

TWO PAGES FROM THE LOS ANGELES TIMES, JUNE 7 AND 9, 1943.

These are photocopies of two pages of the *Los Angeles Times* showing the “news” coverage of the Los Angeles “Zoot Suit Riots” and the detention of Japanese Americans. The riots occurred during the first two weeks of June 1943, and began when servicemen took it upon themselves to rid the streets of Mexican American youth gangs. Scores of servicemen roamed the downtown area and Mexican American communities searching for zoot suiters (young men dressed in hugely padded jackets and flowing trousers that tapered at the ankles, and women in skirts and stockings) who were equated with gang members, but really for any Mexican American young men. The photocopied pages show Mexican American young men in prison and an allegedly slashed white sailor, reversing the roles of attacker and victim. Additionally, the placements of the “news” coverage reveal the associations being made by the *Times* in positioning stories on zoot suit criminality with Japanese American disloyalty. Among the charges leveled at the zoot suiters were that they were part of a Fascist scheme to undermine American unity and that they were unpatriotic, both for not serving in the military and for wearing extravagant clothes amidst wartime rationing. On the other hand, Japanese Americans were removed and detained because of, allegedly, military necessity.



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QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

1. Compare the photographs of the zoot suiters behind bars and the bandaged sailor in uniform, and discuss the implications of those photographs. Why did the editors of the *Los Angeles Times* place in adjacent columns stories on zoot suiters and inquiries into Japanese American loyalty?
2. What do the photographs and stories say about the “news”? Is it objective? Does it carry hidden messages and assumptions?
3. From this history lesson, what can it teach us today about reading the “news” or watching the “news” on television?