

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR HILDA L. SOLIS

May 16, 2023

**80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Zoot Suit Riots**

Eighty years ago, in June 1943, the Zoot Suit Riots exploded. These were a series of violent attacks during which mobs of U.S. servicemen, law enforcement officers, and civilians ambushed young Mexican American, African American, and Filipino American men throughout Los Angeles County. The Zoot Suit Riots took their name from the “zoot suits” (high-waisted, wide-legged trousers pegged at the ankle, and long coats) worn by many men of color during that era.

As zoot suits became popular among young men of color, the outfit elicited racism and discrimination. This was especially true among Latino youths in California who were known as “pachucos” for wearing zoot suits. The white majority at the time often viewed them as gang members and delinquents.

Throughout the early 1940s, young Mexican American men in Los Angeles County suffered waves of ethnically motivated attacks. One precursor to the Zoot Suit Riots was the death of José Gallardo Díaz, which became known in the press as The Sleepy Lagoon Murder. On August 2, 1942, Díaz was discovered unconscious and near

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death on a road near the Sleepy Lagoon in what is now known as the City of Bell. A shoddy investigation into his beating and death led to the rounding up and arrest of seventeen Mexican American youths on flimsy evidence, nine of whom would be convicted of second-degree murder. These arrests and convictions were seen as shams by the Mexican American community, with the police exclusively targeting young brown men as suspects.

On May 31, 1943, a group of servicemen and a group of Mexican American youth wearing zoot suits scuffled in downtown Los Angeles. Three days later, on June 3, 1943, another confrontation ensued, only this time servicemen were joined by police on orders to "clean up" downtown Los Angeles. The next day, a group of over two hundred marines and sailors took a caravan of taxis into East Los Angeles and began to beat any young man wearing a zoot suit, burning their belongings in the process.

The Zoot Suit Riots finally died down after June 8, when military officials banned all U.S. servicemen from Los Angeles. The press described the attacks as "cleansing" and the Los Angeles City Council would approve a resolution (never passed into law) outlawing zoot suits within city limits. Attacks on Mexican Americans in Los Angeles County would taper off, but that summer similar incidents would occur throughout the country.

The Zoot Suit Riots have been one of Los Angeles' most shameful moments in history.

**I, THEREFORE, MOVE** that the Board of Supervisors denounce the devastation of the Zoot Suit Riots, recognize this as a dark chapter in Los Angeles County's history,

and recommit to fighting against racial discrimination.

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