out to defend their right to have a Black Student Union on campus, students at Roosevelt demanded that its principal reinstate its UMAS chapter. Principal Thomas Dyer had suspended UMAS because its members had acted in concert with other regional chapters and had staged a sit-in. In response to the discrepancy in treatment, Ruben Salazar quoted at length in an article in the *Chicano Student Movement* wrote, “Chicanos can learn from our black brothers, we must learn

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<sup>106</sup> Kafka, “Sitting on a Tinderbox.”

<sup>107</sup> Chuck Porter, “Tension Mounts At Jeff High, School Closes,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 18, 1969, A1.

<sup>108</sup> “Jefferson High Problems Aired at Stormy Board Meet, Claims Made,” *Los Angeles Sentinel*, October 23, 1969, A1; “Jefferson High to Stay Closed as Talks on Problems Continue,” *Los Angeles Times*, October 15, 1969, A1.

how to fight effectively for what we want. We have to get ourselves together in high school UMAS and in the community and become strong enough in our unity that ‘the man’ will see and be afraid.”<sup>109</sup> Whereas schools had at one time operated as isolated units of social control, the youth culture of the period channeled calls for change. Even liberal organizers of Camp Hess Kramer argued that it was no longer possible to have a “safe” conference because “militant teenagers” could articulate their message so well that “average” youths became quickly involved in struggles for social justice.<sup>110</sup>

In this period, the Brown Berets faced constant harassment by the LAPD. Historian Edward Escobar and sociologist Rona Fields have described the dialectical relationship between militants in the Chicano movement and the police; as the police worked to break apart the movement by ensnaring the leadership in legal battles, the LAPD’s repressive tactics legitimized the Chicano movement within the broader community.<sup>111</sup> In May of 1969, the Brown Berets began publishing their own newsletter, *La Causa*. Although the high school membership in the Berets was minimal before the walkouts, afterwards Brown Beret Student Organizations (BSSO), “not an on campus recognized Mickey Mouse school club,” formed at Roosevelt, Garfield, Lincoln, Washington and El Monte high schools.<sup>112</sup> The BSSO objectives were to fight for educational reform, get Chicanos to run for school office, and observe law enforcement agencies in the schools. Borrowing from the language of the counterculture, the Brown Berets thought that the local youth culture was “caught up in the psychotic madness of

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<sup>109</sup> Ruben Salazar, “Chicanos Told to Fight Like Blacks for Respect,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 9, 1969, B3.

<sup>110</sup> Ruben Salazar, “Latin Youths Take a Hard Look at Life,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 13, 1969, D17.

<sup>111</sup> Edward J. Escobar, “The Dialectics of Repression: The Los Angeles Police Department and the Chicano Movement, 1968-1971,” *The Journal of American History* 79.4 (March 1993): 1483-1514.

<sup>112</sup> Grace Reyes, “Brown Beret Student Organization,” *La Causa*, May 23, 1969, 2.

materialistic hang ups and competition.”<sup>113</sup> “Plastic” commercial experiences hid the fact that the actual freedom of the Chicano community was severely limited by constant police observation and harassment.

While much of the police harassment was overt, by the spring of 1969, *La Causa* documented the LAPD’s attempted infiltration of both the Wilson High School Blowout committee and the Brown Berets by one Robert Avila, a 23 year-old police officer.<sup>114</sup> While Avila failed to infiltrate the Berets, Fernando Sumaya, also from the LAPD, joined the group, provided bomb-making material and provoking members to commit criminal acts.<sup>115</sup>

The infiltration of the Berets proved disastrous for Chicano activists. On April 24, 1969, at the Nuevas Vistas Conference on Mexican-American education, leaders of UMAS planned a demonstration to take place during Governor Reagan’s address on Mexican-American education. When Reagan began to speak, the assembled demonstrators stood up and tried to verbally encourage other audience members to walkout. However, concurrent to the demonstration, the Berets under the direction of Sumaya attempted to start fires in the hotel. Conference security quickly rounded up both Berets and UMAS supporters and this unfortunate timing allowed the manager of the Biltmore Hotel to claim that all involved, Berets and UMAS supporters, were anarchists.<sup>116</sup> Afterwards, UMAS and supporters struggled with the help of Julian Nava

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<sup>113</sup> “Cruising Whittier Blvd.” *La Causa*, May 23, 1969, 7.

<sup>114</sup> “Robert Avila is a Traitor, Vendido, and Dog,” *La Causa*, May 23, 1969, 5.

<sup>115</sup> Lorraine Escalante, “Establishment Tactics,” *La Causa*, September 19, 1969, 2; Ernesto B. Vigil, *The Crusade for Justice: Chicano Militancy and the Government’s War on Dissent* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 150.

<sup>116</sup> Ruben Salazar, “Hotel Manager and Nava Differ on Arrests During Reagan Talk,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 26, 1969, B1.

to distance themselves from the Berets; Sumaya and the LAPD successfully drove a wedge between college activists and militant working-class youth groups. As a result of Sumaya's actions, the police arrested nine Berets for the attempted arson at the Biltmore Hotel.<sup>117</sup> In less than a month, law enforcement officers arrested two more Berets for allegedly setting fire a Safeway Supermarket on May 10, 1969, although there was scant evidence connecting the two Berets to the arson.<sup>118</sup>

On May 22, 1969, without search warrants, plain-clothed LAPD officers raided the Beret headquarters, confiscated material and arrested two members. This raid led to the eviction of the organization from their headquarters on East Olympic Boulevard. Nonetheless, with help from the Ford Foundation, David Sanchez and the Berets' opened the East Los Angeles Free Clinic, featuring free medical, social and psychological services to Mexican-Americans, on May 31. On August 19, 1969, at a preliminary hearing for Ralph Ramirez, arrested during the May raid, officers accused Lorraine Escalante and a handful of members who came to view the proceedings of assault, interference and resisting arrest.<sup>119</sup> LAPD attacks on the Berets mired the organization and legal battles and reduced their ability to organize. Although lawyer Oscar Zeta Acosta, like the defendants in the Chicago 7 Trials, was able to turn many of the Beret trials into publicity stunts that highlighted the racist nature of the LAPD and the court system, the trials lasted for years and entangled activists in continuous legal proceedings.

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<sup>117</sup> Ron Einstoss, "Hotel Fire Indictments Reveal Heroism of Rookie Policeman," *Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 1969, A1.

<sup>118</sup> Rodolfo Acuña, *A Community Under Siege: A Chronicle of Chicanos East of the Los Angeles River, 1945-1975* (Los Angeles: Chicano Studies Research Center, Publications, University of California at Los Angeles, 1984), 217.

<sup>119</sup> Lorraine Escalante, "Establishment Tactics."

## Conclusion

I've never met personally with a militant I didn't like.<sup>120</sup>

Two years after the Blowouts, in March of 1970, hundreds of students boycotted classes at Roosevelt High School because many of the demands from 1968 had not been met. Five hundred students gathered on the free speech area on campus, the campus football field, and listened to the unfulfilled demands that included better classroom materials, fresh food in the cafeteria and the right invite outside speakers to the campus free speech area. Although the demonstration was peaceful, a tactical squad of the LAPD was called to clear the football field and this resulted in the arrest of thirty-eight students.<sup>121</sup> While the police had been involved in the Blowouts, the swift response of the LAPD to the March 1970 activities, within a free speech area the students had an express right to control, exemplifies how unsuccessful students had been in removing police officers from campus—the Blowouts had the unintended consequence of training the LAPD how to deal quickly with high school activists identified as militants.

The American invasion of Cambodia, and the killing of students at Kent State and Jackson State College in the spring of 1970, directed youth activism away from school reform. Nationwide student strikes against the Vietnam War involved more than 4 million college students and pushed the Nixon Administration to establish a Presidential Commission on Campus Arrests. While the Nixon Administration focused on the

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<sup>120</sup> Rudy DeLeon interview, 6.

<sup>121</sup> “37 at Roosevelt High Protest Rally Arrested,” *Los Angeles Times*, March 7, 1970, A3.

activities of student radicals, the communal momentum from the Blowouts created the groundwork for the Chicano Moratorium in East Los Angeles.<sup>122</sup>

The Chicano Moratorium has been described as “the largest and most significant action of any oppressed nationality in the U.S. against the war in Vietnam.”<sup>123</sup> On Saturday August 29, nearly 30,000 participants marched in the National Chicano Moratorium peace rally in East Los Angeles. At the end of the march, thousands assembled at a rally at Laguna Park.<sup>124</sup> On a corner of the demonstration, a couple of young people thought that a local store was handing out free soft drinks. The storeowner tripped a silent robbery alarm and the police came to investigate but released all suspects because they had paid for their drinks. However, as seen in the sixth chapter, confrontations between young people, merchants and the police often led to violent struggles and some members of the crowd began throwing rocks at the police. As a result of the peripheral conflict, the demonstration was labeled an unlawful assembly, the crowd was told to disperse and after five minutes the police tear-gassed the park. The demonstrators reacted by taking the demonstration to Whittier Boulevard where police clashed with young people who began to loot stores.<sup>125</sup>

Within the chaos of the day, Ruben Salazar, a well known Mexican-American journalist from East Los Angeles who wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* and served as the news director for KMEX—was slain by the police at the Silver Dollar Café. A teargas canister deliberately fired into the restaurant where he sat at the bar drinking a beer hit

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<sup>122</sup> Juan Gómez-Quiñones, *Chicano Politics: Reality and Promise, 1940-1990* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1990), 124.

<sup>123</sup> Fred Halstead, *Out Now! A Participant’s Account of the Movement in the United States Against the Vietnam War* (New York: Monad Press, 1978), 574.

<sup>124</sup> “48 Hurt in Riot at Peace Rally on Coast,” *New York Times*, August 30, 1970, 64.

<sup>125</sup> “L.A. Police Seal Off Chicano Riot Area,” *The Washington Post, Times Herald*, August 31, 1970, A4.

him in the back of the head and instantly killed him.<sup>126</sup> Salazar's death enraged community members and felt like a conspiracy, since he had been actively investigating police malpractice. At the end of the day, 185 people were arrested and the community sustained more than a million dollars in damages. Conditioned by Watts, the police staged an immediate military takeover of Whittier Boulevard and quickly suppressed riots that began in the Mexican-American community in Wilmington.<sup>127</sup>

After the Chicano Moratorium, national media outlets began to cover the political activity of the Chicano community in greater detail. In a *New York Times* article exploring Chicano politics, Joe Razzo, editor of *La Raza*, argued that his newspaper was a vehicle for promoting a better self-image of Chicanos and specifically Chicano youth. He explained that many Chicano leaders saw the school as the primary venue for what Carlos Muñoz called cultural assassination. Razzo proposed that "we can respect our teachers but we can also criticize them. We have to learn to talk back to authority." While schools were one half of the equation, the police represented the other visible source of authority in the community. "The police have adopted the policy of pre-emptive strike," claimed UCLA lecturer Manuel Aragon. "They see the organization and militancy that's developing in this community and they are determined not to let it get as strong as the black movement has become."<sup>128</sup>

In January 1971, Rosalio Muñoz, the organizer of the Chicano Moratorium recounted the historical relationship between Chicanos and the police in the *Los Angeles*

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<sup>126</sup> Escobar, "The Dialectics of Repression," 1484-1485.

<sup>127</sup> Doug Suit and Don Sheibe, "Rioting Spreads to Wilmington: Vandals Set Fires, Smash Windows, East L.A. Quiet," *Los Angeles Times*, August 31, 1970, 1.

<sup>128</sup> Steven V. Roberts, "Mexican-American Hostility Deepens in Tense East Los Angeles," *New York Times*, September 4, 1970, 20.

*Times*. Muñoz's description included the U.S. Army's occupation of the Southwest, the deportation of over 300,000 Mexican-Americans during the Great Depression, and the LAPD's collaboration with rioting servicemen during assaults on Mexican-American youth during the Zoot Suit Riot in 1943. To Muñoz, the police's response to Chicano peace protests was no different than earlier regimes of racial oppression; "U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war had resulted in a severe overrepresentation of Chicano deaths-in effect depriving the Chicano community of its future youth resource."<sup>129</sup> Muñoz described the role of the police in East Los Angeles as maintainers of racial and class status quo; young Chicanos seeking greater participation and expanding opportunities in American life had to confront police officers daily. Muñoz argued, "We desperately wish to be a part of this society but your powerful sentry repeatedly send us away bleeding. We are now directly protesting against the sentry." Although Chicanos began to have a greater voice in the national media, this did little to effectuate a new relationship between either the LAPD and the County's Sheriff's Department. Two weeks after Muñoz's article, at a six month commemoration of the death of Ruben Salazar at Belvedere Park, a conflict between police and activists occurred, and police arrested 49 demonstrators.<sup>130</sup>

The East Los Angeles Blowouts of 1968 occurred at a moment when an emergent ethnic identity coalesced with forces that encouraged autonomous student leadership. Government programs, radical clergy, sympathetic local media and politicians, and innovative educators encouraged the creation of a political subculture of young Chicana/o activists. Generational identity created a means for young people to break from the past

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<sup>129</sup> Rosario Muñoz, "The Public Speaks Out: Chicanos and the Police," *Los Angeles Times*, January 23, 1971, B4.

<sup>130</sup> Ron Einstoss, "Charges Files Against 49 in East L.A. Riot," *Los Angeles Times*, February 5, 1971, A21.

and argue for the creation of new communities and cultures. However, as agents of the “fifth estate,” young people were never in control of the popular representation of youth or ethnicity. As conservatives worked to suppress youth activism, young people’s response was most often to demonstrate against this suppression, thereby confirming public suspicions that the encouragement of youth activism only led to great demands for autonomy. Unfortunately, without direct access to the mass media, each attempt to redress grievances fed into furthering the discourse of dangerous and militant youth.

## **Chapter Eight**

### **Conclusion: The Politics of Youth Culture**

In 1970, Palisades High School student Eve Goldberg worked to organize students from across Los Angeles high schools into a political organization called the Westside High School Liberation Front. From Goldberg's records it appears that meetings were very sporadic, and attendance ranged from seven to forty-five participants. A majority of those present were high school students, although a few college students also attended meetings. Included in Goldberg's records is a short imaginative piece titled "Governor Reagan Attacked by Pali High Communists." In this story, the author imagines a direct confrontation between conservative Governor Ronald Reagan and electric guitar-swinging and tomato-throwing high school revolutionaries, which ends with the firebombing of the school gym by the California National Guard and the total annihilation of the student body.<sup>1</sup>

This anecdote does not mean that members of the Westside Front proposed violent methods as did the Weathermen; in fact, the group's activities were far less dramatic. For the most part, their goals mirrored civil rights platforms of East L.A. student activists during the Blowout. But Goldberg's papers also indicate that the struggle to liberate women and increase sexual freedom had become central platforms of high

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<sup>1</sup> "Governor Regan Attacked by Pali High Communists," Eve Goldberg High School Radicalism and the Red Tide Collection, Southern California Library for Social Studies Research, Los Angeles, California [hereinafter EGC-SCLSSR].

school radicals. Furthermore, across her notes, the handwritten marginalia consist of statements such as “Close the School – It’s Bad for Our City,” “No More Orders,” and “Fuck School,” suggesting the emergence of an anarchist youth subculture within Los Angeles’s middle-class Westside schools. These slogans and political agendas would find common ground with the growing punk scene in Hollywood that flourished in the late 1970s.<sup>2</sup>

On November 1, 1971, this anarchist youth subculture surfaced with the first issue of the student underground paper *Red Tide* at University High School. Issues included content such as critiques of the school’s relationship to the military and police, student organizing strategies, self-defense techniques for women, diagrams of sexual organs, contraception information, and a gay rights forum. Because of the paper’s criticism of the school and its liberal attitude toward sex and drug use, the administration suspended four student staff members. In response to a second round of suspensions, on March 14, 1972, over six hundred students occupied the school’s administration building, demanding that the school revoke the suspensions and allow *Red Tide* to be distributed on campus. These struggles continued throughout the early 1970s, and in 1974, parents of *Red Tide* staffer Susie Bright supported a legal challenge to the school’s suppression of an unofficial student paper. By that time, *Red Tide* was being distributed throughout the city. In December 1976, the California Supreme Court decided in favor of *Red Tide*.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, by the late 1970s, *Red Tide* was divorced from its high school affiliation,

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<sup>2</sup> Spitz and Mullen, *We’ve Got the Neutron Bomb*.

<sup>3</sup> Bright v. Los Angeles Unified Sch. Dist. , 18 Cal.3d 450, 1976.

and its staff packed up and moved to Detroit in order to participate in new political campaigns.<sup>4</sup>

From the members of the Star and Crescent Society at the start of the 20th century to the staff of *Red Tide* in the 1970s, intimately bonded groups of young Angelinos, identified by subcultural practices, built an autonomous youth culture in Los Angeles. Rather than being solely subjects of social control projects and marketing devices, young people organized into subcultural groups have constantly challenged and expanded the cultural and social life of their city. Young Angelinos united around a range of pursuits, including civic participation, labor solidarity, automotive customization, rock ‘n’ roll, and dancing. However, this is not simply an L.A. story: during the 20th century, groups of young Americans in metropolitan centers across the nation acted as a fifth estate, playing critical roles in progressive political and cultural change.

While young people’s groups were often the source of local innovations, many of these developments were highly influenced by the state and the market. Negotiations between young people, youth authorities, and corporate interests were often subtle; much of the period reviewed in this dissertation was marked by mundane practices of accommodation. However, in other periods, re-alignments between young people, authorities, and the market led to new alliances and dramatic periods of market co-optation, parental outrage, and youth rebellion. The struggle over the rights of youth pushed the evolution of local youth culture and, in pivotal events such as the Zoot Suit Riot and the Watts Uprising, transformed national culture.

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<sup>4</sup> “Key Red Tide Dates, 1971-1981,” EGC-SCLSSR.

“Cruising for Community” argues that struggle over youth culture in Los Angeles was at the cutting edge of national trends because of the rapid developments of the city’s sprawling suburbs and powerful entertainment industry. The city’s sprawl encouraged young people’s desires for mobility and subcultural appropriation of suburban landscapes in activities such as hot rodding, lowriding, surfing, and skateboarding. Whereas many city planners and politicians thought that metropolitan design would contain youth populations, historical evidence proves otherwise. Moreover, because of its position at the center of the nation’s entertainment industry, Los Angeles’s local struggles over the shape of youth culture often had national significance. A few Angelinos working as middlemen were able to co-opt particular aspects of local youth culture and make extraordinary profits on a national level. The practice of co-optation exploited subcultural labor and obscured the roots of youth cultural innovation. Young Angelinos were aware of this practice, and a critique of mass consumer co-optation became central to the search for authenticity within the counterculture of the 1960s.

In addition to tracing the local development and national significance of Los Angeles youth culture, “Cruising for Community” has also sought to understand the ways in which young Angelinos have historically claimed the status of “youth” to create a more just community. At the beginning of the 20th century, middle-class high school students were expected to become full civic participants upon graduation, and thus, being categorized as youth was a promise of their acceptance rather than a limit to their potential. As the century progressed and the increasing wealth of the middle class allowed parents to support their children through college years, the boundaries of who counted as “youth” shifted. Additionally, as the discussion of Boys’ Week and the GI Bill

reveals, a myriad of institutions supported white middle-class boys as the representation of youth leadership. This positioned white middle-class boys in roles that allowed them to act as appropriating middlemen between subcultures and mass culture. The exclusion of women, the working class, and non-whites, however, engendered resistance, contributing to the creation of autonomous identities and alternative sources of leadership.

As middle-class youth adapted to increasing wealth, Los Angeles's female, working-class, and non-white young people struggled to claim the benefits of more privileged youth. In claiming youth status as universal, many of these struggles were successful in winning concessions from authorities and general acceptance by the middle class. However, as seen in the Blowouts, any movement for substantial structural challenges based on the politics of youth was fragile and open to suppression by authorities. Nonetheless, the histories of these social movements continue to have consequence, as relationships and identities formed in these struggles often led activists to life-long careers as progressive adult leaders of young people.

“Cruising for Community” examines the role of young people in reshaping the United States in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While many popular narratives characterize young people as representatives of distinct generational identities, throughout this dissertation the evidence has indicated a continuity of intergenerational collaborations and intra-generational divisions. Rather than being a history of antagonistic generational clash, the activities of young Americans have been often organized around the search for identity, belonging, and community. In Los Angeles, these activities were routed by the space of the city and often occurred in commercial public spaces. Therefore, even utilitarian

spaces such as parking lots, and lifeless topographical features such as the dry lakes, became youth cultural destinations in which young people sought to forge less regulated relationships. And at certain moments, these spaces and local youth culture offered the opportunity for young people to interact and collaborate across class, race, ethnic, and gender lines.

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