



STUDENT
MATINEE
PROGRAM

Discovery Guide

Welcome to Center Theatre Group's production of **ZOOT SUIT**.

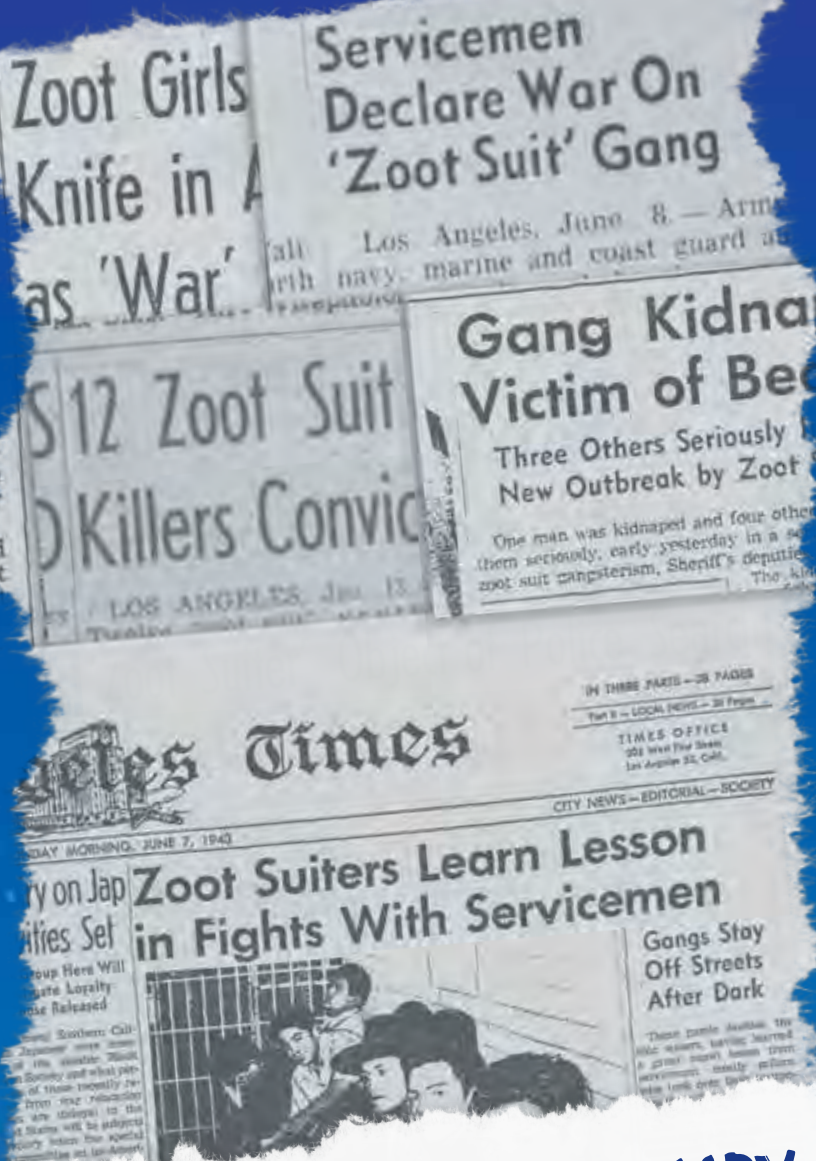
You're going to see one of the most celebrated plays originated in the city of Los Angeles—one that had its World premiere at the Taper in 1978 before becoming the first Chicana/o play ever to run on Broadway. Told from the perspective of Henry Reyna, a wrongfully imprisoned youth, and his personified conscience El Pachuco, *Zoot Suit* draws from the American immigrant experience during World War II, the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial of 1942, and the Zoot Suit Riots of 1943. Henry and the other members of the 38TH Street gang must navigate a landscape of racial intolerance, unjust law enforcement, and a discriminatory legal system as they are wrongly accused and convicted of murder. The story of their fight for freedom is a powerful example of cultural pride, creative spirit, and self-determination.

"LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,
THE PLAY YOU ARE ABOUT
TO SEE IS A CONSTRUCT OF
FACT AND FANTASY."

—El Pachuco, *Zoot Suit*

ZOOT SUIT

Written And Directed By
LUIS VALDEZ



YOUTH CULTURE

Fashion is one of the major ways that we show our affiliations, communicate beliefs, and make social statements. This was true of the group of mostly Mexican-American youth in 1940s Los Angeles who sported zoot suit fashion and came to be known as *pachuca/os*. The biased media of the time would later make the term *pachuco* synonymous with Mexican-American gang members, but for the youth who were proud to be *pachuco*, the term represented cultural expression and resistance to oppression.

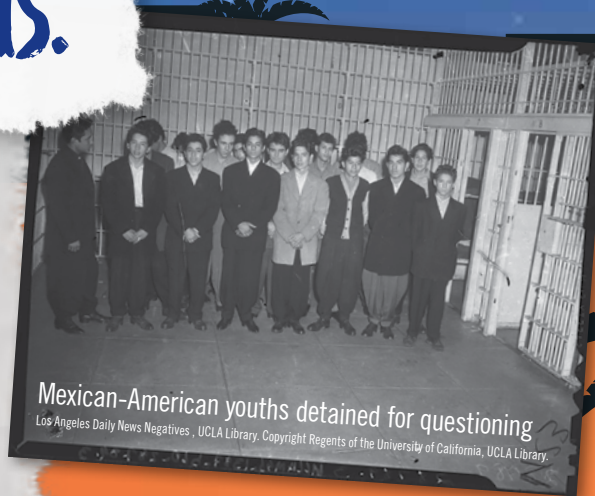
THE FASHION

The creation of the zoot suit has been traced to Harlem in the mid- to late-1930s. Its major characteristics include a “drape shape” where the dress shirt has a large collar, the jacket is oversized with broad shoulders, and in some cases, the hem reaches the wearer’s knees and sleeves reach the fingertips. The cinched waist pants are worn tight and high with suspenders, which extend at the knees and are tight at the ankles. A full zoot suit includes a long chain extending to the knee and a fedora hat, sometimes with a feather attached.

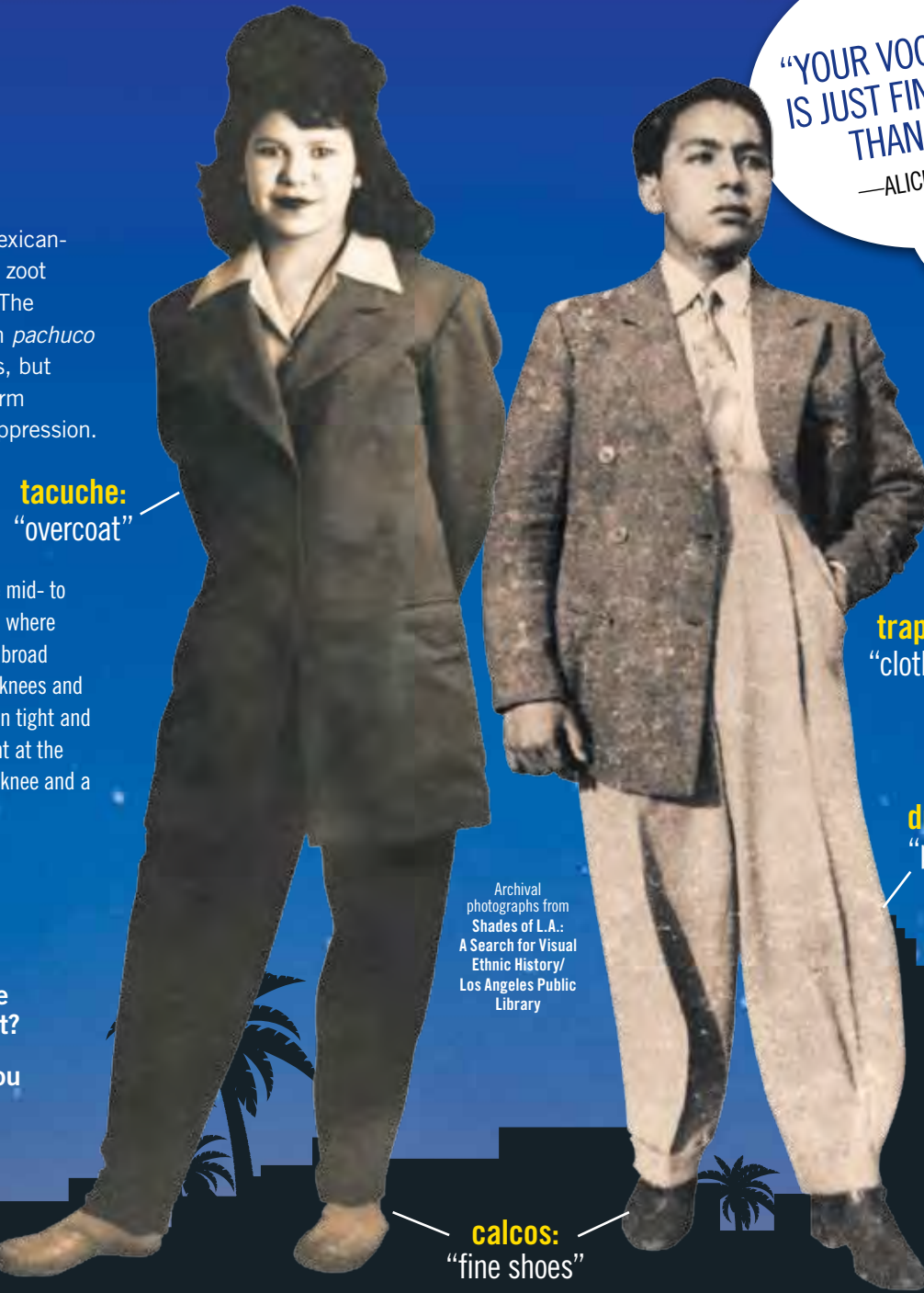
? What are some of the ways clothes define a person’s identity in today’s society?

Do you think it is fair to judge people based on their dress? Why or why not?

Have you ever had to change what you wear to feel safe or like you belong?



? Yellow journalism played a large part in the wrongful conviction of the Mexican-American youth in *Zoot Suit*. What role does the media play today in the way we perceive current events and different groups of people?



tacuche:
“overcoat”

trapos:
“clothes”

drapes:
“pants”

calcos:
“fine shoes”

Archival photographs from Shades of L.A.: A Search for Visual Ethnic History/ Los Angeles Public Library

THE LANGUAGE

Zoot Suit uses many languages to communicate its story: the two main languages in the play are English and Spanish, but the play also uses a dialect known as *Caló* that originated in the Southwestern U.S. and borrows from English and Spanish as well as other indigenous languages. As with fashion, young people stitched different traditions together to form a new way of communicating that was uniquely and authentically *pachuca/o*. *Caló* survives today as a form of slang used primarily by Chicana/o youth. Listen for some of these words and others throughout the play.

calmantes montes:
“take a chill pill”

cálmenla:
“calm down”

¡chale!:
“no way!”

contrólate:
“control yourself”

¡orale!:
“right on”

simón:
“yup”

suave:
“cool”

trucha:
“look alive”

vato:
“dude”

¡watcha!:
“check it”

“THE PRESS HAS ALREADY TRIED AND CONVICTED US.”

—HENRY, *ZOOT SUIT*

HOT OFF THE PRESS!

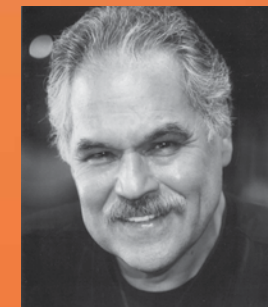
The job of a journalist has always been to report the truth and nothing but the truth, but journalists also have to sell newspapers (or, in the case of today’s digital journalists, get clicks and page views). In the 1890s, two rival newspaper companies began battling for readers with more and more sensational headlines, beginning a type of journalism that persists today called “yellow journalism.” In *Zoot Suit*, we see the detrimental effects this brand of reporting has on people’s lives and the way it can create fear and even hatred toward certain ethnic groups. In 1940s newspaper accounts, journalists fanned the flames of racial intolerance against Mexican-American youth by reporting them to be unpatriotic.

THE STORY COMES HOME



EL TEATRO CAMPESINO

From its founding in 1965, El Teatro Campesino blazed the trail for today’s Chicana/o theatrical productions in the United States. El Teatro Campesino’s mission is to create popular art in order to present a more authentic and accurate account of history, culture and reality. The company is known for a political style of theatre that uses *actos*, short, political plays; *mitos*, plays based on Mexican and Mayan history and myths; and *corridos*, Mexican ballads that recount history from the common people’s perspective. *Zoot Suit* incorporates elements of all three of these forms to bring Chicana/o theatre to a wider audience.



Luis Valdez
(Playwright/Director)

Luis Miguel Valdez is an American playwright, actor, writer, and film director. Born on June 26, 1940, in Delano, California, he was the second oldest of 10 children born to migrant farm workers Francisco and Armida Valdez. Valdez was raised in worker camps across California and started helping his parents pick crops in the fields at age six. In 1965, farm workers in Delano walked off of the grape fields in protest of low wages in what became the Delano grape strike led by César Chávez, Dolores Huerta, and Richard Chávez of the National Farmworkers Association. Valdez co-founded El Teatro Campesino on the picket lines to demonstrate the migrant farm workers’ fight for equality. He is also known for both his play and film adaptation of *Zoot Suit* and his movie *La Bamba*.

Written by Guillermo Aviles-Rodriguez

WELCOME TO THE THEATRE!

Founded in 1967, Center Theatre Group, a nonprofit organization, is one of the largest and most active theatre companies in the nation, programming shows year-round at the Ahmanson Theatre and Mark Taper Forum in Downtown Los Angeles and the Kirk Douglas Theatre in Downtown Culver City.

WHERE will you be going the day of the show?

Zoot Suit will be performed in the Mark Taper Forum at The Music Center of Los Angeles, one of the largest performing arts centers in the country. Every seat is a fantastic seat at the Taper. Built with the sound quality and intimacy of ancient Greek theatres, even the back of the 736-seat house makes you feel like a part of the show.

WHO will you meet and whose work will you see?

Theatre is a collaborative art form; it's a team sport.

- **The creative team:** playwright, director, actors, designers (for the stage, sets, lights, costumes)
- **The crew:** stage manager, crew members (who run the lights and sound and move the set pieces), dressers/costumers, make-up artists
- **The house:** house manager, ushers, maintenance staff
- **Theatre company:** producers, educators, administrative staff

WHAT will happen once you arrive at the Mark Taper Forum?

When you arrive at the venue, Center Theatre Group staff will greet you.

Once you're inside and seated, you'll receive a brief introduction to the event before the house lights dim and the show begins. After the show, you will have the opportunity to discuss what excited and resonated with you about the play.

WHY THEATRE?

At Center Theatre Group, we believe theatre creates an extraordinary connection between artists and audiences that only starts on our stages. Theatre creates the energy that feeds a city, a culture, and a society. Theatre reflects the community it serves.

Center Theatre Group is excited to share the power of live theatre with you. It is an art form that embodies all of the arts: performance, visual, creative movement, writing, music, video, and technology. Theatre weaves all of the arts together to tell stories about what it means to be a human being.

THE AUDIENCE

Without you we wouldn't be here. So even if it's your first time sitting in the house, you are already the most important person in the room. Theatre is live. You see us, and we see you. So, laugh, think, and applaud. Everything is happening right in front of you!

YOU ARE PART OF OUR COMMUNITY.

"If the last 50 years have taught us anything, it is that
THEATRE IS A CREATOR OF COMMUNITY,
and that community is the creator of theatre."
—Luis Valdez

Special Thanks



JPMORGAN CHASE & CO.



A special thanks to Macy's for its generous contribution to support the Student Matinee performances of *Zoot Suit*.

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CenterTheatreGroup.org | 213.628.2772 | @CTGLA

