

Chapter Title: Introduction: Beyond Alliances

Book Title: Beyond Alliances

Book Subtitle: The Jewish Role in Reshaping the Racial Landscape of Southern California

Book Editor(s): Bruce Zuckerman, George J. Sánchez, Lisa Ansell, George J. Sánchez

Published by: Purdue University Press. (2012)

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt6wq518.4>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



This book is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0). To view a copy of this license, visit <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.



JSTOR

Purdue University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Beyond Alliances*

Introduction: Beyond Alliances

By George J. Sánchez, Guest Editor

I want to thank my colleague Bruce Zuckerman, Myron and Marian Casden Director of the Casden Institute for the Study of the Jewish Role in American Life at the University of Southern California, for the opportunity to work on this volume of the Casden *Annual Review*. Although this was a project that my schedule as Vice Dean of Diversity and Strategic Initiatives for the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences at USC did not make easy, I accepted the challenge because of the wonderful reputation of Bruce as an editor and leader, as well as the opportunity to work with a group of young scholars who are making their individual marks on the reassessment of interracial activism in the history of Southern California. It is due to the forethought of Bruce Zuckerman and Lisa Ansell, Associate Director of the Casden Institute, that this unique volume came to be. Having been fortunate enough to have worked closely with a group of budding scholars at the University of Michigan and the University of Southern California, I realized that their insights on the interaction between Jews and the various ethnic and racial groups in the neighborhoods of Los Angeles would benefit from a public presentation through the important venue of the Casden *Annual Review*.

This volume focuses on the unique and special role that Jews took in reshaping the ethnic/racial landscape of Southern California in the mid-twentieth century, roughly from 1930 to 1970. That period was a critical one for understanding both the shifting role of Jews in the Los Angeles area as well as how this dynamic shaped civil rights activism across the gamut of ethnic/racial groups in the Southland. In this period, the Jewish population went from a mostly working class enclave on the Eastside, well segregated from white Christian communities (with a much smaller, more assimilated elite group

situated around the Hollywood studios), to a mostly middle and upper middle class suburban population largely integrated into the white communities on the Westside of the city and in the San Fernando Valley, with synagogues interspersed among Christian churches and middle class homes that were nonetheless still actively segregated from non-white populations—especially, Latinos and Blacks—in Los Angeles. Moreover, the Jewish population of Southern California exploded in the post-World War II period, with newcomers to the state tending to overshadow the previous residents of more racially mixed neighborhoods and bringing with them ideas of diversity and difference that historian Mark Brilliant describes as “the prevailing binary view of the ‘race problem’ in the 1940s” that dominated communities farther to the east (Brilliant 3; Moore).

A new generation of historians such as Brilliant and Shana Bernstein has also recently focused on how the complex racial diversity of Southern California shaped the advent of civil rights activism and reform in the region in critical ways during this same period (Brilliant; Bernstein). This is part of a larger trend in civil rights history, in which historians have expanded analysis of the movement for civil rights in the mid-twentieth century beyond a focus on the American South to also encompass the North and the West. Southern California, in particular, exhibits a unique unfolding of the movement for civil rights that does not simply depend on the black-white binary but is much more a result of a multitude of strategies for equality among all of California’s ethnic/racial minorities. In this multiracial mix, Jews have played a particular role as both beneficiary of the advent of civil rights and as a demographically shifting minority group considered to be “white” by the end of the period.

In particular, this volume is one of the very first to take seriously the unique ethnic/racial makeup of Southern California for Jewish activism, in terms of the special relationship between Jews and Mexican-Americans in the overall diverse setting around Los Angeles. Both groups were considered nominally white in California, which allowed for distinctive relationships to develop, such as the marriage that is considered by Genevieve Carpio in this volume between lawyer David C. Marcus and his Mexican-born wife, Maria Yrma Davila. Both Jews and Mexican-Americans shared the unique space of Boyle Heights during the 1930s and 1940s, a neighborhood considered a multiracial ethnic ghetto by most of the rest of Los Angeles. But the divergence of experiences in the post-World War II era produced increasing tensions between Jews and Mexican-American activists, as Jews progressively integrated themselves successfully into Cold War suburban life on the Westside and in

the San Fernando Valley, while ethnic Mexicans remained largely isolated in racially segregated Eastside barrios.

Rather than considering the advent of a multiracial civil rights movement in terms of broad analyses of organizations or entire communities, each article in this volume looks instead at the issue through the lens of the activity of a single Jewish individual in his/her relationship with the larger diverse social terrain of a changing Southern California—namely, David Marcus, Max Mont, William Phillips and Rosalind Wyman. This allows the respective authors to consider the personal lives of each individual, taking into account how critical personal decisions affected their social relationships with others and their political postures. As Anthony Macías shows in his essay in this volume, William Phillips's commitment to keeping his business in Boyle Heights, even after moving his family out of East Los Angeles to the Westside, not only influenced his political and social relationships with Mexican-American leaders such as Edward Roybal, but also his ability to play a decisively constructive role in his interactions with Mexican-American youth in the neighborhood. And, as Barbara Soliz demonstrates in her contribution to this collection of studies, Rosalind Wyman's rise in Los Angeles politics was certainly framed by her relationship to West Los Angeles suburbs and the particular Cold War sensibilities that emerged in that part of the Los Angeles metropolis. Soliz makes the case that Wyman's willingness to prioritize attracting the Dodgers to Los Angeles over the needs of the Latino Chavez Ravine community were shaped by her personal distancing from that community, not just her role as a civic leader.

This focus on individuals also allows us to see the various roles that particular Jews played in relation to others in the metropolitan area and their respective, singular impacts on the broader dynamics of racial/ethnic interaction in Los Angeles. The Jewish individuals who are this volume's primary focus represent a range of backgrounds and perspectives, from an elected official to an activist lawyer, and from a local businessman and musician to a Democratic Party organizer. They are all middle class professionals, however, and this shapes their respective relationship to the largely working class Black and Latino populations with whom they interacted. As a businessman in a working class ethnic enclave, Phillips probably had the most direct contact with the working class Latino population on the Eastside, while Marcus's position as a lawyer working for the Mexican Consulate put him in a position to be directly defending and/or advocating on behalf of working class Mexican and Mexican-American families. Both Wyman and Mont played more traditional political roles, primarily dealing with the middle class leaders of other ethnic

communities, and are therefore operating in interracial coalitions from more impersonal positions.

The geography of Los Angeles, so shaped by class differences and racial segregation, is a critical factor in contextualizing the nature of interethnic relationships. One can see this in the political career of Wyman most clearly, since her city council district was shaped by longstanding segregationist patterns that, while opening up to Jews in the post-World War II period, remained largely off-limits to integration by the city's African-American and Latino populations. Since any politician must represent the perceived interests of his/her constituents, Wyman clearly reflected the growing suburban mindset of the Jewish and non-Jewish voters in her district, who wanted metropolitan growth but also desired a careful containment of the aspirations of racial and ethnic minority populations in the city. On the other hand, as Max Felker-Kanto emphasizes in his study, Mont seemed to struggle with the direction of Jewish politics in the city, ultimately choosing to represent a labor organization, rather than a formal part of the growing middle class Jewish community of the city. This gave him greater personal flexibility that reflected his own class beginnings, but it also made Mont more able to work across racialized lines while dealing with the increasingly contentious ethnic issues that became part and parcel of 1960s politics.

Clearly, the growth and success of civil rights as a political movement of the 1950s and 1960s plays a central role in all the studies found in this volume, but one cannot and should not forget the rather hostile nature of the California electorate and part of the political elite to the advancement of civil rights in this period. In the immediate post-World War II period, Southern California built its own virulent anti-communist hysteria led by Republican state Senator Jack Tenney of Los Angeles and his California Legislature's Committee on Un-American Activities, which actively labeled even moderate organizations and individuals dedicated to improving race relations as "prominent left-wingers" and "well known [communist] Party-liners" who regularly were in "submission to Moscow" (HoSang 49). Eventually feeding into the senatorial campaign of Richard Nixon, these efforts to brand interracial coalitions with the label of "Moscow-inspired" limited the actions of those coalitions and forced most to adopt strict guidelines against participation from those with leftist histories from the Depression era. Moreover, Tenney himself did not shy away from making virulent anti-Semitic remarks, often equating communism with Judaism when confronting Jewish witnesses brought before his committee (Sánchez 149). This anti-Semitic tinge to the anti-communist campaign

certainly elicited a cautious reaction among Jewish activists and inevitably pushed interracial coalitions of the period to the right, politically.

Moreover by the 1960s, Southern California became the breeding ground for an evangelical, Christian-centered New Right politics, which would blossom under the growing influence of western politicians such as Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. First detailed by historian Lisa McGirr in *Suburban Warriors*, the backyard barbecues and Christian churches of Orange County and the San Fernando and San Gabriel Valleys became the hotbeds of an evangelical Christianity, which did not shy away from political activity in local, state, and ultimately national politics and which further stressed Christian values and activism against homosexuality, abortion, and the perceived radicalism of 1960s racial movements for justice and equality (McGirr; Dallek). As Daniel HoSang reminds us, Californians were the ones who voted against fair employment in 1946, against fair housing in 1964, then followed up in the 1970s and 1980s with majority votes against busing for integration and for English-only legislation. Southern California, therefore, was not only a liberal terrain for racial progress, but often also a hostile environment for racial reforms—a hostility of a sort that also became common-place in other areas of the country.

It is in this larger political context that these articles trace the pathways of racial liberalism, the ideology driving Los Angeles's nascent civil rights movement, which placed an emphasis on state enforcement of nondiscrimination laws and expressed its commitments through a language of rights, opportunity, tolerance and freedom (HoSang 264, 282 n. 7). The interracial coalitions that promoted civil rights became a growing movement in the mid-twentieth century, relying on this form of ethnic/racial liberalism to interpret how to move forward for civil rights progress and a nondiscriminatory future. As historian Stuart Svonkin has put it, the ethnic/racial liberalism espoused by Jewish liberals that emerged in the post-World War II period “combined Jewish particularism with liberal universalism” (178). In the Los Angeles context, Jews felt that, by confronting the forces of intolerance, they could both attack anti-Semitism while advancing a civil rights agenda that would emphasize equal rights for all Americans.

While Jewish activism in shaping local civil rights is astutely discussed from a number of perspectives throughout this volume, the often unequal dynamics of power within the civil rights community are also a concern given close consideration. In particular, the changing relationship of Jews to whiteness in Southern California, in both demographic and political terms, shaped

many of the ongoing relationships between Jews and other groups in this period. Scholars as varied as anthropologist Karen Brodtkin and historian Eric Goldstein have recently explored the relationship of Jews to whiteness brought about by the opening up of segregated suburbs in the post-World War II era to Jews and other white ethnics. Not only did this lead to a growing fear of assimilation among Jewish leaders; it also positioned Jews as “middlemen”—some would say “model minorities”—between the white Christian communities in the suburbs and the racialized minorities still stigmatized by their ghetto and barrio existences. One can see this “middle” existence in the tension that Max Mont experienced as a leader of the anti-Proposition 14 campaign in 1964 chronicled by Felker-Kantor.

In the end, this volume does not shy away from taking on some of the most vexing issues in the scholarship of ethnic/racial interaction in the twentieth century, but does so in new and innovative ways. By focusing on individual stories, we learn about the various dilemmas facing a set of Jewish professionals in Los Angeles, as they interacted with the wider diversity of Southern California. In this respect, the studies in this volume not only track the alliances made between Jews and other ethnic/racial groups that promoted equality and diversity, but also take a hard look *beyond* these alliances at the underlying tensions and counter-forces that made these relationships more complex and less idealistic than one might first expect. This volume ends just as the most significant chapter of multiracial coalitions emerges in southern California, the two bruising campaigns for mayor of Los Angeles launched by African-American city councilmember Tom Bradley with significant Jewish support throughout the city (Sonenshien). The unsuccessful race in 1969 against Sam Yorty and the triumphant campaign of 1973 set in motion a new relationship between Jews, African-Americans, and Mexican-Americans that emerged inside the mayoral administration of Tom Bradley and extended to constituencies throughout the Democratic Party. But it also tended to blur memories of earlier affiliations and coalitions, especially those rooted in geographic proximity and similar class standings.

I hope that this volume provides a unique historical perspective on our understanding of contemporary Los Angeles in all its ethnic complexity and specifically in thinking through the future of the Jewish role in urban Southern California. Jews have always played a critical role in shaping urban society in Los Angeles, but probably no more crucially than in the decades of the middle twentieth century. How individuals faced the rampant discrimination in the city and the formation of a multiracial politics that could confront that

discrimination is a key to understanding our present condition. Let us hope that we do not forget the lessons embodied in these articles and can find an urban existence in our future that takes the best from the past and constructs new, even more innovative ways to bring social justice to our urban future.

Works Cited

- Bernstein, Shana. *Bridges of Reform: Interracial Civil Rights Activism in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. New York: Oxford Univ., 2011.
- Brilliant, Mark Robert. *The Color of America Has Changed: How Racial Diversity Shaped Civil Rights Reform in California, 1941–1978*. New York: Oxford Univ., 2010.
- Brodtkin, Karen. *How Jews Became White Folks & What That Says About Race in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers Univ., 1998).
- Dallek, Matthew. *The Right Moment: Ronald Reagan's First Victory and the Decisive Turning Point in American Politics* (Oxford: Oxford Univ., 2004).
- Goldstein, Eric L. *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. Princeton: Princeton Univ., 2007.
- HoSang, Daniel Martinez. *Racial Propositions: Ballot Initiatives and the Making of Postwar California* (Berkeley: Univ. of California, 2010).
- McGirr, Lisa. *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 2002).
- Moore, Deborah Dash. *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.* New York: Free, 1994.
- Sánchez, George J. “‘What’s Good for Boyle Heights Is Good for the Jews’: Creating Multiracialism on the Eastside during the 1950s.” *Los Angeles and the Future of Urban Cultures*. Ed. Raúl Homero Villa and George J. Sánchez. Spec. issue of *American Quarterly* 56.3 (2004): 633–61.
- Sonenschein, Raphael J. *Politics in Black and White: Race and Power in Los Angeles* (Princeton: Princeton Univ., 1994).
- Svonkin, Stuart. *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York: Columbia Univ., 1997).