

than in the effort to end school segregation. Foley's third chapter chronicles relations, or lack thereof, between Mexican American and African American attorneys and civil rights advocates between the landmark legal cases of *Mendez v. Westminster* (1947) and *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954). In the *Mendez* case, Mexican American civil rights leaders fought for equal rights afforded by white racial status, specifically the right not to be segregated in so-called Mexican schools. Correspondence between Mexican American civil rights leadership and African American attorneys, including later US Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, indicates that Mexican Americans narrowly cleaved to a legal challenge to segregation that endorsed the separate but equal doctrine for Black Americans, but not Mexican Americans. Middle-class Mexican American leadership according to Foley lacked the race consciousness to join African Americans in a full-frontal assault on the *Plessy v. Ferguson* doctrine of separate but equal. Mexican Americans felt superior toward both recent Mexican immigrants and African Americans. Association with either group risked a loss of personal, economic and social status gained by claiming a white racial identity.

This book is timely given the contemporary debate on illegal Mexican immigration and its implications on Latinos and African Americans. Racial solidarity is critical to challenge the rising tide of racial legislation reinforcing America's white racial democracy, so well eluded to in Foley's book. Future studies on historical relations between Mexican Americans and African Americans no doubt will more fully contextualize relations between the two racial groups beyond the war years. Scholars will grapple though with Foley's contention that whiteness has determined the boundaries and permeability of American racial solidarity.

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Daniel Widener, *Black Arts West: Culture and Struggle in Postwar Los Angeles* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

For contemporary scholars of post World War II United States history, the narrative of struggles for social equality follows a now familiar trajectory. Racially marginalized groups, galvanized by the economic and social opportunities of the post-war era, mobilized politically to overtly challenge centuries of American racism; first, by demanding equal inclusion within the system of liberal democracy; and later, once frustrated by the deliberately slow pace of change, grew more radicalized and pushed for a new politics of self-determination. The liberating promise of these social movements was cut short in the 1970s for numerous reasons, not the least of which was the vitriolic backlash against civil rights, the murder of prominent leaders of color, and the commercial appropriation of the era's cultural symbols, which turned signs of committed social activism into fashion state-

ments. Subsequently, historians have focused their attention on this period of roughly 1945 to 1980 to locate newfound possibilities for social justice, from sites of cross-cultural alliances to collective action and political radicalism.

In *Black Arts West*, a richly detailed and provocative study of African American arts communities in postwar Los Angeles, Daniel Widener joins this conversation and challenges some of the assumptions of this narrative arc by applying it to the production of expressive arts, from the 1940s wartime struggles to integrate Hollywood to the emergence of an art of self-determination that articulated the more radical goals of the black liberation movement. Indeed, Widener argues that identity-based black arts activity in Los Angeles cannot be understood simply as cultural fallout from the upheavals of the 1960s; rather, this activism was the product of an earlier “search for civic equality amid the plenty of postwar abundance.” (52) By pushing back the story of the black arts movement to the 1940s, Widener sets up a history in which the seeds of radical protest art were planted in the creative efforts of the wartime cultural front. Writer Chester Himes, jazz great Duke Ellington, actor Paul Robeson, and impresario Frances Williams, among others, politicized black art during the war by insisting on greater inclusion of African Americans in the culture industries and, once included, demanded that cultural representations of blacks move well beyond subservient roles and degrading minstrelsy performances.

Between the integration strategies of the 1940s and the liberation movements of the 1970s, Widener situates cultural liberalism, a community-based interracial cultural politics whose proponents “saw the arts as a key element of urban reform, insisting that writing, music, and other creative endeavors could provide opportunities for blacks and heal the divisions reflected in events like the Watts riot.” (94) The Watts Writers Workshop, led by Academy Award-winning screenwriter Budd Schulberg, is one example of this type of project in which white liberals and black artists worked collectively to challenge damaging notions of the “culture of poverty” that reverberated in the wake of the riot through administrative channels like the McCone Commission. Primarily using creative writing and theatre performance as tools of a nonviolent strategy for racially integrated cultural production, groups like the Watts Writers Workshop and the Inner City Cultural Center acted “as a kind of ‘cultural front’ in the broader war on poverty.” (109)

By the later 1960s, cultural liberalism was supplanted by the oppositional politics of black power. Widener especially heralds the talents of free jazz musician Horace Tapscott, whose work in collectives like the Underground Musicians Association and the Pan Afrikan People’s Arkestra offered an affirmation of black identity rooted in “a kind of emancipatory epistemology based upon the possibility of defining freedom in multifaceted, open-ended, and comprehensive terms.” (118) Critical to Widener’s broader argument is his point that the Underground Musicians Association, and other related groups, formed several years prior to the uprising of 1965. Rather than late 1960s arts activism expressing a reaction to

failed earlier struggles, Widener argues that the emergence of the “Watts Renaissance” was indigenous to Los Angeles and suggests “the need to see the ideas of self-determination associated with black power as *arising alongside, rather than in response to*, the more familiar struggle for civil rights.” (120, emphasis mine) Widener effectively concludes his study in the early 1990s with the municipal government’s flawed efforts under Mayor Tom Bradley to build a multicultural arts program that resulted in systematic displays of token diversity while harnessing elite patronage to civic renewal projects that all but excluded Los Angeles’ working class and minority communities. This failure on the cultural landscape reflected the socio-economic catastrophes provoking the Los Angeles’ drug wars and, of course, the 1992 Rodney King riots.

Widener draws on a rich theoretical legacy but much of his work builds on Michael Denning’s concept of the labouring of American culture in the 1930s and the formation of a cultural front allying the creative labour of the culture industries with the organized Left; in fact, some of the best moments in *Black Arts West* come when he focuses our attention on class. Widener points out that after World War II, the preserve of the visual arts shifted from a middle class preoccupation to that of a working class bohemia empowered through GI Bill education subsidies and labour activism. This is a fascinating narrative thread that could have been further developed, as could the connections between the black cultural politics of the 1930s and those that followed the war. That said, by complicating our understanding of the black arts movement, *Black Arts West* makes a significant contribution to the history of art and activism in Los Angeles and highlights the city as a landscape of possibility upon which deeply meaningful cultural battles can be fought.

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Graham Russell Gao Hodges, *David Ruggles: A Radical Black Abolitionist and the Underground Railroad in New York City* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2010).

In 1942, Dorothy Porter [Wesley] read a paper at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in which she said of David Ruggles: “Through a queer arbitrary ordering of things or through unfortunate oversight of the historians, his memory has been almost wholly neglected, and his activities as a tireless fighter in the cause of abolition virtually forgotten.”¹ Porter, the much-esteemed bibliophile, archivist, and librarian at the Moorland Spingarn Research Center, argued that “no keener, nor more articulate advocate of human rights ever lived,” though she acknowledged that “the life and deeds” of Ruggles would have to be “recovered with great difficulty from dark obscurity.”²