

Today, the disproportionately high representation of young people of color in the armed forces, and particularly in high-risk assignments, has not likely gone away—indeed, the elimination of a universal draft and the tacit, socioeconomic conscription that accompanies a “volunteer” military may have caused the armed forces to be less white than ever before. It is clear from anecdotes about immigrants in the military that there are some for whom the dream of substantiating a claim to citizenship through willing military sacrifice is still very real. It may be that we will again have the tragic opportunity to revisit one of the core questions in the book: do disproportionate casualties sustained by a particular group signal exceptional bravery and commitment or victimization? And, in either case, do these casualties support a claim to full citizenship in this country?

How the cultural politics of identity and identification with competing nationalisms or other lines of affiliation play out in the new social formation remains to be seen. Those interested in seeing can attune their eyes by picking up Oropeza’s thought-provoking book.

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LOS ANGELES AND THE FUTURE OF URBAN CULTURES: A *Special Issue of American Quarterly*. Edited By Raúl Homero Villa and George J. Sánchez. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2005. 357 pp. \$19.95 paper.)
Reviewed by Allison Varzally.

The compelling question that engages the contributors to *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures*, a special issue of the *American Quarterly*, inspired by the journal’s recent relocation to the University of Southern California, is “How, in other words, can we best know this place called Los Angeles?” (p. 3). The answers offered suggest not only the affection of authors from a range of disciplinary backgrounds for the Pacific Coast city and the maturation of Los Angeles studies but a concern for the interplay between the particular and general, the local and global. The authors do not gaze upon Los Angeles from the lofty heights of central city skyscrapers, police helicopters, or the Malibu Hills. Nor do they treat L.A. as the creation of disconnected and abstracted economic and political forces. Alternatively, their L.A. is an inhabited city where diverse groups actively engage with capitalism and globalization. They look upon the global city from a variety of grounded sites—art galleries, dance clubs, streets, parks, housing developments, freeway underbelly—where “the everyday problems and promise of urban life are played out” (p. 3). Thanks to the proliferation and recognition of Los Angeles-based studies in the past ten years, these writers are largely freed from debates about whether the city is a “worthy” or exceptional locale. Instead they focus upon Los Angeles in order to “draw attention to the current practices and strategies in the field of American studies more broadly” (p. 3).

Through the collection's fifteen essays, Los Angeles emerges as a historically multiracial, transnational, multi-centered, Latinized, complexly imagined, and fluid city. Greg Hise's assertion that Los Angeles "has been a border city from its founding . . . a site where people, artifacts and ideas from around the globe converge" positions the city's contemporary demography, complex cultural interactions, and orientation towards the Pacific and Latin America as the latest chapter in a longer story of diversity and transnationalism (p. 57). Henry Yu conceives of Los Angeles not as a separate and final point of settlement for immigrants but as an "intersection on a larger grid" (p. 33). Los Angeles, thus, is best defined through the many and long links that tie its people to other places in the United States and the world. The re-imagining of city and national borders to accommodate fluid and multi-directional migrations is also the theme of Elana Zilber's piece on deported Salvadoran youths and Josh Kun's study of Mexican migrants' hybridized, border-inflected music.

Other American cities may be cosmopolitan in their populations, the contributors concede, but the ethno-racial mixture that constitutes that cosmopolitanism is unlike that of Los Angeles. George Sánchez and Regina Freer address the consequences of the city's unique diversity. Sánchez discusses the efforts of Jews, Japanese, blacks, and Mexicans in the heterogeneous neighborhood of Boyle Heights to create a multiethnic political coalition in the mid-twentieth century. Freer explores this progressive effort from the perspective of Los Angeles' African American community whose rapid expansion and deteriorating public image made them amenable to cooperation with other minority groups after World War II.

This diversity expresses itself in the spatial organization of Los Angeles. The contributors emphasize how distinct social groups determine the built environment as they interact "with fantasies, myths, images, symbols, and structures over which they have varying degrees of control" (p. 315). The result is a shifting, multi-focused, imperfectly segregated metropolis. Dana Cuff observes this formative process from the vantage point of the neighbor. The neighbor's relations with, and conceptions of, other neighbors is the basis of civil society, even liberal democracy, she insists. Kristen Maher examines different types of relationships and their spatial significance. Mostly white and Asian suburbanites' dependence on urban minorities for service labor, she argues, effectively blurs the boundaries between suburban and urban communities. However, these homeowners and employers are able to recreate segregation despite the proximity of minority workers by regulating social interactions.

Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures also addresses the dynamic between how Los Angeles is represented and how Los Angeles is lived. As an important home of the movie and music industries, the city is particularly susceptible, Josh Sides notes in his article about Compton, to exaggerations and distorted depictions, to being made into a metaphor that covers up and even compromises the real Los Angeles. Yet, in their discussions of the city's music and art scenes, Marisela Norte, Victor Viesca, and Sarah Schrank make clear that the residents of Los Angeles create their own counter versions of Los Angeles, expressive of variations in neighborhood, work, migration, and politics.

In these urban visions by artists, intellectuals, and activists, George Lipsitz finds hope that a "plural, egalitarian, democratic and intercultural America" can survive in the face

of “particular and parochial meaning” advanced by current leaders in the name of fighting a war against terrorism (p. 17). Michael Nevin Willard strikes a similarly political note in his helpful survey of recent scholarship about Los Angeles, communicating his concern that current politicians “would return us to the ‘American’ identity that overshadowed [Carey] McWilliams’ insights in order to dismiss current multiculturalism as unpatriotic” (p. 336). This explicitly liberal political perspective orients many of the essays and sustains the mission of American studies to affect as much as study American culture.

Overall, *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures* captures the vitality and variety of Los Angeles studies specifically and American studies generally. If the different disciplinary approaches sometimes make for a disjointed and disorienting reading experience, they do convey the complexity of Los Angeles and the breadth of the field. What remains largely neglected or simplified in the authors’ treatment of the social, cultural, and spatial meanings of Los Angeles are the lives of those with power and privilege. The authors’ preference for the experiences and spaces of ethno-racial minorities is a welcomed alternative to a top-down portrait, yet in focusing so little on the cultures of those who continue to control money and resources, those cultures become mere caricatures. Furthermore, the full implications of Los Angeles’ intercultural, mestizo character are underdeveloped and unexplained. With that said, this collection provides a lively sample of the latest scholarship that critics and fans of Los Angeles alike will enjoy.

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LONG BEACH ARCHITECTURE: *The Unexpected Metropolis*. By Cara Mullio and Jennifer M. Volland. (Santa Monica, California: Hennessey + Ingalls, 2004. 276 pp. \$39.95.) Reviewed by Sean Smith.

Until relatively recently, the history of Los Angeles and Southern California was largely the domain of amateur historians, local historical societies, and enthusiastic boosters. These histories, rooted in exceptionalist arguments, tended to be celebratory or to reinforce popular myths about Southern California. But for the past decade and a half, historians and other scholars have been actively reexamining the history of Los Angeles and Southern California.

In 1996, the publication of *Rethinking Los Angeles*, edited by Michael Dear, H. Eric Shockman, and Greg Hise, and *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Allen Scott and Edward Soja, marked for many the beginning of a “discernable L.A. School of urban studies.”¹ These books, along with more

¹ Michael Nevin Willard, “Nuestra Los Angeles,” *American Quarterly* 56.3 (September 2004): 810.