

# Biased Reporting on the Zoot Suit Riots



# Key Terms

## **Bias**

Unfair prejudice in favor of or against a person or group.

## **Racism**

The combination of individual prejudice and individual discrimination with institutional policies and practices. Racism results in unjustified negative treatment and subordination of members of racial or ethnic groups. Prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention.

Adapted from *Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging Glossary: Foundational Concepts & Affirming Language*.  
Harvard University.

## **Yellow Journalism**

Bias news writing disguised as objective reporting. This type of journalism uses sensational headlines, misleading images, and distorted stories to capture readers' attention, influence public opinion, and increase sales.

**SOURCEBOOK 1:**  
THE ZOOT SUIT RIOTS

Newspaper clippings re: Zoot Suit Riots and LA, 1943, Bowron, Fletcher. Loren Miller Papers.  
The Huntington Library, Art Museum, and Botanical Gardens.  
[Link](#)

Primary Source 1



Primary Source 2



Primary Source 3



Primary Source 4



Primary Source 5



Primary Source 6



# Primary Source 1

Original



**ADDED ATTRACTION**

The Long Beach sailors chased a zoot-suiter onto the stage of a movie theater on "The Pike" and stripped off his peg-topped pants while the audience roared approval.

"I no like thees daputy sheriffs," said the pachuco woman, Mrs. Amelia Vengas, 22, arrested with her 18-months-old baby in arms when she cursed sheriff's patrols who went to an East Los Angeles street corner to pick up "a wagonload of punks"—five zoot suiters.

A pair of aluminum knuckles which deputies reported she said she intended to pass onto a zoot suiter to defend himself against sailors was taken from her. The young woman said her husband is in the Navy. Her baby was turned over to her mother-in-law.

Mrs. Venegas pleaded guilty to peace disturbance before Justice Myer B. Marion of Belvedere and was remanded to jail pending sentence and decision on her probation application June 21. She faces hearing on a second charge tomorrow—that of carrying concealed weapons.

**'TASK FORCES'**

In Compton, South Gate and Lynwood "task forces" of sailors scoured theaters and bars searching for zooters, but with no more success than was encountered by the "Army parties" in El Monte.

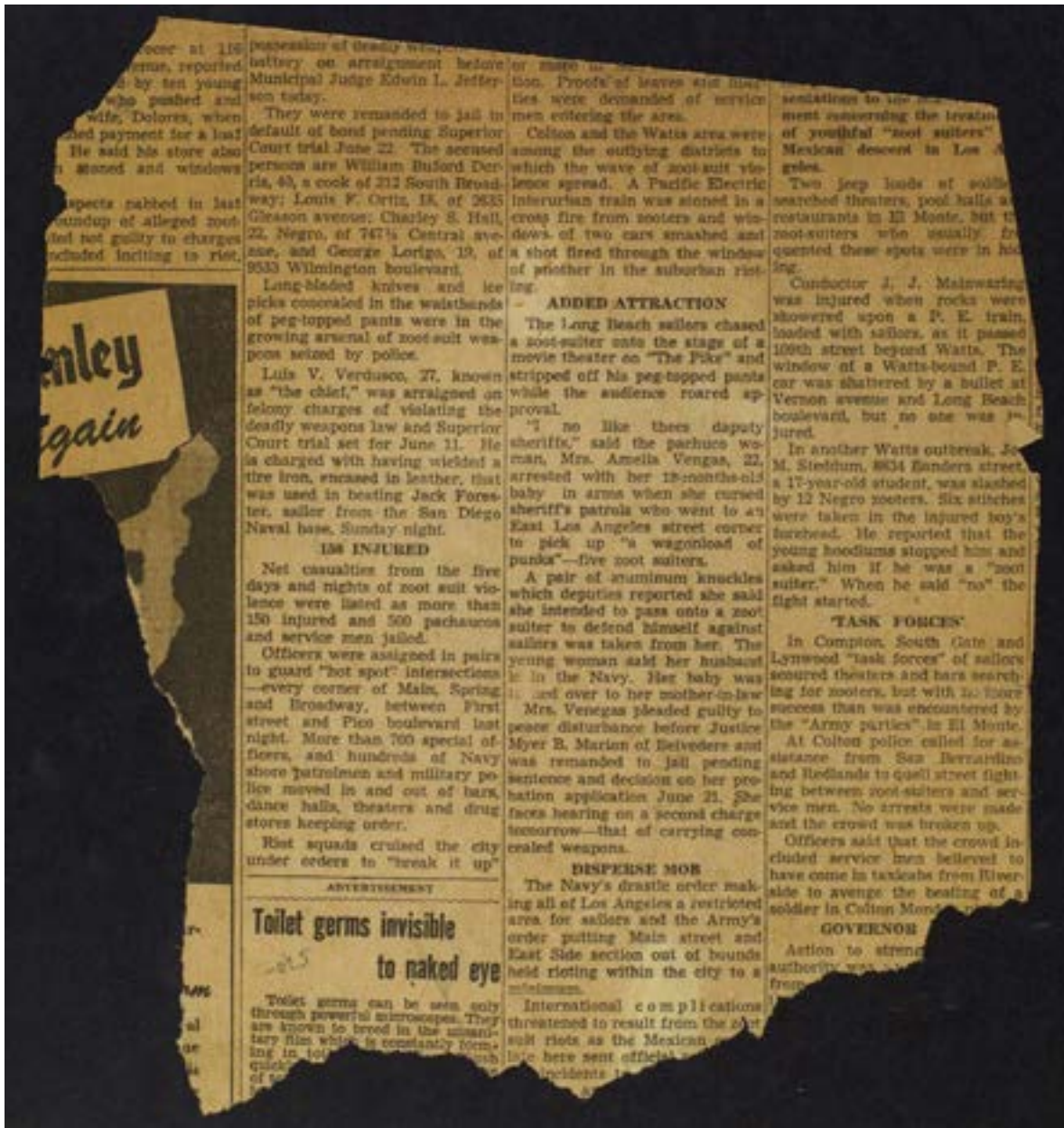
At Colton police called for assistance from San Bernardino and Redlands to quell street fighting between zoot-suiters and service men. No arrests were made and the crowd was broken up.

Officers said that the crowd included service men believed to have come in taxicabs from Riverside to avenge the beating of a soldier in Colton Monday night.

SELECT ANOTHER  
SOURCE

# Primary Source 1

- Describe what you read in this article.
- What is the attitude of the author toward the subject? What did you read that makes you think that?
- Where do you see examples of **bias** in this article?
- Where do you see examples of **yellow journalism** in this article?



SELECT ANOTHER SOURCE

## Primary Source 2

Original



Meanwhile, officers seeking the cause of the gang riots, raided a marihuana farm in Norwalk. They found a field of cultivated marihuana growing, took the man and woman living on the farm into custody. Both denied any knowledge of the marihuana crop. R. A. Sanford, state narcotics officer, and Capt. F. J. Kearney, head of the Los Angeles police narcotics squad, said that a majority of the zoot suit rioters were hopped up with marihuana cigarettes. Reefer stubs, they said, have been found on kid hoodlums. "Almost all of the ringleaders of these hoodlum gangs have from one to half a dozen arrests chalked against them for the sale or possession of marihuana," Sanford said. "The wanton savagery of their attacks, and the sadistic torturing of their victims, indicated the widespread use of these marihuana reefers," he added. Marihuana suspects have been observed in the Ford and Brooklyn ave. areas and in Watts, he said. While officers kept zoot suit hot spots under control, international eyes focused on Los Angeles. The Council for Pan-American Democracy urged immediate

eyes focused on Los Angeles. The Council for Pan-American Democracy urged immediate federal action "to put an end to the hysterical persecution of Mexican citizens and American citizens of Mexican descent in Los Angeles." The council, in New York, asked Nelson Rockefeller, coordinator of inter-American affairs, and other officials to stop the violence between zoot suiters and servicemen. They charged this gang warfare was the result of "racial hysteria deliberately fostered by county police, the sheriff's office and other disruptive elements." Sheriff Eugene Biscailuz said his office was doing everything it could to suppress the disturbance. He met last night with the executive staff of his office, and said that the streets in unincorporated areas of the county could be kept free from violence. "I have assigned reserve equipment and officers to the areas most likely affected," he said, "with instructions to allow no unlawful assemblage and to preserve peace impartially and without fear or favor."

SELECT ANOTHER  
SOURCE

## Navy in new move to end zoot riots

(Continued from Page 1)

men have been taken into custody by military and civil police, without any formal charges.

Latest victim was 15-year-old Vincent Durate of Azusa, reportedly a member of a 23 kid gang of hoodlums who were tossing gasoline soaked rags into the State theater, Azusa, after lighting them.

Police swooped down on the juvenile gang and the members dispersed.

As Durate ran from the theater, officers said, Harry E. Heirich, a railroad bridge guard, shot him twice in the right leg. The boy was taken to General hospital.

Another sailor was beaten at the corner of Overhill dr. and Hlauson ave. by five pachucos. He was treated at a USO station and sent back to his station.

Juvenile gangs stoned Pacific Electric cars in Watts for the third night, inflicting injuries on passengers, police said.

Five more pachucos were arrested by city police later.

Ruben Alanz, 17; Robert Redondo, 17; Jesus Gonzales, 18, and Felix Romo, 18, were held for charges varying from inciting to riot to carrying concealed weapons.

Joe Santillan, 17, was arrested for grand theft auto, after officers found him driving a "hot car" stolen in Stakersfield.

More than 1000 extra police and sheriff's deputies patrolled the entire county, dispersed crowds and kept on the alert against new mob outbreaks.

Yesterday afternoon, an east-side gang romped on an 18-year-old high school youth, intending to join the navy. His name and condition were not immediately available.

Meanwhile, officers seeking the cause of the gang riots, raided marijuana farms in Norwalk.

They found a field of cultivated marijuana growing, took the man and woman living on the farm into

ravaged by four zoot suiters; Miss Paiz by seven.

Bail of \$5000 was set on each of the 11.

Meanwhile, the first pachuco woman held since the six-day warfare started, pleaded guilty to disturbing the peace.

Mrs. Amelia Venegas, 22, mother of a 28-month-old baby, admitted in Justice Myer H. Marion's court in Belvedere that she hindered deputy sheriffs trying to stop kid riots.

Officers charged she also carried concealed "brass knuckles" to give to juvenile gangsters.

Four more zoot suit riot suspects pleaded not guilty in Municipal Judge Edwin L. Jefferson's court, and asked for jury trials. They were set for June 22.

Possible consequences of the rioting in impairing United States-Mexico relations were seen by Gen. Sheridan Downey, in San Francisco with a senate military affairs subcommittee.

Downey, who had several phone conversations with Los Angeles authorities in connection with the matter, feared the "probable reactions in Mexico when news spreads that United States soldiers have beaten Mexican civilians."

Importation of Mexican labor to relieve the manpower shortages on farms might be hampered, he believed.

"The trouble is an outgrowth of wartime conditions superimposed on slum conditions. Those Mexicans have been living in slums, without adequate education, recreational facilities or supervision," he said.

Senate investigations last month, Downey declared, indicated the city had only 75 per cent of the police force needed to maintain order in the face of a reported 250 per cent rise in the crime rate in 18 months.

ZOOTER ATTACKED  
IN BAY DISTRICT

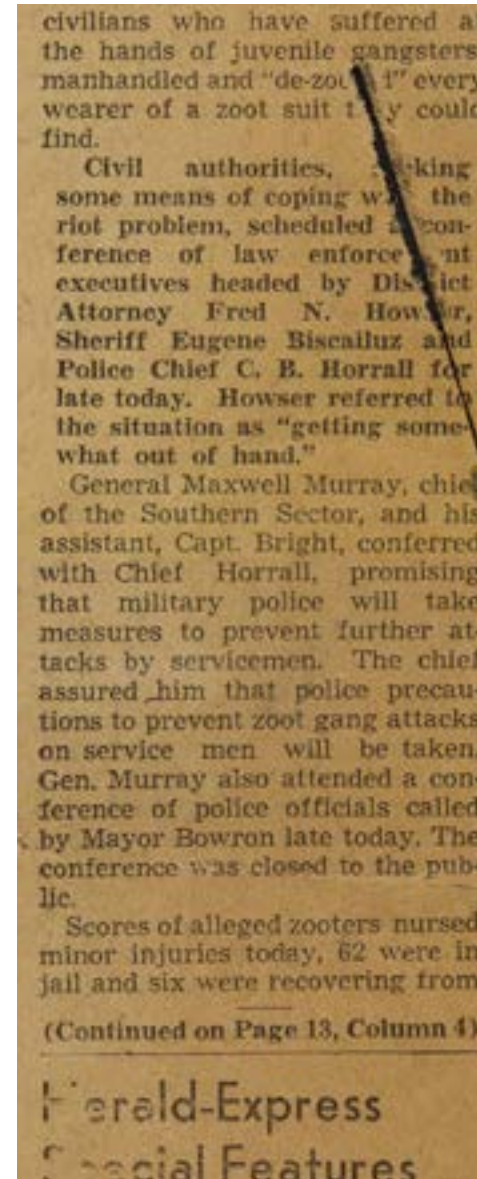
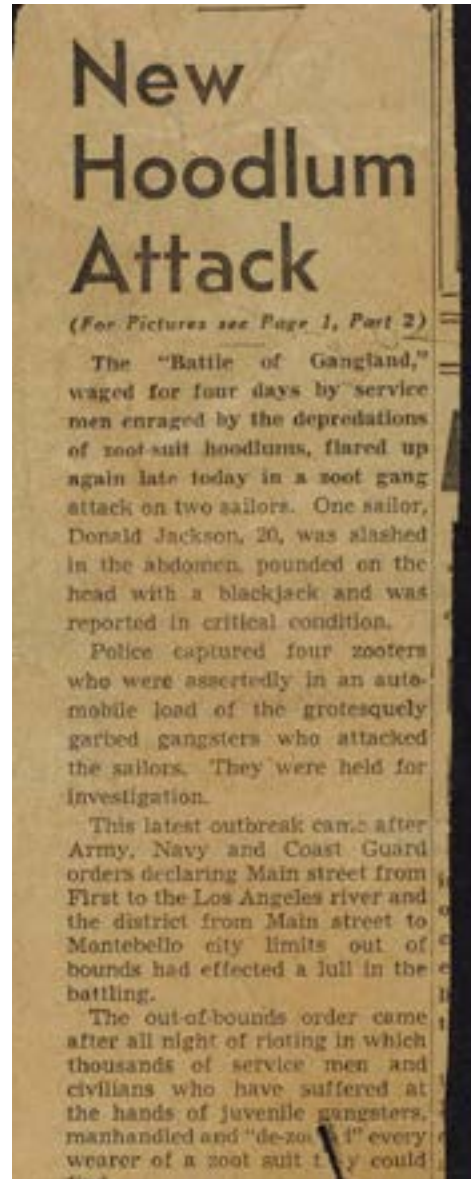
## Primary Source 2

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SELECT ANOTHER  
SOURCE

## Primary Source 3

Original



SELECT ANOTHER  
SOURCE



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# Primary Source 4

Original



Held in the county jail on a vagrancy charge, Frank H. Tellez, 22, models a zoot suit, badge of roving youth gangs engaged in terroristic riots. Tellez holds a medical discharge from the Army.



SELECT ANOTHER  
SOURCE

# Primary Source 4



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# Primary Source 5

Original



## Warn of Mass Riot Tonight

(For pictures see Page A-3.)

Zoot suit gangsters, furious at the punishment meted out to them in week-end forays by service men, who were determined to eliminate the juvenile gang menace here, threatened a mass riot tonight with the aim of "killing every cop we see."

An anonymous telephone call to police headquarters blamed the police for the attacks by sailors, soldiers and marines and announced:

"We're meeting 500-strong tonight and we're going to kill every cop we see."

They said nothing about killing any service men, however.

**SENTENCE 12**

**SENTENCE 13**

The punitive expedition of the Navy, Army and Marine Corps men today resulted in putting six more zooters on the casualty lists and a score or more additional hoodlums in jail.

Out in Belvedere township Justice of the Peace Myer B. Marion cleared the record of Saturday night fighting in East Los Angeles by sentencing 12 alleged zooters.

Four were found guilty of vagrancy and eight of rioting and sentences ranged from \$250 fine or 50 days in jail down to probation hearings for several youths who had no previous police record. The hearings were set for June 18.

In jail are 55 alleged zoot suiters and hospitals throughout the Los Angeles area reported treating numerous casualties resulting from the campaign of sailors, soldiers and marines to discourage juvenile gangsters.

Action which began Saturday reached a climax early this morning and late last night. A task force in which detachments from the Army, Navy and Marine Corps co-operated closely ranged through zooter-infested districts.

Invasion operations in the zoot

(Cont'd on Page 6, Columns 2-3)

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# Primary Source 6

Original



ZOOT-SUIT FANS FIND THAT LIFE'S GETTING TOUGH

Saturday night and has resulted in several arrests and in a few instances injuries. The rebellion was caused by zoot gangs molesting citizens. Times photo

ard of servicemen and civilians last night halted a trolley zoot suit passenger. The rebellion against zoot-suiters started

Riot Alarm Sent Out by Horrall in Zoot-Suit War

Continued from First Page  
sailors in the crowd was reduced.  
The clashes broke out later in the evening in various parts of the county, with more than 200 servicemen gathering at a theater at Ford St. and Brooklyn Ave. and rousting zoot-suiters out of their seats.  
Many Civilians  
Policemen were handicapped by the tremendous crowd



SELECT ANOTHER SOURCE

# Primary Source 6



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