

of proletarian fiction in the 1930s" (342). Ultimately, Wrobel makes a powerful case that *The Grapes of Wrath* was, "at its core, a book about the West" (343).

The final essay in *Regionalists on the Left*—and the closest thing to a conclusion the book offers—is Steiner's treatment of the personal, professional, and political epiphanies Carey McWilliams experienced over the course of the 1930s. The Colorado-born lawyer, historian, essayist, editor, and activist spent his first years in Los Angeles spellbound by that city's vibrant hubbub. By the late 1920s, McWilliams had become an aspiring bohemian who sought to advance what Steiner calls "aesthetic regionalism." By 1934, though, McWilliams had shorn himself of old aspirations and inhibitions. Leaving "his constraining marriage and lucrative Pasadena law practice in 1934 to devote himself to labor activism and legal advocacy for the working class," McWilliams's "expressive power seemed to soar with his rising social consciousness and decision to join ranks with the underdog" (366). In the mid-30s, McWilliams provided legal counsel to a succession of workers' movements. His experiences with struggles such as the East L.A. walnut pickers' strike led directly to *Factories in the Field* (1939), the first of ten books McWilliams would publish in the ensuing decade. For Steiner, McWilliams, "like many of the radical regionalists of his time, and many surveyed in this present volume," managed "to merge a deep-seated love of place with a passion for racial equality and social justice"—a combination that Steiner believes "holds immense promise for the future" (373).

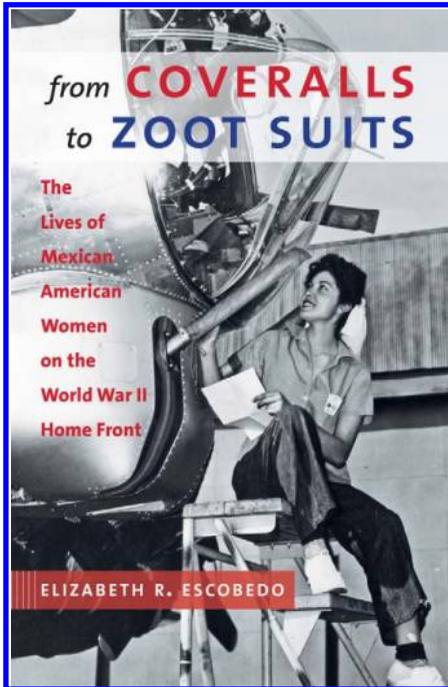
Regionalists on the Left successfully puts to bed one of the oldest myths of American regionalism: that there is a natural congruity between regionalism, nationalism, and reactionary politics. As Steiner and the other contributors to this worthy volume show, western soils have always been a fertile mix of dispossession, discontent, and dauntless hope.

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FROM COVERALLS TO ZOOT SUITS: *The Lives of Mexican American Women on the World War II Home Front*. By Elizabeth R. Escobedo. (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2013. 256 pp \$34.95 cloth.) Reviewed by Natalia Molina.

As someone who teaches U.S. and Chicana/o history, I was excited to see a renewed attention to zoot suiters and 1940s Mexican American youth culture more broadly. Luis Alvarez's *The Power of the Zoot* (2009) provides a deeper understanding of the cultural politics around zoot suit lifestyle. That same year, Catherine Ramírez published *The Woman in the Zoot Suit* and she expanded our understanding of popular culture through a gendered analysis and a focus on women in this time period. Thus, when Elizabeth Escobedo's book *From Coveralls to Zoot Suits* was published this year I wondered do I have to read yet another book on this same time period and subject? The short answer is yes.

Despite the recognized interventions and successes of Alvarez and Ramírez, Escobedo's book still expands our understanding of race, community, and identity



in new and important ways that speak to both the significance of the period as well as larger concepts, such as how everyday practices can also be viewed as examples of political experiences or cultural practices. Escobedo examines Chicana/o history during this period to help us understand the cultural, social, and gendered dimensions of their experiences and wider shifts in society (social and cultural changes on the home front during and after WWII, the long civil rights period, changing gender rights and norms, and transformations in urban landscapes). Focusing on female zoot suiters, *pachucas*, Escobedo pulls back the lens and considers all aspects of the “average rank and file” Mexican American woman as *pachuca*, consumer, worker, family member, and volunteer.

Looking at such diverse arenas required that Escobedo cull from a range of sources that allowed her to understand the people, institutions, political economy, and culture as each relates to work, leisure, family, and patriotism; she covers these topics in depth in separate chapters in the book. The range of the research alone is impressive. To get at the breadth of women’s experiences during this period and in their own voices, she relies on forty interviews, thirty-two of which she conducted herself. To understand how race and criminality became increasingly linked during this period, she mines 250 Los Angeles Superior Court Juvenile Division case files of Mexican American women. (This chapter could be paired well with Miroslava Chávez García’s book, *States of Delinquency: Race and Science in the Making of California’s Juvenile Justice System*). Lastly, to understand the role of the U.S. government as a major catalyst in both opening and foreclosing opportunities for women and people of color during and after WWII, she delves into the labyrinth of National Archives records.

As scholars, we know that research is only as good as what we make of it and Escobedo excels here. Her study of how Mexican youth were criminalized during WWII provides a much more nuanced sense of how juvenile delinquency was racialized and gendered by focusing on Mexican American girls and young women, some of whom identified as *pachucas*. Escobedo demonstrates that, while sometimes rebellious young women were involved in gangs, there were many other moments in which they came under the purview of the state simply by transgressing sexual and social mores, such as hanging out with boys, dressing up, and going out. This demonized not just them, but their families, particularly their mothers, and the wider Mexican American community. To critics, these young women seemed to

be examples of not simply girls gone wild, but a deviant culture. Whereas the critiques about male Chicanos and *pachucos* were presented as evidence of the innate violence of Mexican American culture, *pachucas* confirmed the limits of Americanization since reformers often saw women as the bearers of culture. For Escobedo, these acts could be read as youthful rebellion and agency. I was curious how the actions of these young women might be viewed through a different lens. There seemed to be a lot of thirteen-year-olds running away from home to go dancing, including one who lived with her father but preferred to sleep on random porches instead of going home. Perhaps Lynn Sacco's *Unspeakable: Father-Daughter Incest in American History* could be instructive here in providing alternative frameworks for understanding these young women's behaviors and motives.

Furthermore, Escobedo brings to light how projects undergirded by racial liberalism had to take into account the specificities of the Mexican American community. For one, U.S. officials were concerned that perceptions of the mistreatment of Mexicans and Mexican Americans could undermine their efforts with Latin America, notably the Good Neighbor Policy, which sought to strengthen social and economic ties with Latin American countries. As a result, government agencies conducted surveys in Mexican and Mexican American communities to assess their perspectives on the home front situation and, not surprisingly, found much discrimination. Both government and defense agencies worked to be more inclusive as a result. Douglas Aircraft recruited men and women from the Mexican community, demonstrating how, at times, Mexican Americans were discriminated against and at other times courted by government and the defense industry.

Escobedo readily acknowledges the limits of many of these wartime programs, which often espoused the rhetoric, but often stopped short of knocking down any institutional walls. Nonetheless, these histories that Escobedo uncovered and about which she writes convincingly help us better understand how race is constructed in differential ways in America. Government bi-lingual outreach campaigns (contrast this with contemporary English-only laws and attitudes) show us the ways in which Mexicans and Mexican Americans could be more readily accepted into U.S. society. These programs did have limits, which Escobedo demonstrates deftly. In one case, a promoter of such programs was asked if he would let his white daughter marry a Mexican. Shocked, he sputtered out a "no" but quickly added that they could be neighbors. Yet, African Americans often did not even have this much support and Japanese Americans, of course, were interned during WWII. The rich, deep histories Escobedo presents thus teach us something about the historical specificity of race. The racial liberalism of the 1940s that espoused equality failed in many ways but affected communities of color quite unevenly. Given its interventions, original research, and accessibility, the book is sure to be well received.

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