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Review of: Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics, by Daniel Hurewitz

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the killing, characterized herself as a victim of spousal abuse and incompetent counsel, and ultimately won the commutation of her sentence. Nellie gained her parole hearing in 1943 and left prison as Helen Marguerite Brown, a reinvented woman, who blended into the twentieth century.

Nellie was not like Kathryn Kelly, Bonnie Parker, or Ma Barker of the depression decade, but she was a crack shot much like the women of Laura Browder's *Her Best Shot: Women and Guns in America* (Chapel Hill, 2006). Readers who liked Patricia Cline Cohen's *The Murder of Helen Jewett* (New York, 1998), Elizabeth U. Alexander's *Notorious Woman: The Celebrated Case of Myra Clark Gaines* (Baton Rouge, 2001), or Susanne Lebsock's *A Murder in Virginia* (New York, 2003) will find this book far more nuanced, clearer on the role of the law, and explicit on the function of the press. This book is a major contribution to our knowledge of women in the American West.

GORDON MORRIS BAKKEN
California State University, Fullerton

Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics. By Daniel Hurewitz. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007. x + 367 pp. Illustrations, maps, charts, notes, index. $29.95.)

Since the publication of George Chauncey's *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940* (New York, 1994), a growing number of scholars have engaged in a lively debate about the history of homosexuality in the United States. In recent years, scholars have begun to explore the possibility that same-sex desire and behavior meant different things to people in different regions. The most articulate advocate of this position is western U. S. historian Peter Boag, the author of *Same-Sex Affairs: Constructing and Controlling Homosexuality in the Pacific Northwest* (Berkeley, 2003). Daniel Hurewitz's *Bohemian Los Angeles and the Making of Modern Politics* represents a strikingly original contribution to this debate. At the heart of the book is an explanation of the emergence of the Mattachine Society, the first homophile organization, in Los Angeles in 1950.

Hurewitz's explanation, however, is not simple and straightforward. In order to show how and why this early gay organization developed, Hurewitz focuses on a variety of seemingly unrelated topics, from the emergence of a community of artists in Southern California to the region's radical politics. The connection among these topics is the community of Edendale, now known as the Silver Lake and Echo Park neighborhoods of Los Angeles. The artists who built a community in Edendale in the 1920s and 1930s argued among themselves about the relationship between the inner self and artistic expression. The radicals who established a similar community in the neighborhood in the 1930s and 1940s increasingly recognized that their everyday lives were inextricably linked to political action. Communists had always been concerned about racial injustice in the United States, but wartime events, particularly the Zoot-Suit Riots of 1943, convinced many other Los Angeles residents that racial discrimination was their society's most pressing problem. A few years later, Harry Hay, a member of the Communist community in Edendale, began to argue that homosexuals were a group analogous to a racial minority group. Hay and other like-minded men established the Mattachine Society and planted the seeds of identity politics.

Hurewitz's research follows in the footsteps of other ground-breaking scholars, most notably Sharon R. Ullman, Edward J. Escobar, and John D'Emilio. Hurewitz, however, has approached the same sources from a different perspective and offers fresh insights. He also

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uncovered some previously unexamined documents and drew upon a number of interviews and oral histories. Hurewitz's argument is not always satisfying. For example, he does not explore the racial and ethnic dimensions of the policing of homosexual behavior as effectively as Boag did in *Same-Sex Affairs*. *Bohemian Los Angeles*, however, is always engaging, and it will undoubtedly spark a lively debate among scholars of sexuality, politics, and the urban West. All historians of the twentieth-century West should read this book.

Kevin Allen Leonard
Western Washington University

On Strike and On Film: Mexican American Families and Blacklisted Filmmakers in Cold War America. By Ellen Baker. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007. xiv + 349 pp. Illustrations, maps, tables, notes, bibliography, index. $59.95, cloth; $22.50, paper.)

In April 1954, when a local movie house premiered *Salt of the Earth* (Herbert J. Biberman), the Sudbury nickel mining community lined up for over two blocks to catch the film. They had to be quick, for within two days the movie was shut down. The theatre owner, under a threat from the local chamber of commerce, decided it was not worth the aggravation. Little wonder—the film, its crew, and the union, International Mine Mill and Smelter Workers, were no match against the onslaught of the Cold War propaganda they faced.

The movie depicts a strike at Empire Zinc Company in Grant County, New Mexico, that began in October 1950, and lasted for over a year. The story the movie tells and the strike that it portrays are the focus of Ellen Baker's book.

Baker's account of the miners' struggle and the cultural battle to make and distribute the film are described on many levels. This is, as Baker herself notes, a story that "fuses, in a clear and compelling fashion, themes of class, ethnic, and gender conflict and struggles for solidarity. It embodies the connections between local and national historical trends: the workings of anticommunism, early efforts at Chicano civil rights, and the trajectory of the American labor movement" (p. 252). It is a well-known tale of Cold War abuse, loss, and a struggle for social justice. Several researchers have approached the subject, but Baker's perspective is unique.

The book is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on the context of the Empire Zinc strike and the crisis surrounding it. The second part is about the central event of both the strike and the film: the women's picket. The last part details the making of the film in the context of Hollywood blacklisting. This last part is the strongest section of the book. Baker paints a comprehensive picture of a political and cultural environment, in which Mine Mill members and film workers were among the pioneers of social unionism and anti-racist struggles.

Baker attempts to integrate the sections of her narrative into a unified whole, but the effort is not a complete success. Although the conclusion traces the ongoing impact of the events on the lives of its participants, the importance of left-led unionism to the Mexican American remains in the background of her argument. Instead, the author focuses on the interconnections of labor and civil rights as they are woven through both the events of the strike and the making of the film and its aftermath. But as *Salt*'s screenwriter Michael Wilson reported after his visit to the women's picket line, "there are battles for equality taking place there on so many levels I can hardly unskein them myself" (p. 193).

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