Generations of Youth Austin & Willard (eds.)

Chapter Seven

Brown "Hordes" in McIntosh Suits

Filipinos, Taxi Dance Halls, and Performing the Immigrant Body in Los Angeles, 1930s–1940s

Linda N. España-Maram

taxi dance
8 p.m.–2 a.m.
blondies
seven days a week

"I forgot
my labors
for awhile
at the taxi dance"

the hand around
your waist
feels good

is nothing
but my own

belonging to nobody
but you
if you want it

"they're all blondies
most of the women
all *mataba* [plump] from the south"

but the goddamn tickets
for you
went so fast

into three minutes
ten-cent squeezes

—al robles, "taxi dance"
in *rappin' with ten thousand carabaos in the dark*, 1996

In October 1935, the Los Angeles Police Department conducted a series of surprise raids on all of the city's taxi dance halls for two consecutive Saturday nights. The police claimed to have received an anonymous tip that a murder was to take place in one of the recreation centers. Interrupting the busiest evening in the dance halls, the LAPD thoroughly searched the premises and the male patrons, confiscating a number of weapons, including knives, guns, and ice picks. Before the end of the week, after the second raid, the police announced that patrons caught with lethal weapons in dance halls faced the possibility of deportation.[1]

Because immigration policies were (and still are) under federal jurisdiction, the local police department did not have the authority to carry out the threat. But in the midst of the Great Depression, with repatriation campaigns directed against Mexicans and Filipinos in full swing, issuing such a decree suggests that the police sought to cloak a racist policy in the mantle of local "peace-keeping" tactics. Further, the LAPD's full-scale response to a single anonymous tip and the consequences aimed specifically toward the immigrant male patrons of the taxi dance halls speak volumes about the relationship among the city's regulating agencies, ethnic Angeleños, and commercialized recreation centers.

This chapter traces how popular culture practices among members of a working-class immigrant community facilitated the negotiation of identity politics through an examination of the leisure activity arguably most closely associated with Filipinos of the 1920s and 1930s: the taxi dance halls where they paid to dance with women in timed, ritualized sequences. Some observers from the period decried these centers as nothing more than gathering places for working-class brown "hordes," particularly what one young woman described as the "sensuous, gaudily dressed, almost fierce-looking young Filipinos on the East Side of L.A."[2] But for the participants, these taxi dance halls became important sites for creating a vibrant subculture. Fueled by the intense nativism and racist and sexist legislation of the Great Depression and New Deal eras, these leisure centers provided opportunities for young, poor immigrant men like Filipinos to create identities that allowed them to be something other than what their ethnicity, class, or national origin dictated.

Conflicts emanating from issues related to the taxi dance halls indicate the effectiveness of commercialized leisure as conduits to fostering an alternative culture among marginalized populations. Within the Filipino community itself, issues related to taxi dance halls exposed the class distinctions between the small, self-described "adjusted group" of Filipino students who "cannot afford to waste much of their time in terms of the pleasures of their brothers," and the workers, whom the students argued comprised the "bewildered group, [whose] most outstanding characteristic . . . is the lack of any tangible aim in life."[3] On another level, the competition in the dance halls evinces the struggle among Filipino workers themselves as they sought to create viable individual and group identities. Finally, the controversies elucidate tensions between the dance halls' largely youthful, largely working-class participants and the dominant society's policing agents, including the LAPD and a number of reform societies. Reformers conducted campaigns against taxi dance halls in part because the centers presented a visible threat to the dominant culture's construction of youth, morality, and gender relations, but also because the commercialization

represented the uneasiness they felt about the expansion of capitalism into the area of leisure. In a broader sense, then, this chapter analyzes the struggles over the issues of ethnicity, class, and popular culture not only within immigrant and working-class communities but within the larger American society as well. In forging a collective sense of ethnicity and building a viable community, Filipino immigrants challenged the host society over the nature of "American" values. By displaying "improper" behavior, they sought to carve niches of autonomy for self-definition, fought against imposed restrictions on space, and sought to expand the boundaries of alternative expressions.

Filipinos constitute one of the largest Asian/Pacific Island immigrant groups in the United States today. Despite their numerical significance, however, few researchers have explored this immigrant community and the Filipino-American experiences.[4] This chapter focuses on Filipino immigrants from the 1920s until the late 1930s, a period when young, single, unskilled males made up the vast majority of the group. Agents of United States agribusinesses went to the Philippines to recruit Filipinos as an additional pool of exploitable labor, first for Hawaii's sugar plantations and then for California's fields, since U.S. immigration laws barred Chinese and Japanese laborers.[5] In addition, as a result of the Spanish-American War of 1898, American imperialism, and the defeat of large-scale Filipino resistance to United States occupation, the Philippines became a colony of the United States. The United States government thus considered Filipinos as "nationals," and as such they were not subject to immigration restrictions or quotas; like other Asian immigrants, however, neither could they vote, own land, buy homes, nor apply for citizenship. The immigration of this wave of Filipinos virtually stopped by the mid-1930s, largely because of the Tydings-McDuffie Act which, among other things, significantly reduced the number of Filipino immigrants to the United States mainland through a quota of fifty per year.

The first large group of more than 2,000 Filipino laborers arrived in California by 1923. This figure represents a threefold increase over the number of Filipinos in California in the previous year. Single young men formed the bulk of these immigrants, with 84 percent in their teens to mid-twenties. By 1930, men made up 94 percent of the Filipino immigrant population. In that same year, more than 45,000 Filipinos resided in the continental United States, 67 percent of whom lived and worked in California.[6] By 1933, an estimated 65,000 Filipinos had arrived in the continental United States, with about one-fifth of that population (about 12,000) residing in Los Angeles County. Of these, about 4,000 lived in the city's downtown area on a year-round basis.[7]

In part because of racism and in part because of the requirements of an industrialized economy, the bulk of these laborers found employment only in the lowest ranks of some of the most exploitative sectors, including agribusiness, the canning industries, and service-oriented jobs. The vast majority (80 percent) became migratory laborers, routinely traveling between farms, ports, and urban areas. Other Filipinos, including full-time students on scholarships, students who worked part-time, and workers employed full-time in domestic service as houseboys, dishwashers, or bellboys, settled in cities. Studies of these Filipino laborers have often failed to explore

Fig. 7.1. Town mates Romy Madrigal (top row, second from right), Dodo Zamorano (top row, second from left), Bonifacio Libre (sitting center), others unknown, pose for a group picture in Los Angeles' harbor area during the 1930s. Photographs like this linked the immigrants with their families and friends across the Pacific Ocean. This posed photograph of workers at the fish canneries of Terminal Island attired in their fashionable McIntosh suits, no doubt delighted and fired the imagination of the recipients of the picture. (Courtesy of "Shades of L.A." Archives, Los Angeles Public Library.)

this fluidity associated with creating an ethnic, working-class identity among such a young, geographically mobile population. While earlier theses have acknowledged the migrant lifestyle, they nevertheless tend to look at Filipinos only as rural agricultural hands, only as cannery workers, or only as urban laborers.[8]

Filipinos earned meager wages for tedious, hard work in often closely supervised positions. One study estimated that Filipino migrant workers in California's fields earned between 30 to 50 cents per hour or between $2.50 to $5 a day in the late 1920s.[9] These already marginal salaries plummeted during the Depression. Toribio Castillo, who worked in Stockton's agricultural fields before settling in Los Angeles, recalled that during the 1930s, Filipinos felt "lucky" if they earned $2 for a 12–hour day cutting celery or picking peaches.[10] Celendo La Questa and his cohorts, however, remember making only one dollar a day for 15-hour days performing back-breaking stoop labor like hoeing cabbage in the Salinas Valley.[11] The economic slump affected Filipinos in urban areas just as dramatically. Johnny P. Rallonza, who worked as a dishwasher in Los Angeles, recalled that his weekly salary fell from $45 to $10, while

his work day increased from 9½ to 15 hours. Rallonza expressed discontent, but quickly added that "I *had* to work. Too many people were out of jobs and had no place [even] to sleep."[12] Indeed, one study estimated that in Depression-era Los Angeles County, about 75 percent of the more than 12,000 Filipinos lost their jobs.[13]

As laborers in some of the most exploitative sectors, Filipinos sought to create meanings in their lives by developing cultural practices and oppositional strategies to mitigate the harsh circumstances of their lives and to foster some semblance of ethnic solidarity. The taxi dance halls and other recreational centers which dotted the migratory routes and the downtown areas where Filipinos lived became significant rendezvous points for calling the community into being, where Filipinos could cement and rejuvenate personal bonds, share food, swap stories, and surely gossip about the *kababayan* (countrymen) along the migration circuit. Barred from buying homes and forced to rent small shoddy rooms in the rundown sections of cities by a combination of legislation, poverty, racism, and segregation, Filipinos invested instead in clothing and activities that showcased a vibrant public life in and around Los Angeles's Little Manila. From the 1930s until World War II, this ethnic enclave flourished in the downtown area, roughly demarcated by San Pedro Street on the east, Sixth Street on the south, Figueroa Avenue on the west, and Sunset Boulevard on the north.[14]

Filipinos eagerly frequented the taxi dance halls near the community, including Danceland and the Hippodrome Palace on Main Street, the Liberty Dance Hall on Third, Roma Hall on Figueroa, and the Orpheum and the Red Mill Dance Hall on Broadway. Many of the dance halls were within easy walking distance, sometimes even next to each other, or at least along the route of the red cars, the city's public transportation system in the 1930s. The dance halls were part of the effervescent street culture of the downtown scene, blending in with the various restaurants, cafes, barbershops, and pool halls ardently patronized by the Filipino residents. Walkways leading to these leisure centers were strategic meeting points in the Filipinos' social lives. Indeed, Filipino foot traffic was so brisk that at least one researcher observed how "Filipino arrests in Los Angeles for blocking the sidewalk alone run proportionately high. In 1928–1929, 46 of the total 80 arrested under this ordinance were Filipinos."[15]

Clearly, street culture and commercialized leisure activities represented sites that nurtured an important alternative lifestyle. In their search for places that afforded them some sense of dignity and relative freedom of expression, Filipino workers flocked to taxi dance halls to tout young brown bodies not as exploited workers but as sources of enjoyment, style, and sensuality.[16] Living in a world where their work time was dictated by cycles of crops, migration patterns of fish, and demands of service-oriented industries, dance halls provided the spaces for Filipinos to be what they also were: young men in search of the proverbial wine, women, and song. Ray Corpuz, for example, who emigrated when he was fourteen years old, recalled that in the Filipino community of the 1930s,

> we were all males at that time, from L.A. to Seattle . . . so what do we have to do? We were young so we go to Chinatown because there are a lot of, ah, things going on there. Taxi dances, prostitution, whatever, they were there. And of course young people like me at the time, I like to try everything to see what it looks like as opposed to, you know, [reading about] it in the books.[17]

In the dance halls, Filipino workers developed a dynamic subculture, where they celebrated the body attired in McIntosh suits, expensive formal attire with padded shoulders and wide lapels worn by some of Hollywood's most famous leading men like William Powell. This desire for a form-fitted McIntosh in turn provided opportunities for some entrepreneurs in Little Manila. When Vincent Bello, for example, tired of the migratory lifestyle, he opened the Bello Smart Tailor Shop on Main Street, where he made a living in custom fitting, and sometimes designing, clothes for his compatriots.[18] Felix Pascua remembered that Bello "made the best McIntosh suit around town in those days."[19] Bello never had to return to migrant labor to make a living.[20] Oscar F. Huck's tailor shop on 706 South Hill Street also thrived on a brisk business due to a "large Filipino clientele."[21] The Calderon Company on 105 East First Street, capitalizing on the appeal of the McIntosh suit to Filipinos, advertised that the shop specialized in "custom-built Hollywood clothes."[22]

Dressed to the hilt, Filipinos flocked to L.A. leisure halls to dance to music ranging from sentimental love songs to more rousing numbers like the swing, the jitterbug, and the fox trot. Entrance fees usually ranged from ten cents to a quarter. Some dance halls, like the Red Mill on Broadway, offered free admission up to a certain hour. Others charged a dollar upon entering, but patrons received tickets good for ten one-minute dances. Various establishments offered a spectrum of incentives, including the "lucky number" lottery, where the owners hid numbers amid the decorations in the ceiling. At certain intervals, the house would call out a "lucky" number, and the patron standing under, or closest to, that number received free dance passes.[23]

Other dance halls provided "free" entertainment like dance shows and musical recitals before or after the regular taxi dancing. The Hippodrome Dance Palace, for example, regularly sponsored a Sunday midnight program that featured an "all girl show" led by "Big" Rita Gaythorne. One such line-up included Spanish dances performed by Betty Bernard and a rumba number by Billie Wallace. But if "Big" Rita, Betty, and Billie were not enough for the patrons, the Hippodrome promised that all "other girls will be called on demand."[24] A Filipino observer noted that during these shows, "the Filipino patrons cannot refrain from participation when watching the dancing or listening to the singing. When a dancing couple performs a 'blues' or a 'moonlight waltz,' voices from the crowd will be raised time and again. . . . Also, when there is a popular song, voices occasionally join in a wild exultant shout at certain intervals."[25]

The key to participating in the games and dances, of course, was the continual purchase of tickets. "If you wanted to dance you had to buy a roll of tickets in advance," a Filipino laborer recalled, "then you would dance with a woman until all your tickets were gone. . . . Each ticket was 10 [cents] and you were lucky if your salary was even $5 a day then. So your whole salary might last for only an hour if you liked to dance."[26] For some Filipinos, this price was too high for one night's pastime. Johnny Garcia remarked that "if they [Filipino patrons] would work and

save their money now instead of hanging around dance halls and going out with the girls they would be better off. I like to dance but I don't like to well enough to throw all my earnings on it."[27] Indeed, even Carey McWilliams quipped that taxi dancing "is about the costliest [entertainment] to be found in California: ten cents for a dance that lasts exactly one minute."[28] Still, most Filipinos bought rolls of tickets in the dance halls. Severely restricted by racism and segregation in other aspects of their lives, they reveled in the night clubs which accepted, indeed encouraged, their participation. Felix Pascua recalled that Filipinos faced rejection in most social institutions, and that "the only places that welcomed us with open arms were the gambling houses and dancing halls."[29]

While the tickets frequently represented the bulk of their wages, for some Filipinos taxi dancing remained a popular diversion because it paid off in another way: it enhanced their prestige as "sporting men" among their compatriots. Frank Coloma, for example, bragged that "there were four main dancing cabarets in Los Angeles and I had a girlfriend in every hall."[30] Miguel Lawagan also frequented taxi dance halls in Los Angeles, going to the Hippodrome Dance Palace, the self-proclaimed "rendezvous of sportsmen," almost every night. For him, taxi dancing "is cheaper than a date—for one dollar you can have, say, ten different girls."[31]

While most dance halls remained open every evening, Saturday and Sunday were the busiest nights, when young, working-class immigrant men like Filipinos and Mexicans cruised these leisure centers in pursuit of some night moves.[32] Inside the crowded dance halls, one anxious observer described "dancing that was thoroughly immoral. Couples dance or whirl about the floor with their bodies pressed tightly together, shaking, moving, and rotating their lower portions to rouse their sex impulses. Some even engage in 'biting' one another on the lobes of the ears and upon the neck."[33] The sexual overtones in part reflected how workers took control of their own bodies and actions in these commercialized centers. Regarded by many Anglo employers primarily as exploitable "stoop labor" in the fields, Filipinos and Mexicans proclaimed their sensuality and virility in ways denied them as workers. Under the guise of performing modern dance movements, overworked brown bodies reveled in a charged atmosphere of raw sexuality. Through public displays of simulated sexual intercourse, workers seized moments of gratification absent from other aspects of their lives. Working for farm owners who pitted them against each other during often bitter labor disputes, taxi dance halls encouraged an interethnic working-class culture based on the body's ability to express, or at least effectively suggest, passion, arousal, and sexual bravado.

While promoting a shared, decidedly heterosexual masculine experience, confrontations were also frequent enough among the young Filipino and Mexican regulars and the Anglos who occasionally attended the dance halls that the police had a convenient reason to raid the clubs regularly.[34] Sammy R. Lopez, a migrant worker who came to the United States in 1929, recalled how "Filipinos, Americans, Mexicans . . . get jealous . . . [of] one another [because] they think somebody [is] fooling around with their sweetheart. . . . I see actually shooting, too, in Los Angeles in front of the [taxi dance hall]."[35] Rivalry over accouterments and the affection, or at least the availability, of taxi dancers appear to be the overwhelming causes of these skirmishes. One Mexican observer noted how a number of the Mexican immigrant men in the dance halls were "very poorly dressed . . . [and] many of them dance Mexican style."[36] This aspect of clothing and dancing style among Mexican patrons contributed to the competition with the customarily impeccably groomed, and periodically flashy, Filipinos who routinely frequented the same leisure centers. Frank Coloma recalled that whenever he went out, "I always wore the very best suit—a McIntosh suit."[37] Vicente Elequin remembered interethnic tensions also based on clothing in San Diego, where "the Mexican and Anglo guys did not like us [Filipinos] because we got all the girls at the dance halls. We wore the best clothes in the market and entertained the girls well."[38]

Bursts of interethnic tensions among the youthful male patrons notwithstanding, amicable relations developed between some taxi dancers and their Filipino partners, suggesting that the attraction between brown men and white women was mutual. Alida C. Bowler, director of the Delinquency Unit of the U.S. Children's Bureau, noted that a number of Anglo taxi dancers preferred Filipino customers. When she worked as the LAPD's director of public relations, Bowler recalled that

> from the Filipino youth, she [the taxi dancer] will tell you, she usually receives treatment greatly superior to that accorded her by the average American frequenter of the dance-hall. The Filipino is a natty fellow, almost always immaculately groomed, well garbed, with a flair for that style of dress described by these girls as "classy". . . . And he has manners. His approach to the girl is habitually marked by a courtesy practically non-existent among the more or less uncouth American white men to whom she has already been or has become accustomed. The girls are by no means indifferent to these qualities.[39]

Not all taxi dancers, however, shared these sentiments regarding Asian patrons of the leisure centers. Intense interethnic prejudices often had to be overcome before dancer and client ever stepped onto the dance floor. In some of Los Angeles's dance halls, a Mexican observer noted how "the majority of the Mexican [taxi dancers] do not like to dance with the Chinese, Japanese, or Filipinos who, for their part, generally prefer American or Mexican women who are very light-skinned and can easily pass as Americans."[40] Slang terms among Filipino workers reflected some of these pervasive racial tensions—for example, "staying white" referred to taxi dancers who danced with Filipinos but dated only Anglo men, while a "nigger lover" was a white taxi dancer who accepted dates with Filipinos.[41]

Thus the dance hall culture was neither inherently utopian nor even democratic. The only acceptable sexual mores, for example, were based on heterosexual desires. Further, hand in hand with the emergence of the male youth subculture was the patrons' objectification of women in the dance halls. The gendered arrangements of the public space underscored this principle. Unless they were dancing with clients, all of the taxi dancers were required to stand in a line, in full view of potential customers. While waiting, women were supposed to attract the interests of any male patrons.[42] Slang expressions among Filipinos reflected the sexism within the largely male population. A number of them generally referred to taxi dancers and female Anglo companions, no matter how old, as "*bata*," a Tagalog word for, literally, baby

or a very young child, not necessarily always a term of endearment.[43] These condescending attitudes may in part be what the taxi dancers perceived as "manners" among the Filipino patrons.

Despite the male-centered subculture of the taxi dance halls, for some women, especially young women, working in the leisure centers provided one way of making a living. Generally, dancers earned one-half of the ticket price per dance, but whatever else the patrons gave them as "tips" or gifts were theirs to keep. For some unemployed women, working as taxi dancers seemed to offer a relatively more profitable alternative job. One study estimated that taxi dancers could potentially earn between $35 to $40 per week, a figure representing at least twice or even three times the salaries offered by factories and department stores.[44] Income and other benefits from taxi dance halls became especially crucial to single young women during the Great Depression and the New Deal decades, when men received preferential treatment from federal programs like the Works Progress Administration (WPA) on the assumption that men were the principal breadwinners. This policy squeezed not only single women from federally funded jobs, but wives and female heads of household as well.[45]

The predominance of young men paying to dance with women in these taxi dance halls suggests how, on one level, entertainment industries began to take seriously working-class youth, immigrant or not, as consumers.[46] Some of the most popular recreation centers, like the Orpheum and the Hippodrome, were originally built as luxurious theaters for quality vaudeville acts for the largely middle-class Midwesterners and their families who migrated to Los Angeles beginning at the turn of the century.[47] When vaudeville ceased to be profitable, a few theater owners sold their properties to entrepreneurs, some of whom catered to an emerging population of consumers, young working people with discretionary incomes.

On another level, however, popular culture practices represented sites where workers, marginalized by class, race, age, or gender, took back what they felt was rightfully theirs: their bodies, their time, and the freedom to construct, affirm, or reject identities in their own fashion and among their own peers. Historian Robin D. G. Kelley understands the urgency of this need within communities of exploited laborers. Writing about oppositional strategies among workers of color in general and African Americans in the Jim Crow South in particular, Kelley eloquently argues that the

> search for the sonic, visceral pleasures of music and fellowship, for the sensual pleasures of food, drink, and dancing was not just about escaping the vicissitudes of southern life. They went with people who had a shared knowledge of cultural forms, people with whom they felt kinship, people with whom they shared stories about the day or the latest joke, people who shared a vernacular whose grammar and vocabulary struggled to articulate the beauty and burden of their lives."[48]

Like these black workers, Filipinos went to dance halls because they not only liked to dance, but also to share experiences and formulate a collective memory in addition to those in the work place.

To the broader American society and its policing agencies, however, the combination of youth, flagrant displays of sexuality, and bursts of violence among working-class men in the taxi dance halls represented the close association they had always assumed existed among vice, prostitution, and commercialized entertainment. In 1929, for example, the Los Angeles Police Commission embarked on an impassioned crusade against taxi dance halls when a newspaper's unsubstantiated "exposé" alleged that "white girls [are] 'sold' to Oriental Men as Partners for 'Taxi-Dance.' "[49] But because of poverty, restrictive covenants, and brute force from neighboring Anglo residents, ethnic communities were usually segregated in neighborhoods that were crime ridden even before the arrival of immigrants or poor people of color in the area.[50] Filipino immigrant author Carlos Bulosan wrote how, in 1930s Los Angeles, he, his brother, and many compatriots were forced to live on Hope Street, "where pimps and prostitutes were as numerous as the stars in the sky. It was a noisy and tragic street, where suicide and murders were a daily occurrence, but it was the only place in the city where we could find a room. There was no other district where we were allowed to reside."[51]

For numerous reasons, including recreation, possible employment, and varying degrees of protection from a hostile dominant society, immigrants often congregated in ethnic neighborhoods like Sonoratown, Chinatown, and Little Manila. Thus, the police associated violence particularly with the activities of Angeleños of color, despite the fact that arrest rates for Filipinos under twenty-five years old in Los Angeles during the Great Depression were lower than those among Anglo men of the comparable age group.[52] Furthermore, these statistics were typical throughout California where Filipinos and Anglos worked and lived, including San Francisco and Stockton.[53] Nevertheless, Manuel Buaken, who worked as a houseboy in Los Angeles in the 1930s, remembered that he and his friends constantly faced harassment by police officers. Strolling along his employer's affluent residential street during a break from his domestic duties one evening, Buaken recalled how an officer barked at him to "move along, you appear like a questionable and suspicious character."[54]

In addition to localized attempts at controlling the Filipinos' use of public spaces, campaigns for restrictive legislation regarding Filipino immigration became typical responses among associations like the Native Sons of the Golden West and the Commonwealth Club. Members aggressively lobbied for exclusionist policies based on the presumed unbridled "sexual passions" of Filipinos for Anglo women. David T. Barrows, a former president of the University of California, testified before the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization that the Filipino "usually frequents the poorer quarters of our towns and spends the residue of his savings in brothels and dance halls, which in spite of our laws exist to minister to his lower nature."[55]

Competition over the regulation of taxi dance halls, however, was not restricted to the impulses and racist attitudes of the dominant society. Divisions within the Filipino community illustrate the competing agendas and visions of what a Filipino ethnic identity should incorporate. Campaigns to discipline and "correct" the behavior of the young Filipino workers came not only from the host society's policing institutions and reform associations but also from small groups of self-appointed guardians of Filipino "morality" within the community. Controversies associated with the leisure activities of fellow countrymen reveal tensions, including interethnic class struggles and differences over the image of Filipinos in the United States, among

the immigrants. Mutual-aid societies like the Filipino Federation of America (FFA), for example, renounced the workers' many "immoralities," and actively discouraged Filipinos from drinking, gambling, and dating white women, activities which its members argued contributed to disparaging stereotypes of Filipinos.[56]

Some Filipino fraternal organizations also routinely organized dances for the "boys" as alternative recreational activities to commercialized dance halls, but these gatherings were generally not popular. The groups served no liquor, they kept the dance floor well lit, and the only female dance partners available were the wives of the organizers. As one young Filipino laborer explained, "I wouldn't want to go there and dance with them. They're married and they're too old and they don't dance very well."[57] Still other Filipino leaders appealed to the business owners of nearby commercialized centers to close the dance halls part of Sunday evenings in the hopes that Filipino workers would come to community-based socials and events instead. Danceland and Hippodrome Dance Palace complied with the request, but Liberty Dance Hall remained open early on Sundays, and with free admission to boot. This issue evoked strong reaction among the small Filipino elite. Johnny Samson, chairman of the Filipino Unity Council, charged that Liberty Dance Hall's owner, "Jack Goldberg [,] is not a human being. He is only interested in what he gets from Filipinos—their MONEY, their hard earned MONEY!"[58]

Conflicts related to taxi dance halls were also often intense among the Filipino workers themselves. One old-timer recalled that tensions among the youthful patrons occasionally ran high, and the

> boys used to get jealous with each other because those girls would dance with anyone with ten cent ticket[s]. And some guys have more money than others and [the] boys think he's trying to outshine him. Naturally, the fight start[s] . . . Filipinos are really hot-tempered when it comes to things of that sort. . . . It happened everywhere[,] . . . Los Angeles, Stockton, everywhere where they have [taxi] dances.[59]

In part, these anxieties depict the importance of, and the urgency to maintain, an image of desirability among themselves. The competition, however, also evinced an internal code of behavior among Filipino workers which allowed them to define what was acceptable or unacceptable on their own terms. Living in a world that classified all of their leisure activities as "deviant," the workers themselves formulated ways of discouraging conduct which threatened the community and communal experiences beyond a tolerable level. While they considered dressing in vogue for a night out proper behavior, monopolizing all the dances clearly was not.

The biggest and by far the most turbulent confrontations at the taxi dance halls, however, were between Filipino and Anglo laborers. On one occasion, an Anglo migrant worker seethed about losing jobs to Filipinos because they worked longer hours and accepted lower wages. Included in this bitter complaint was that when Anglos went to the taxi dance halls, they found that

> Filipino boys are good dancers. They can dance circles around these "white" boys, and the "white" boys don't like that—especially when the Filipinos dance with "white" girls. It's no telling what these Filipinos will do if they keep comin'; and it's no tellin' what the "white" man will do either. Something is liable to happen.[60]

In January 1930, something *did* ensue in what is arguably the largest and most vicious display of anti-Filipino sentiment in California. In Watsonville, crowds of white workers and residents stormed a new taxi dance hall in a nearby town because, as one participant declared, "taxi-dance halls where white girls dance with [Filipinos] may be all right in San Francisco or Los Angeles but not in our community. We won't stand for anything of the kind."[61] In the days that followed, the mob, at times numbering up to seven hundred men, roamed Watsonville's streets, beating or shooting all Filipinos on sight. A Filipino laborer recalled that "the mob came into the pool halls and with clubs bludgeoned all of us and followed us until we were out of the city. Then residences where Filipinos were quartered were ransacked and burned to the ground. Automobiles that contained Filipinos were fired upon, and many of the boys were wounded."[62]

In the following month, the Los Angeles correspondent for the *Baltimore Sun* explained that the ferocious attack on Filipinos occurred in part "because [Filipinos] wore 'sheikier' clothes, danced better, and spent their money more lavishly than their Nordic fellow farmhands and, therefore, appealed more than some of the latter to the local girls."[63] This commentary underscores how the counterimage of Filipino workers created by the Filipinos themselves unsettled the dominant culture's assumptions about the brown "hordes." In sporting quality, fashionable attire like McIntosh suits, Filipinos disrupted the stereotypes of asexual laborers in the dirty, tattered overalls of the agricultural fields and the seemingly docile attendant in the uniforms issued by the service-oriented industries. In effect, Filipino laborers subverted the icons of white middle-class American masculinity, including the ability to dress stylishly, dance well, and exhibit manners appreciated by white women.[64]

Despite the intricate intra- and especially interethnic conflicts which at times erupted into violent confrontations, Filipino workers continued to frequent taxi dance halls. By the 1940s, however, reformers and church groups opposed to "our blondes dancing with Filipinos and Orientals" finally succeeded in getting legislation that barred Filipinos and all Asian men from taxi dance halls.[65] In Los Angeles, regulatory agencies, including the police commission, the fire department, and the health department, implemented this restriction by stricter licensing requirements, exorbitant fees for infractions, and threats to suspend or revoke a license. In September 1940, for example, the police commission launched a zealous investigation of business owners suspected of continuing to operate "mixed" dance halls within the city. A commission spokesperson declared that "the past city administration might have felt that the Oriental and white halls were proper, but I think this administration should take another stand."[66] In addition, guidelines to obtain permits shifted the internal regulation which had rested with the dance hall owners and dancers themselves to the police department, which assigned female officers to the newly formed Dance Hall Detail of the Juvenile Control Division. To further curtail interethnic youth relations, this department supervised the hiring and work schedules of the Anglo women who predominantly worked as taxi dancers.[67]

For Filipinos, legal exclusion from the taxi dance halls created yet another hurdle on one of their favorite leisure activities. This consequence, however, did not mean that Filipinos readily abandoned or forgot the alternative youth culture and com-

munity nurtured in the dance halls. Some Filipinos shed their outdated McIntosh suits of the 1930s for the new craze, the zoot suit. Dressed in their drapes and reet-pleat trousers, these Filipinos went instead to the segregated black-and-tan cabarets in Los Angeles, dressing up and dancing to the rhythms of a myriad sounds.[68]

The persistence displayed by Filipinos in negotiating a viable identity in the context of complex race, class struggles reveal the crucial role that popular culture practices played in the formulation of a collective memory and coping strategies among immigrant working-class youths. Looking at the activities deeply embedded in the daily lives of members of aggrieved populations broadens our understanding of the effectiveness of resistance and complicates the questions associated with work, leisure, popular culture, and acculturation.

NOTES

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1. *Philippines Review* (Los Angeles, California), 31 October 1935.

2. Interview of R. K., an "American girl," by Emory Bogardus, in "American Attitudes toward Filipinos," *Sociology and Social Research* 14, no. 1 (September-October 1929): 68.

3. D. F. Gonzalo, "Social Adjustments of Filipinos," *Sociology and Social Research* 14, no. 2 (November-December 1929): 171–172.

4. Some Filipinos had immigrated and settled in the Americas by the late sixteenth century as a result of the galleon trade between the Spanish colonies of Mexico and the Philippines. A number of these "Manilamen," or Spanish-speaking Filipino sailors, jumped ship and settled in Mexico and Louisiana. The first significant wave of Filipino immigrants, however, consisted of *pensionados,* government-sponsored students who came to the United States under the U.S. colonial administration of William Howard Taft in the Philippines. Groups of these students arrived between 1903 and 1938 to study in American institutions, including Harvard, Stanford, Yale, and the University of Southern California. About 14,000 pensionados completed their education between these years, and the vast majority returned to the Philippines. The second biggest wave of Filipino immigration began in the 1920s and lasted until the 1940s. Unlike the preceding wave of pensionados who came from the most privileged families in the Philippines, poor, unskilled laborers from rural provinces constituted the bulk of this group. During World War II, a number of these immigrants joined the United States armed forces and returned to the Philippines to fight against the Japanese. Postwar immigration represented a shift in the composition of Filipinos coming to the United States. For the first time, Filipinas, many of them war brides, began to constitute the greater portion of immigrants from the Philippines. The liberalization of United States immigration laws in 1965,

which gave preference to professionals and family reunification, facilitated the immigration of the latest wave of Filipinos, the majority of whom are middle class, professionals, and their families. See Fred Cordova, *Filipinos: Forgotten Asian Americans* (Seattle: Demonstration Project for Asian Americans, 1983); Royal Morales, *Makibaka: The Filipino American Struggle* (Los Angeles: Mountainview Publishers, 1974); H. Brett Melendy, *Asians in America: Filipinos, Koreans, and East Indians* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1977); Sucheng Chan, *Asian Americans: An Interpretive History* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1991); and Ronald Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore: A History of Asian Americans* (New York: Penguin Books, 1989). On the "Manilamen" and their legacy in Louisiana, see Marina E. Espina, "Filipinos in New Orleans," *Proceedings of Louisiana Academy of Sciences* 37 (December 1974): 117–121; and Cordova, *Filipinos,* 1–7. On pensionados, see Catherine Ceniza Pet, "Pioneers/Puppets: The Legacy of the *Pensionado* Program" (B.A. thesis, Pomona College, 1991). On Filipino laborers in the continental United States during the Great Depression, see, for example, Linda Nueva España-Maram, "Negotiating Identity: Youth, Gender, and Popular Culture in Los Angeles's Little Manila, 1920s-1940s" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1996); and Barbara M. Posadas, "Mestiza Girlhood: Interracial Families in Chicago's Filipino American Community since 1925," in *Making Waves: An Anthology of Writings by and about Asian American Women,* ed. Asian Women United of California (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 273–281. Some Filipino students wrote about their working-class compatriots. See, for example, Severino F.Corpus, "An Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1938); and Benecio T. Catapusan, "The Filipino Occupational and Recreational Activities in Los Angeles" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1934). On struggles for unionization, see Craig Scharlin and Lilia Villanueva, *Philip Vera Cruz: A Personal History of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement,* memorial edition, ed. Glenn Omatsu and Augusto Espiritu (Los Angeles: UCLA Labor Center, Institute of Industrial Relations, and the UCLA Asian American Studies Center, 1994); Chris Friday, *Organizing Asian American Labor: The Pacific Coast Canned Salmon Industry, 1870–1942* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Howard A. de Witt, *Anti-Filipino Movements in California* (San Francisco: R and E Research Associates, 1976); and Arleen Garcia de Vera, "A Case Study of the Cannery Workers and Farm Laborers Union, 1948–1955" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1990). On Filipinos and World War II, see Manuel Buaken, "Life in the Armed Forces," *New Republic* (30 August 1943): 279–280; Bienvenido Santos, "Filipinos in War," *Far Eastern Survey* 11, no. 24 (30 November 1942): 249–250; and Theodore Sanchez Gonzalves, " 'We hold a neatly folded hope': Filipino American Veterans of World War II on Citizenship and Political Obligation," *Amerasia Journal* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1995): 155–174. On Filipina war brides, see Dorothy Cordova, "Voices from the Past: Why They Came," in *Making Waves,* 42–49. On post-1965 Filipino immigrants, see Fred Arnold et al., "Estimating the Immigration Multiplier: An Analysis of Recent Korean and Filipino Immigration to the United States," *International Migration Review* 23 (1989): 813–838; Richard E. Joyce and Chester L. Hunt, "Philippine Nurses and the Brain Drain," *Social Science and Medicine* 16, no. 12 (1982): 1223–1233; and *Amerasia Journal* 13, no. 1 (1986–87), which focused on Filipinos. See especially Tania Azores, "Educational Attainment and Upward Mobility: Prospect for Filipino Americans," 39–52; Pyong Gap Min, "Filipino and Korean Immigrants in Small Business: A Comparative Analysis," 53–71; and Madge Bello and Vincent Reyes, "Filipino Americans and the Marcos Overthrow: The Transformation of Political Consciousness," 73–83. See also Bangele Alsaybar, "Satanas: Ethnography of a Filipino American Brotherhood" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1993).

5. The Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 prevented the immigration of Chinese laborers, while the 1908 "Gentlemen's Agreement" targeted Japanese workers. The National Origins Act of 1924 completely banned Asian immigration, including Asian spouses of U.S. citizens.

6. State of California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts about Filipino Immigration*, Special Bulletin No. 3 (San Francisco: State Building, 1930), 16. See also Harry H. L. Kitano and Roger Daniels, *Asian Americans: Emerging Minorities* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1988).

7. See Corpus, "An Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship"; and Casiano Coloma, "A Study of the Filipino Repatriation Movement" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1939). All figures related to Filipinos are estimates, since the vast majority of these immigrants were migratory laborers.

8. The work (mostly sociological theses) by students in the 1930s that focused on Filipino Angeleños include Catapusan, "The Filipino Occupational and Recreational Activities in Los Angeles," and Corpus, "An Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship." Relatively more recent studies by Edwin B. Almirol, for example, focus on Salinas in "Filipino Voluntary Associations: Balancing Social Pressures and Ethnic Images," *Ethnic Groups* 2, no. 1 (1978): 65–92; Herminia Quimpo Meñez focuses on Delano in *Folklore Communication among Filipinos in California* (New York: Arno Press, 1980); and Howard de Witt focuses on Watsonville in *Violence in the Fields* (Saratoga, Calif.: Century Twenty One Publishing, 1980). Barbara M. Posadas's studies examine the urban Filipino-American experience in Chicago. See, for example, "Ethnic Life and Labor in Chicago's Pre-World War II Filipino Community," in *Labor Divided: Race and Ethnicity in United States Labor Struggles, 1835–1960,* ed. Robert Asher and Charles Stephenson, 63–80 (New York: State University of New York Press, 1990).

9. State of California Department of Industrial Relations, *Facts about Filipino Immigration*, 23–24.

10. Toribio Castillo, interview by author, 1 March 1992, Los Angeles.

11. Celedonio La Questa, Jacinto Sequig, and Florentino Mendoza, "A Dollar a Day, Ten Cents a Dance: A Historic Portrait of Filipino Farm Workers in America," produced by George Ow, Jr., Geoffrey Dunn, and Mark Schwartz, directed by Mark Schwartz, 40 min., Impact Productions, 1984, videocassette.

12. Johnny P. Rallonza, interview by author, 23 April 1992, Downey, California.

13. See Coloma, "A Study of the Filipino Repatriation Movement."

14. References to Little Manila are valid only until World War II. This geographical location for the ethnic community no longer exists. Most of the original buildings were demolished in the postwar gentrification of Los Angeles's downtown and Little Tokyo's expansion. Information on Little Manila for this study came from advertisements in the *Philippines Review* (Los Angeles); Corpus, "An Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship"; Tania Azores, "Filipinos in the Los Angeles Labor Force: Placemaking in Little Manila," unpublished paper, 1983; and Rosemarie D. Ibañez, "Birds of Passage: Filipino Immigrants in the 1920s and 1930s," unpublished paper, 1990. On the postwar Filipino Angeleño community, see Valentin R. Aquino, "The Filipino Community in Los Angeles" (M.A. thesis, University of Southern California, 1952). On recent struggles to create a Filipino Town in downtown Los Angeles, see Augusto Fauni Espiritu, "The Rise and Fall of the Filipino Town Campaign in Los Angeles: A Study of Filipino American Leadership" (M.A. thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992).

15. James Earl Wood, "Field Notes Regarding Filipinos," James Earl Wood Papers, Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley (hereafter cited as Wood Papers).

16. Robin D. G. Kelley touches on these themes in relation to leisure activities of African Americans in " 'We Are Not What We Seem': Rethinking Black Working-Class Opposition in the Jim Crow South," *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 75–112. See also the collection of essays in idem, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1994). On class, gender, and alternative notions of sexuality fostered through participation in urban leisure centers, see Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986). On popular culture and oppositional strategies among aggrieved populations, see George Lipsitz, *Time Passages: Collective Memory and American Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990); Stuart Hall, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Popular'," in *People's History and Socialist Theories*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), 227–239; Kelley, "Notes on Deconstructing 'The Folk'," *American Historical Review* 97, no. 5 (December 1992): 1400–1408. See also James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1990); and C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1963).

17. Ray Edralin Corpus, interview by Bob Antolin, 22 September 1981, Tacoma, Washington, interview PNW81-Fil-028ba, transcript, Pinoy Archives, Filipino American National Historical Society (hereafter cited as FANHS).

18. Castillo interview. Bello adamantly refused to be interviewed for this project, insisting that Filipino/a-American students should concentrate less on the past and more on promoting the achievements of contemporary Filipino/a Americans. By 1938, the Vincent Bello Smart Tailoring Shop had moved to 238 East Second Street. See Corpus, "An Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship," 67.

19. Felix Pascua, interview by author, 21 May 1995, Los Angeles.

20. Castillo interview.

21. See *Philippines Review* (Los Angeles), 6 April 1935, and passim.

22. See *Ang Bantay* [*The Guardian*] (Los Angeles), 7 December 1929, and passim.

23. On the "lucky number" and "lucky door ticket," see Benecio T. Catapusan, "Leisure Time Problems of Filipino Immigrants," *Sociology and Social Research* 24, no. 2 (July-August 1940): 548.

24. *Philippines Review* (Los Angeles), 13 November 1935.

25. Catapusan, "Leisure Time Problems," 548.

26. Joan May T. Cordova and Alexis S. Canillo, eds., *Voices: A Filipino-American Oral History* (Santa Rosa, CA: Northwestern Graphics, 1984).

27. Johnny Garcia, interview by Lundy, 18 January 1937, transcript, "Racial Minority Survey: Filipinos," Federal Writers' Project, box 142, folder 1086, University Research Library, University of California, Los Angeles (hereafter cited as FWP).

28. Carey McWilliams, *Brothers under the Skin* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1942; reprint, 1964), 238 (page reference is to reprint edition).

29. Felix Pascua, interview by Dante Ochoa, in "Little Manila Revisited," *Philippine Beat Magazine* 1, no. 2 (January-February 1989): 15.

30. Frank Coloma, interview by Roberto V. Vallangca, *Pinoy: The First Wave* (San Francisco: Strawberry Hill Press, 1977): 96.

31. Miguel Lawagan, interview by author, 26 June 1993, San Francisco.

32. On Mexican immigrants and dance halls in La Placita, see George J. Sánchez, *Becoming*

Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), especially chapter 8.

33. Clyde Bennett Vedder, "An Analysis of the Taxi-Dance Hall as a Social Institution, with Special Reference to Los Angeles and Detroit" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1947), 183.

34. Conflicts were also common between Filipinos and the white ethnic patrons of Chicago's taxi dance halls. See Paul Cressy, *The Taxi Dance Halls: A Sociological Study in Commercialized Recreation and City Life* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1932).

35. Sammy R. Lopez, interview by Cynthia Mejia, 24 November 1975, interview FIL-KNG 75-36cm, transcript, Washington State Oral/Aural History Project, Olympia, Washington (hereafter cited as WSOAHP).

36. Luis Felipe Recinos, "Observaciones—Los Salones de Baile," Los Angeles, 15 April 1927. Manuel Gamio Collection, Bancroft Library, University of California Berkeley (hereafter cited as Gamio Papers). Spanish passages translated by author.

37. Coloma interview in Vallangca, *Pinoy*, 87.

38. Vicente Elequin, in Adelaida Castillo-Tsuchida, "Filipino Migrants in San Diego, 1900–1946" (M.A. thesis, University of San Diego, 1979), 52.

39. Alida C. Bowler, "Social Hygiene in Racial Problems—The Filipino," *Journal of Social Hygiene* 18, no. 8 (November 1932): 455.

40. Recinos, "Observaciones," Gamio Papers.

41. See collection of slang among Filipinos in Corpus, "Analysis of the Racial Adjustment Activities and Problems of the Filipino-American Christian Fellowship."

42. *L.A. Express* (Los Angeles), 16 April 1929. Thanks to Michael Willard for pointing out this source and photocopying the clippings relevant to this study.

43. Ibid.

44. See Cressy, *Taxi-Dance Hall*, 12.

45. See, for example, Lois Scharf, *To Work and to Wed: Female Employment, Feminism, and the Great Depression* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1980).

46. See, for example, the collection of essays in *Small Worlds: Children and Adolescents in America, 1850–1950*, ed. Elliott West and Paula Petrik (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992).

47. Stan Singer, "Vaudeville in Los Angeles, 1910–1926: Theaters, Management, and the Orpheum," *Pacific Historical Review* 61, no. 1 (February 1992): 103–113.

48. Kelley, " 'We are not what we seem'," 84–85.

49. See the *Los Angeles Express* (Los Angeles), 16 April 1929.

50. See, for example, Neil Larry Shumsky, "Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870–1910" *Journal of Social History* 19, no. 4 (Summer 1986): 664–679. See also Donald Teruo Hata, Jr., and Nadine Ishitani Hata, "Asian-Pacific Angelinos: Model Minorities and Indispensable Scapegoats," in Norman M. Klein and Martin J. Schiesl, eds, *Twentieth-Century Los Angeles: Power, Promotion, and Social Conflict* (Claremont, Calif.: Regina Books, 1990), 61–99.

51. Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1943; reprint, Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 134 (page reference is to reprint edition).

52. See *Annual Report of the Los Angeles Police Department*, 1936–1937 and 1937–1938.

53. See Honorante Mariano, "The Filipino Immigrants in the U.S." (M.A. thesis, University of Oregon, 1933).

54. Manuel Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1948), 89.

55. David P. Barrows, quoted in Takaki, *Strangers from a Different Shore*, 329.

56. On the FFA, see Steffi San Buenaventura, "Nativism and Ethnicity in a Filipino-American Experience" (Ph.D. diss., University of Hawaii, 1990).

57. Interview by James Earl Wood, n.d., but almost certainly in the 1930s, when he conducted his fieldwork. Wood Papers, folder no. 3.

58. *Associated Filipino Press* (Los Angeles), 15 February 1939 (emphasis in original).

59. Alfronso Perales Dangaran, quoted in Cordova, *Filipinos*, 215.

60. Interview by James Earl Wood, n.d., but almost certainly in the 1930s, when he conducted his fieldwork. Wood Papers, folder no. 3.

61. Ibid.

62. Buaken, *I Have Lived with the American People*, 103. Amazingly, only one Filipino, Fermin Tovera, died in the riot.

63. Duncan Aikman, quoted in "Causes of California's Race Riots," *Literary Digest*, 15 February 1930, 12.

64. On subverting and inverting icons of the dominant culture, see, for example, George Lipsitz, "Mardi Gras Indians: Carnival and Counter-Narrative in Black New Orleans," in *Time Passages*, 233–253.

65. Quoted in Vedder, "An Analysis of the Taxi-Dance Hall," 48.

66. *L.A. Express* (Los Angeles), 18 September 1940.

67. See Los Angeles Police Department, "Rules Governing Taxi Dance Halls, 1943."

68. For a preliminary examination of Filipino zoot suiters in Los Angeles, see España-Maram, "Negotiating Identity," 225–269. On the explosion of nightclubs in war time Los Angeles, see Stephen J. Loza, *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).