

Mark Wild. *Street Meeting: Multiethnic Neighborhoods in Early Twentieth-Century Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005. Pp. 298. Paper \$24.95.

Mark Wild's *Street Meeting* focuses on the multiethnic central city neighborhoods of Los Angeles during the first four decades of the twentieth century. Wild, an Associate Professor of History at California State University, Los Angeles, explores the shared cultural interactions that shaped the identities and experiences of all Angelenos. His approach is guided by the dilemma of modern American identity, which seeks unity amidst persistent cultural diversity and inequality. Wild locates the promise of unity in the traditions of meaningful cultural interaction and coalition building that marked urban Los Angeles' formative years prior to the city's World War II restructuring.

Wild advances his narrative of multiethnic neighborhoods in seven semi-autonomous topical chapters. Each chapter utilizes a mix of governmental reports, oral histories, personal interviews, and an impressive array of secondary sources to analyze distinct elements of the city's approach to diversity. By addressing social, cultural, and political aspects of Los Angeles life ranging from the Church of All Nations and the city's playgrounds to its sex industry and street politics, Wild offers the reader a comprehensive understanding of Los Angeles' ethnoracial (term used by author) diversity and deep insights into the city's complex and often contradictory multiethnic experience.

Wild's over-arching theme is the coexistence of elements that both reinforced and promoted the crossing of ethnoracial boundaries. The migration of the city's residents and settlement into multiethnic neighborhoods at the turn of the twentieth century was countered by institutional attempts in the 1920s to reconstruct Los Angeles along ethnoracial lines. Zoning policies resulted in the segregation of African American, Asian American, Latin American, and European immigrant residents in distinct enclaves. However, by zoning specific areas for industry, the city created districts that promoted increased multiethnic interaction among the workforce and consumers of Los Angeles.

Particularly insightful and engaging are Wild's chapters on interpersonal relationships, which show how youthful willingness to cross ethnoracial boundaries decreased as children reached adulthood. During this period, the city simultaneously promoted interaction and created social distance between its multiethnic groups. The curriculum in integrated classrooms and recreational programs in public playgrounds emphasized acceptance and cooperation through students' primary school years. However, as they reached high school, patterns of social stratification became evident. Students of color dropped out of school at higher rates and the system of tracking disproportionately placed them in remedial classes. This effectively segregated many of the city's classrooms and eroded childhood connections. When Wild turns to Los Angeles' adults and examines interracial relationships in chapter five, there is more evidence of short-term

sexual encounters than committed long-term relationships. The city's sex industry exploited interracial relations, reinforcing taboos by linking interracial sex with illicit activity. Additionally, women (usually of color) from districts in which prostitution occurred often found themselves implicated as sex workers by men soliciting their services.

The era's social and political trends culminated in the attempts by radical organizations such as the Socialist Party, the International Workers of the World, and the Communist Party to forge inter-ethnoracial coalitions among working class residents on political levels. Early attempts engaged central city residents through street politics, which flourished during the 1910s. While successful in generating popular support, the tactics of soapbox speaking and mass demonstration made these organizations targets for police violence and institutional repression through zoning ordinances. The recurrent shortcoming in each of these organizations was their unwillingness to integrate non-Anglo and working-class residents into positions of leadership. Wild points to the Communist Party as an exception to the trend, and cites this as a major reason for their success in the 1930s, when the Party's popularity expanded beyond central city neighborhoods and into the suburbs. Communists mobilized around the interests of specific ethnic groups using satellite organizations, often drawing leadership from members of those communities. However, integration came at the cost of a unified organization, with the Party turning into several loosely connected, mono-ethnic unions and groupings by the late 1930s.

Wild's work is a valuable analysis of Los Angeles' multiethnic history. It challenges the basic concept of multiculturalism based on a plurality of experiences, arguing instead for a deeper common experience of diversity as an integral element of urban life. The integrated perspective of this narrative is perhaps its greatest strength, eschewing the trend of evaluating marginal groups' assimilation or resistance to dominant cultures. Additionally, the broad scope of Wild's scholarship makes it accessible to the general public and important for disciplines ranging from history and cultural studies to sociology and urban planning, among others.

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