

# Latino

Mexicans, who had been unwelcome in the United States during the economic hardship of the Great Depression, were welcomed with open arms during World War II to fill the jobs left as men went off to war.

## **Think about:**

- What type of racism did Latinos face during World War II?
- What roles did Latinos take on during World War II?
- Why were Latinos targeted during the Zoot Suit Riots?

Nazis Spur Zoot Riots  
Los Angeles Daily News  
June 9, 1943

...Sailors state that in fighting zoot suiters and other gangsters in Los Angeles they have only been avenging injuries inflicted on themselves and their wives in this area. A number of servicemen have been badly beaten by zoot suiters, and cases of attacks on wives of navy men have been reported. ...[A] telegram from the sailors said:

"We make this plea in hopes that all fighting Americans are not in service, that there are some left to protect the families of ours. Our intent in taking justice in our own hands was not an attempt to instill mob rule but the only desire to insure our wives and families safe passage in the streets.

"As none of the creators of the outrages on your wives and ours have been brought to justice or the streets made clean we felt that something had to be done.

"Our past activities, we realize, were not within the law, but we are sure they met the honest approval of the people.

"The so-called zoot suiters may now have free reign throughout our city of Los Angeles to do what they may with the wives of servicemen and civilians as they make their way home from swing and graveyard shifts in war plants. "The Los Angeles city limits are out of bounds to we servicemen. We are not permitted to enter the city.

"Has Los Angeles fallen to the zoot suiters?

"We are anxious to know. How about telling the folks at home for us?"

[http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng\\_sfeature/sf\\_press\\_text\\_06.html](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/zoot/eng_sfeature/sf_press_text_06.html)

Al Waxman watches the Zoot Suit Riots

Note: Al Waxman, editor of the *Eastside Journal*, an East Los Angeles community newspaper, was one of the few newspaper men not sympathetic to the Anti-Zoot suit rioters

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At Twelfth and Central I came upon a scene that will long live in my memory. Police were swinging clubs and servicemen were fighting with civilians. Wholesale arrests were being made by the officers. Four boys came out of a pool hall. They were wearing the zoot-suits that have become the symbol of a fighting flag. Police ordered them into arrest cars. One refused. He asked: "Why am I being arrested?" The police officer answered with three swift blows of the night-stick across the boy's head and he went down. As he sprawled, he was kicked in the face. Police had difficulty loading his body into the vehicle because he was one-legged and wore a wooden limb. Maybe the officer didn't know he was attacking a cripple.

At the next corner a Mexican mother cried out, "Don't take my boy, he did nothing. He's only fifteen years old. Don't take him." She was struck across the jaw with a night-stick and almost dropped the two and a half year old baby that was clinging in her arms. . . .

Rushing back to the east side to make sure that things were quiet here, I came upon a band of servicemen making a systematic tour of East First Street. They had just come out of a cocktail bar where four men were nursing bruises. Three autos loaded with Los Angeles policemen were on the scene but the soldiers were not molested. Farther down the street the men stopped a streetcar, forcing the motorman to open the door and proceeded to inspect the clothing of the male passengers. "We're looking for zoot-suits to burn," they shouted. Again the police did not interfere. . . . Half a block away . . . I pleaded with the men of the local police substation to put a stop to these activities. "It is a matter for the military police," they said.

Source: *Eastside Journal*, as quoted in Carey McWilliams. *North From Mexico* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968)

**"Americans all, let's fight for victory: Americanos todos, luchamos por la victoria"**

Mexicans and Mexican Americans contributed in many ways to the United States' war effort during World War II. About 19% of all Mexican Americans signed up for the armed forces; nearly 17,000 Mexican Americans in Los Angeles worked in the area's shipyards, airfields, and armament factories.



**Source** | Leon Helguera, "Americans all, let's fight for victory: Americanos todos, luchamos por la victoria," 1943, Washington, D.C., available from UNT Digital Library, <http://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc426/>, accessed 20 January 2010. **Creator** | Leon Helguera **Item Type** | Poster/Print **Cite This document** | Leon Helguera, "'Americans all, let's fight for victory: Americanos todos, luchamos por la victoria'," *HERB: Resources for Teachers*, accessed November 29, 2012, <http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1440>.

### A Bracero's Identification Card Certifies He Is Ready to Work

Aaron Castañeda Gamez and thousands of other Mexican workers had to pass a series of examinations to enter the bracero program. The processing stage lasted for several days, most of which were spent standing in line. Finally, if the man passed all the exams, he was given an identification card that certified his acceptance in the program. This card notes that Castañeda was to perform "railroad track labor only".

RAILROAD TRACK LABOR ONLY  
Form I-100 (Edition 1-4-43)  
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE  
BUREAU OF MIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE

ORIGINAL 7 9885

**ALIEN LABORER'S IDENTIFICATION CARD**  
(Void unless countersigned by immigrant inspector)

**Name** CASTANEDA, Aaron Gamez  
native of MEXICO citizen of MEXICO selected by  
U. S. RAILROAD RETIREMENT BOARD  
and medically examined and passed by  
[Signature] medical examiner, U. S. Public Health Service, is desirous of entering the United States solely for the purpose of engaging in labor under conditions prescribed by the Attorney General. Not required to register under Selective Service during the period of admission or any extension thereof.  
[Signature] Immigrant Inspector.

Port of Entry: PASO, TEXAS ...

Entrance Date: APR 10 1944

Period of Admission: OVER

GPO 16-32608-1

<http://herb.ashp.cuny.edu/items/show/1439> 11/28/2012

**Source** | Aaron Castañeda Gamez, "Identification Card," 10 April 1944, in *Bracero History Archive*, Item #512, <http://braceroarchive.org/items/show/512> (accessed 21 January 2010).

**Item Type** | Artifact



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<http://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/special/images/sleepylagoon/slwar11.jpg>





"Zoot suiters" in jail, 1942  
Los Angeles Daily News Negatives Collection

<http://unitproj.library.ucla.edu/special/sleepylagoon/slwar13.html>