
**Book Review by Nick Lopez.**

The 1942 “Sleepy Lagoon” murder of José Diaz in Los Angeles launched a massive war on Mexican juvenile delinquency by the Los Angeles Police Department. The LAPD's sweep of Mexican “gang members,” followed by a questionable trial that lacked evidence, led to the swift conviction of seventeen working-class youths from East Los Angeles. Just five short months following the murder came the Zoot-Suit Riots, when Mexican youths and white sailors from a local naval base clashed over social space. In Eduardo Obregón Pagán’s *Murder at the Sleepy Lagoon: Zoot Suits, Race, and Riot in Wartime L.A.*, the author makes the case that the convictions of the seventeen young men and the eruption of the riots were not merely the result of anti-Mexican sentiment on the part of the police and media. He argues that these events are better understood in the context of long-festering social conditions, race relations, American wartime patriotism, and the rise of an alternative youth subculture among working class minorities.

Pagán tackles each element chapter by chapter throughout the book. He starts by painting a picture of the “cultural and political context that gave rise to the public reaction to the Sleepy Lagoon murder trial and to the riot that followed.” (16) He describes in detail the lives of the murder victim as well as those of the accused, including who they were and where they came from. Pagán describes a group of friends that came from the same neighborhood, and then explains how the police and media judged them to be the “38th Street Gang.” Pagán also includes a deep look into the Zoot Suit subculture, its origins, its soundtrack, and the kids that adopted it in Southern California. He discusses the Zoot Suit and Pachuco movements through the eyes of an extremely patriotic mainstream public during World War II. Pagán concludes with a theory of who could actually have killed José Diaz, based on evidence that was not highlighted during the trial.

Throughout his book, Pagán presents a balanced and unbiased picture of the social and political context of the people and places involved. He does not cater to a particular side, but rather tells each story in its own context, ultimately giving the reader a better understanding of why events turned out as they did. Pagán does not seem to leave any
issue unconsidered in his book, which makes for a spectacular read. In addition to his fascinating attempt to solve the Murder at Sleepy Lagoon, Pagán also demonstrates perfectly just how during times of chaos, accuracy can take a back seat to sensationalism.


**Book Review by Rosalie MacPhee.**

Though somewhat obscured in United States history by the war that followed in the 1940s, World War I had a tremendous effect on almost all facets of American society. In his book, *America’s Great War: World War I and the American Experience*, Robert H. Zieger attempts to bring the conflict from this relative obscurity and share its importance with a new generation of both historians and general readers. Zieger’s work touches upon four major “themes” that structure his investigation of the war and its effects on American society.

The first theme is the relationship between the United States and Europe, which played an important role in the course of the conflict. This bond not only mattered in diplomatic and military terms but, more importantly, in terms of a shared “Western” identity. Zieger highlights this point of culture and destiny by explaining that “the Great War drove home the fact that America was Europe’s offspring and successor…” (2)

Zieger’s second theme deals with the relationship between America’s wartime experience and the Progressive era. The author emphasizes that the war aided in the further separation of so-called “control progressives” from “liberal progressives.” The control progressives were more likely to pursue moral reforms, like prohibition and “traditional” values, whereas liberal progressives concerned themselves more with social reforms like welfare, education, and labor. Both sides, as Zieger explains, “saw the war as an opportunity for social action.” (2)

The control progressives realized several of their wartime programs, like conscription and a limitation on American immigration. The liberal progressives, however, saw several of their projects, such as new social reforms, quickly snuffed out after the war ended.

The “National Security State,” which began during the Great War, is Zieger’s third theme. The United States, at this time, started utilizing different means of coercion and domination in an attempt to protect national security and advance different foreign policy and military goals. Some examples that Zieger points to include government policies like conscription and the Espionage and Sedition Acts, actions that severely limited civil liberties.
Zieger’s fourth and final theme offers an analysis of the role that President Woodrow Wilson played throughout the course of the Great War. He shows that Wilson’s policies and actions in no small way guided America’s part in the war, going so far as to refer to World War I as “Mr. Wilson’s War.” The author emphasizes that “[i]t was Wilson whose response to the outbreak and course of the war in Europe combined such a potent mixture of Christian redemptionism, American exceptionalism, and determination to rescue European moral and cultural values from the folly of Europeans.”(1) Wilson and his policies also hold importance to Zieger’s other three themes. For example, Wilson further strengthened the bond between America and Europe by giving money and supplies to the allies. Wilson also helped to widen the gap between control and liberal progressives with his support for procedures that favored the control progressives. Wilson’s legislation also made America’s new “National Security State” possible.

Like many Americans, Zieger also has a deep personal connection to the war. He explains in his preface that his grandfather, Alf Harman, was one of the last casualties.

On November 7, 1918, amid the false Armistice celebrations that gripped New York that day, the horse drawing the delivery cart he was negotiating through the streets of Manhattan shied and pitched him out. His head struck a street rail and his skull was fractured. He died the next day. (xi)

World War I also impacted Zieger’s father, John, a German immigrant in New York who was sometimes treated as an enemy alien and who found it difficult to get work. (xi) Personal connections like these allow Zieger to show his audience that his sometimes-lofty “themes” had specific consequences for individual lives.

Even the most casual reader should find America’s Great War a good overview not only of the war itself, but also of how it affected the people involved. Zieger gives a firm background to the causes and events leading to war in Europe, and then to America’s involvement, before touching on his “themes.” He is thorough and detailed without being longwinded and exorbitant. The resulting book is therefore accessible to a wide range of readers.

As our own times change year by year, our interests in history change as well. Today, many people find the social history of race, gender, and class most interesting. Zieger does not disappoint, dedicating a whole chapter to these very topics. In chapter five, the author discusses the war’s effects on different social classes, African Americans, and women. While his study of African Americans during World War I is thorough, it is nevertheless disappointing that

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Zieger did not include other races in his considerations. An even slightly comparative investigation into the experiences of other minority groups might have offered more insight. Perhaps the greatest obstacle in Zieger’s work is not in the book’s historical content, but in the author’s writing style. Throughout the text, the reader encounters long strings of rhetorical questions about aspects of the war, questions that the author often leaves unaddressed. Some paragraphs in his book are at least half a page long, made up of nothing but unanswered queries. All of Zieger’s questions seem relevant, but the habit of posing them and then talking about something else can leave the reader frustrated and confused. In addition, strings like these, that go on so long, tend to break up the flow of the narrative.

A further, relatively minor issue with Zieger’s writing style is his occasional use of obscure historical references. Such references, perhaps understood by fellow historians, may be lost on casual readers. For examples, the author refers to “Prussian methods of coercion,” (70) or else to “[the] militant tactics of British women.” (136) It seems that only a person with more than a passing knowledge of these specific histories would be able to apply these references to Zieger’s writing. One might assume that “Prussian methods of coercion” would be violent or aggressive, based on context or stereotype or what have you. However, the sentence itself is not exactly clear, nor is the reference to the “militant tactics of British women.” Obviously, Zieger wants to specify that their tactics were militant, but in what way were their tactics militant?

On the whole, however, Robert Zieger accomplishes his goals of “[helping] students and general readers to gain a sense of importance and tragedy of the Great War . . . [and of telling] members of a rising generation about the great events and developments that have shaped their lives.” (xiii) Zieger’s often direct, non-excessive way of putting things, as well as his attention to issues relevant to today’s society, allow his book to grab the attention of many kinds of readers. Perhaps even Zieger’s rhetorical questions help him achieve these goals, if they pique one’s interest in the subject matter. Thanks to Robert H. Zieger, America’s “Great War” need no longer be obscured by the history that followed it. He makes clear that World War I, though lasting only eighteen months for the United States, was important in many ways, and is still relevant to the world in which we live today.

**Book Review by Jason Martinez.**

Joseph F. Spillane’s book documents the early development and use of cocaine for medical purposes, and how its later misuse and abuse lead to federal prohibition against non-medical usage. Works such as Edward Brecher's 1972 book *Licit and Illicit Drugs* and Jill Jonnes 1996 book *Hep-Cats, Narc's, and Pipe Dreams: A History of America's Romance with Illegal Drugs* provide excellent research into the history of cocaine and other illegal drugs. Instead of repeating work done by other authors, Spillane provides a new and in-depth look at the early history of cocaine, utilizing extensive primary and secondary sources. Spillane takes care not to rely primarily on law or legislation as explanatory of the changing perceptions of cocaine and those who used it. Instead, the author focuses on everyday interactions between users, sellers, doctors, and law enforcement, as the major agent of perceptual change.

Spillane begins by discussing the origins of cocaine and its subsequent rapid ascent in popularity. Initially viewed as a ‘miracle’ cure following its discovery, the drawbacks of cocaine usage became apparent to medical practitioners in the late 19th century. Doctors attempted to limit access to the drug to prevent possible misuse and addiction, but this became impossible as pharmaceutical companies began actively marketing the drug to the general populace. The resulting increase in cocaine usage led to a national crisis as people began abusing the drug.

Spillane makes an insightful observation as to how providers of the drug influenced those who used it, how they influenced the perceptions of those who used it. Initially, doctors prescribed cocaine predominantly to middle-class white patients, and those who developed a cocaine habit tended to be looked upon with sympathy. After cocaine became widely available for public consumption, recreational use of the drug became prevalent and those who abused it were widely viewed as deviants or ‘dope fiends.’ The resulting increase in usage by lower-class whites and minorities helped further the backlash against cocaine addicts. Seen in that context as a menace to society, numerous groups began pushing for legislation to prohibit cocaine usage. These efforts culminated in the passage of the Harrison Act of 1914, which effectively made cocaine an illegal substance. Spillane is careful to point out that state and local governments attempted to restrict cocaine usage prior to the passage of the Harrison Act, and that the underground culture of cocaine...
usage began well before it became illegal.

Well written and well researched, Joseph Spillane employs a socio-historical approach to provide an excellent overview of how cocaine passed from medical miracle to national nightmare. While the book is relatively short, at 214 pages, Cocaine contains a wealth of information on the early history of cocaine. Those interested in looking at the topic in more depth will find a tremendous number of sources for further research.