Zoot Suits, Lowriders and Brown Eyed Soul: Popular Culture as an Assertion of Chicano Identity, 1940s-1970s

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Abstract

This paper analyses three important popular cultural manifestations in the struggle for Mexican-American identity: clothes, cars and music. The paper argues that from the 1940s all three have provided canvasses for the expression of Chicano cultural assertion and resistance, while provoking a range of negative reactions from the dominant Anglo-U.S. political culture. Although the Zoot Suited Pachucos of the 1940s were brutally repressed, subsequent representations in the 1950s reflected the emergence of Cesar Chavez and the "Brown Revolution" of the 1960s. That iconic symbol of modernity - the car (in the forms of the Lowrider and its associated art) and that powerful cultural marker - music (Brown Eyed Soul/ Latin Rock) both proved to be, by the 1970s, inspiring celebrations of Chicano pride.