

contemporary clothing were feminist advocates, whether they knew it or not. A fuller discussion of the restrictive aspects of fashion—and the intensive focus on women’s bodies as problems that fashion authorities claimed necessitated shaping garments such as girdles, slimming diets, and other beauty regimens, including cosmetic surgery, to resolve—might have tempered the author’s claims. I would also like to have seen greater critical explication of the concept of “Oriental style” as used by the author. In addition, though Rabinovitch-Fox often characterizes fashionable clothing as expressive of freedom and empowerment, a more specific consideration of what is arguably the most fundamental element of feminist agitation—the fight for equality—might have brought more explicit feminist concerns related to fashion into the book’s analysis. For example, the author’s discussion of the sexual freedom represented by the 1960s miniskirt could have led to consideration of how fashion figured into feminist criticism and activism regarding rape prosecutions in an era when women’s clothing played a central role in the blaming of rape victims for assaults.

In documenting self-identified feminists’ use of fashion in the suffrage and women’s liberation eras, *Dressed for Freedom* provides new insights about the relationship between feminism and fashionable clothing. The book also exposes the contradictory aspects and shifting meanings of fashion. Feminists understood fashion as an unavoidable focus of women’s lives that required critique and thus solutions, but they also appreciated that what women wore could contribute to a vision and experience of social transformation. Nonetheless, shared understandings of what specific fashions represented remained elusive at times, even among feminists. Black activist Florynce Kennedy, for example, pointed out in 1974 that jeans might be a welcome alternative to the “tailored well-dressed image” for white women, but for Black “women who have had to wear ‘shapeless hand-me-downs’ . . . indulging in feminine fashions [could be] ‘a declaration of independence’” (175).

The contradictions Rabinovitch-Fox highlights and the less obvious aspects of the fashion-industrial complex that she brings into consideration suggest the potential for *Dressed for Freedom* to spark future studies of the often fraught, yet useful, and certainly multidimensional relationship between fashion and feminism that continues to impact diverse women across the United States today.

Jill Fields

JILL FIELDS is a professor of history and founding coordinator of Jewish studies at Fresno State, where she teaches courses in women’s history, popular culture, and Jewish studies. She is the author of *An Intimate Affair: Women, Lingerie, and Sexuality* (2007) and editor of *Entering the Picture: Judy Chicago, the Fresno Feminist Art Program, and the Collective Visions of Women Artists* (2012).

---

Jessica Ordaz. *The Shadow of El Centro: A History of Migrant Incarceration and Solidarity*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 196 pp. Paperback \$24.95.

Children huddled under tinfoil sheets in chain-link pens, Black men from Haiti hunted down by armed white men on horseback, the drowned bodies of a young father and

daughter on the grassy banks of the Rio Grande—the past five years have delivered us plenty of vivid images that show how violent and punitive an institution the southern border of the United States can be. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids, attempts to construct a border wall, and hateful and racist conflation of immigrants with criminals by the Trump administration and the far right have all contributed to the pairing of immigrants with criminality in the public imagination. Thus, *The Shadow of El Centro: A History of Migrant Incarceration and Solidarity* and its argument that the southern border has served a regime of racialized imprisonment and labor exploitation come at a time when the description of the border as a carceral institution stretches few imaginations and may indeed be unsurprising. For those whose cynicism has not yet drowned all outrage, however, there is still much to learn from Jessica Ordaz’s thoroughly researched work.

Ordaz, who has her own personal connections to the trauma of border detentions and deportations, has chosen the now closed-down El Centro Immigration Detention Center in California’s southeastern corner, Imperial County, for her history of migrant incarceration. There, she argues, “the policing of migration, racialization of labor, and resistance converged” (xvi). The focus on a single institution in a sprawling bureaucratic apparatus like the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) can be problematic, but Ordaz’s history is limber enough to change location when necessary. For instance, in a creative and effective twist, the author begins her history not in El Centro, but with the original uses of the portable building components that would form the core of the detention center in Imperial County in 1945. Originally installed as camp Fort Stanton in Arizona, the facility housed Germans as enemy aliens and unauthorized immigrants, such as the crew of a German cruise liner stranded in the Caribbean because of the onset of war in 1939. These detainees were frequently unapologetic Nazis, yet their labor never went unpaid, their rights and privileges were usually honored and accommodated, and their terms of imprisonment were generous to lax. The neighboring communities expressed kindness and support.

Things changed once the INS deployed the building modules for a temporary—and later permanent—detention center in El Centro. At the same time that the U.S.-Mexican bracero program channeled cheap farm labor into the United States via a reception center a mere four miles away, the El Centro Detention Center held some of the growing number of unauthorized migrants that the bracero program encouraged. This was quite purposeful, as Ordaz explains: “racialized as ‘illegal’ regardless of their actual status,” Mexicans remained impossibly entangled in a revolving door of recruitment, exploitation, detention, and deportation (29).

The center’s transition to a prison-like facility happened almost instantly. On paper, El Centro was supposed to merely hold Mexican men long enough for processing and deportation. Since most who went through its doors had committed no crimes and simply had to leave the country, this should have taken no more than three days. “In practice,” however, “local patrol inspectors kept migrants at El Centro for up to thirty days,” typically to take advantage of their unpaid labor, frequently extracted in the most forbidding desert climate (21).

Long before Donald Trump helped broadcast an image of the U.S. Border Patrol as a modern-day posse of vigilantes, its agents guarded both a border and a labor system, readily investigating Imperial County's Mexican population to find grounds for deportation. Ordaz's stories of agents sieving through medical records of a public health clinic to find grounds for deportation, for instance, are as shocking and unsurprising as the mass disinfections of allegedly disease-carrying Mexicans with carcinogenic DDT well into the 1960s.

The El Centro Detention Center looked, felt, smelled, and tasted like a prison, time and again; no matter the bureaucratic regime and rationale formally imposed on the facility, its subjects found themselves not held for processing and removal but detained as prisoners. Not surprisingly, detainees increasingly sought to escape the place—which, in turn, increased its security and surveillance. Cold War anticommunist paranoia regarding alleged labor radicals from south of the border turned the “illegal aliens” of the borderlands into potential subversives and public enemies, a sentiment that fueled the launch of the notorious “Operation Wetback” in 1954. Ironically, it was the violence triggered by American anticommunist subversion and interference in Latin American nations that internationalized the migrant stream across the border.

By the 1970s, the increasingly international population moving through El Centro helped bring to light the center's arbitrary rule by violence. Not only did Mexican authorities and journalists decry the inhumane conditions at El Centro, but asylum seekers from El Salvador and other nations had horrendous personal stories to tell. The Reagan administration's application of the 1980 Refugee Act viewed left-leaning asylum seekers fleeing right-wing regimes with suspicion. Their quests for sanctuary became harrowing ordeals that could easily lead to deportations into the hands of feared regimes back home, and to death—as was the case with 30 percent of Salvadorian deportees in 1984 alone (77). In what is easily the most riveting chapter in the book, the hunger strike among 175–300 detainees in May 1985 crystallized a transnational resistance to an increasingly transnational American prison complex.

Employing a concept that Ann Laura Stoler has used to illuminate the shadows that empire has cast over intimate spaces, Ordaz refers to an “archival haunting” she experienced in the silence with which government records treat the experiences of the detained (xx). In this history, however, Ordaz shows herself a competent ghost hunter, sorting through the bleached bones of the closed detention center and finding voices in oral histories that bring to life the persistent reduction of people of color to subjects of incarceration and labor exploitation. Few readers will doubt the “connections between the carceral state and the control of racialized bodies through labor, isolation, and punishment” that Ordaz lays bare here (3). At the same time, many would probably like to learn still more about the intersections between prison inmates and INS detainees, or border patrol officers and prison guards.

A study of borderlands rather than of California, *The Shadow of El Centro* is a slim volume with a disciplined structure and prose reminiscent of the dissertation that forms its core. Richly footnoted, amply quoting historical theorists, and steeped in the language and terminology of the “carceral school,” Ordaz's work seems aimed at fellow scholars, activists, and advocates. However, this history deserves the much broader readership it

could attract at a time when we are learning more about the border's different dimensions of violence almost every day.

Volker Janssen

VOLKER JANSSEN is a professor at California State University, Fullerton, and holds a PhD in history from the University of California, San Diego. He is the editor of *Where Minds and Matters Meet: Technology in California and the West* (2012) and is currently finishing a history of California's prison reform efforts between World War II and the 1970s. His essay "When the Jungle Met the Forest: Public Work and Civil Defense in California's Prison Camps, 1941–1977" received the *Journal of American History's* award for best article of the year in 2009.

---

Nicholas F. Centino. *Razabilly: Transforming Sights, Sounds, and History in the Los Angeles Latina/o Rockabilly Scene*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2021. 224 pp. Paperback \$29.95.

In this concise history of Los Angeles's Rockabilly scene, Nicholas Centino examines a critical period in the remaking of the city, the near-present, as he delves into the first decades of the twenty-first century. In this critical era, Latinas/os became close to half of the population of Los Angeles County. However, their presence continued to be marginalized socially and demonized politically, and their economic and educational progress in "de/postindustrial" Los Angeles was impaired by entrenched systemic racism.

In four chapters, Centino presents the Rockabilly scene as an international phenomenon and examines how it took root in 2000s Latina/o Los Angeles. A revival genre, Rockabilly combines elements of Black R&B and white country music from the 1950s. By the late 1990s, the genre had gained strong acceptance and popularity in Greater Los Angeles, where Chicanas/os and Latinas/os became the driving force of the Rockabilly scene as performers, event organizers, and participants.

Centino employs carefully thought-out ethnographic approaches to examine the experiences of Latina/o Rockabilly participants and performers amid the backdrop of the cultural and political impact of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, which led to the seemingly perpetual war on terror, as well as the hopeful period that the presidency of Barack Obama represented. The brief optimism around the 2008 election was immediately followed by the devastating Great Recession, which bookended the decade and brought severe economic hardships for Latinas/os in Southern California.

For those unacquainted with L.A. music scenes and cultures, Rockabilly is often understood as intrinsically tied to white male musicians and to audiences who yearned for nostalgic, mid-twentieth-century sounds and fashions emanating from a time of racial segregation—and thus may seem inherently contradictory to the lived experiences of most Latinas/os and the social and political environments that would welcome them. The genre's roots, after all, lie in an era before the major victories of the civil rights, women's, and queer liberation movements. Nevertheless, while there were only a few Latina/o rock and roll performers in the 1950s, with the advent of Rockabilly as a revival genre in the 2000s, predominantly Latina/o Los Angeles became its global capital, with ethnic