

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

As I move between discussions of the World War II period, the Chicano movement, and the post-9/11 era, I try to use terms appropriate to each period. For example, when discussing the early 1940s, I generally refer to people of Mexican descent in the United States as Mexican Americans, rather than as Chicanas or Chicanos, politically charged labels that gained currency with the Chicano movement. I use “Hispanic,” “Latina,” and “Latino” as umbrella terms when referring to people, including Mexicans, Chicanas, and Chicanos, with roots (however distant) in the Spanish-speaking world or Latin America. Likewise, as I discuss the *pachuca* as historical actor (women who called themselves *pachucas* or who took part in the Mexican American zoot subculture) and the discursive *pachuca* (the *pachuca* of public discourse), I often denote the latter by referring to it as a “figure” or—taking my cue from Raúl Salinas—as *la pachuca*. Even though I maintain that agency is always mediated and, thus, it is often difficult for scholars who study the past to distinguish the historical actor from the icon or representation, I make this thorny distinction for clarity.

Finally, while I use “*pachuca*” somewhat gingerly throughout this book, I also use it very liberally. As I show in the following chapters, “*pachuca*” is a multifaceted label, one that was more often than not pejorative. I believe that for this reason, the Mexican American women I interviewed as part of this study were reluctant to call themselves *pachucas*, even though some wore zoot suits, “rats,” and dark lipstick, spoke *pachuco* slang, enjoyed listening and dancing to jazz, and associated with other zoot-clad Mexican American youths during the early 1940s. I do not mean any disrespect when I refer to these women as *pachucas*. Instead, I wish to reclaim and complicate this label via their recollections

and stories and my own readings of the iconic pachuca. By doing so, I hope to articulate “pachuca’s” multiple and contradictory meanings and the breadth and complexity of Mexican American history, identities, and communities.