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# Review of: Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles, by Eric Avila

Kevin Allen Leonard

Western Washington University, [kevin.leonard@wwu.edu](mailto:kevin.leonard@wwu.edu)

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Review

Author(s): Kevin Allen Leonard

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history in order to open up new conversations about transnational relationships.

Paying tribute to the multiplicity of narratives and histories found in the borderlands region, Truett and Young divide the volume into four thematic sections. Part One, "Frontier Legacies," looks at the Texas and California borderlands during the colonial and national periods, asking readers to re-examine traditional assumptions of frontier life. Raúl Ramos challenges the stereotype that Indians and Mexicans in Texas constantly fought one another in the Mexican North; Louise Pubols argues that the conventional declension narrative of Californio elite post-1848 fails to take into account re-fashioned patriarchal relationships that helped maintain Californio political power for years after the U. S. conquest.

Part Two, "Borderland Stories," examines literature, community, and the ways in which stories were told in the nineteenth-century borderlands. This section includes Bárbara Reyes's insightful piece about patriarchal groups producing competing narratives of a native woman, Bárbara Gandiaga, and her role in the murder of a Dominican priest in Baja California in 1803. While the stories of colonial authorities criminalized Gandiaga in an effort to justify their control over the native population, just fifty years later, amidst the push towards Mexican liberalism, Baja Californios re-appropriated her as an anti-clerical heroine.

Paying tribute to less familiar borderlands actors, Part Three, "Transnational Identities," challenges the customary "brown-white" paradigm by introducing readers to new players on the U. S.-Mexico frontier. Grace Delgado's study of Chinese merchants and laborers moving into the Arizona-Sonora border region, and Karl Jacoby's examination of an African American colony in northern Mexico, add excellent new insights to the complexity of borderlands race relations.

The book's last section, "Body Politics," traces the construction of national, ethnic, and gendered bodies on the borderlands landscape. Benjamin Johnson's exploration of tensions between Tejano Progressives and supporters of the 1915 Plan de San Diego uprising and Alexandra Stern's study of the Texas Rangers and the U. S. Border Patrol both speak to efforts by the state to domesticate the borderlands by squelching rebellion and patrolling boundaries between the U. S. and Mexico.

The transnational approach of this collection comes on the heels of the Organization of American Historians's "La Pietra Report" and addresses important realities of globalization. As the peoples and economies of the U. S. and Mexico continue to overlap, these scholars provide a welcome invitation to re-think the meaning of borderlands in our world today.

ELIZABETH R. ESCOBEDO

*University of Texas at San Antonio*

***Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight: Fear and Fantasy in Suburban Los Angeles.*** By Eric Avila. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. xx + 308 pp. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. \$39.95, £26.95.)

Eric Avila's ambitious and engaging *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* argues that a "new 'new mass culture'" emerged in the United States in the years following the Second World War. The "new mass culture" of the nineteenth century reflected the development of modern, industrial cities; this "new 'new mass culture'" mirrored the development of a new, post-industrial, suburban society. In this new culture, cities represented sites of decay and danger occupied by

dark-skinned criminals. Suburbs, on the other hand, represented sites of order and safety inhabited by homogeneous groups of “white” people. As this new culture replaced an older culture, new theme parks such as Disneyland replaced old amusement parks such as those at Coney Island, new baseball parks such as Los Angeles’s Dodger Stadium replaced old parks such as Brooklyn’s Ebbets Field, and freeways replaced streetcars. The dramatic suburbanization of the Los Angeles region after World War II makes it the ideal venue in which to explore the contours of this new culture. Avila analyzes a number of Hollywood films, Disneyland, Dodger Stadium, and Southern California’s freeways to reveal how a suburban white identity formed in the region.

Avila suggests that Los Angeles film noir served the interests of Los Angeles’s business elite, which wanted to eliminate “slums” such as downtown’s Bunker Hill. These films emphasized the presence of racialized criminals in these inner-city neighborhoods. Several films even featured scenes shot on Bunker Hill. The book’s examination of the construction of Dodger Stadium is especially insightful. Avila retells the familiar story of the destruction of the Mexican American community in Chavez Ravine. He also explores a fascinating and revealing irony: most African Americans, many of whom fought other “urban renewal” efforts, supported the city’s deal with Dodgers owner Walter O’Malley. To many African Americans, the Dodgers’ reputation as the team that desegregated major league baseball outweighed the deal’s mistreatment of poor people of color in Los Angeles.

In emphasizing the distinction between the “chocolate city” and the “vanilla suburbs,” the book may simplify too much the complexity of racial ideology in Los Angeles. Although Mexican Americans confronted prejudice and discrimination, the law classified them as “white,” and some Mexican Americans embraced this racial identity. Avila seems

to assume that all Mexican Americans saw themselves as “people of color.” This lack of a direct discussion of Mexican Americans and whiteness, however, does not detract from the book’s value. *Popular Culture in the Age of White Flight* constitutes a valuable contribution to ongoing debates within cultural history, urban history, and the history of “race” in the United States. Historians of the twentieth-century West should find this book enjoyable, insightful, and provocative.

KEVIN ALLEN LEONARD  
Western Washington University

**Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice.** By Ian F. Haney López. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003. x + 324 pp. Illustrations, tables, notes, index. \$16.95, paper.)

Ian Haney López, with *Racism on Trial: The Chicano Fight for Justice*, chronicles the history of Chicano resistance as not just a movement against poverty, educational inequalities, legal violence, and institutional racism, but as a movement that “constantly, creatively, and self-consciously . . . fashioned a new racial identity” (p. 205). Repelling the historiographic tendency to treat social movements as single events with a clear beginning and end, Haney López delineates a complex history that links the Chicano movement and the 1968 blowouts to the changing definition of Mexican/Chicano within and outside the community, as well as the shifting relationship between East Los Angeles residents and the state, which he in turn links to grassroots organizing, police brutality, and the “East L.A. Thirteen” and “Biltmore Six” trials. In documenting this history, Haney López avoids the clichéd trap of focusing exclusively on organizations and