

has become one of the true voices of American folk song. For years he has traveled the roads with his guitar and made up ballads about American life and sung them everywhere" (103). As if quoting Gold to indict Lomax is not confusing enough, a later chapter by Ed Cray completely contradicts the portrait of Lomax as manipulator.

If there is a serious scholarly debate to be had about the substance and construction of Guthrie's legacy – and here is where an introduction to the volume would have been really helpful – Frank Erik Pointner's chapter on "This Land Is Your Land" and Ron Cohen's piece on Guthrie's relationship with Will Geer present a contrary view to the chapters discussed above. Pointner argues that "This Land" is a "rebel anthem" that has been coopted and that Guthrie's legacy "has been distorted by those in power" (128), a direct counterpoint to the chapter on Lomax, which Morgan frames as a challenge to the "static 'radical' model of Guthrie" (100). Cohen emphasizes the importance of Guthrie's support networks and relationships. Surely we can appreciate Guthrie's utopianism without having to make him larger than life, take him out of the cultural movement of which he was a part, and stereotype (or ignore) the communist left, which helped shape his music but was also very much affected by it.

Southern Illinois University, Carbondale

ROBBIE LIEBERMAN

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Kathy Peiss, *Zoot Suit: The Enigmatic Career of an Extreme Style* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011, \$24.95/£16.50). Pp. 238. ISBN 978 0 8122 4337 6.

Kathy Peiss has written previously on the American beauty industry and women's leisure pursuits in turn-of-the-century New York. In her latest book she turns her attention to the zoot suit. With its broad shoulders, cinched waist, pegged cuffs, and billowing pants, this was one of the most flamboyant fashions of the twentieth century. It was worn primarily – but not exclusively, as Peiss stresses – by African American and Mexican American youths during the 1940s, and was brought to wider public attention by jazz musicians and other entertainers. Condemned by the United States government as a wasteful and unpatriotic use of fabric at a time of war, it became associated with public violence during the Los Angeles "zoot suit riot" of 1943. Thereafter it drew the attention of academics, journalists, and other public authorities who attempted to decode and understand this outlandish urban style, and at the same time became popular with groups of young men in, among other places, France, Russia, South Africa, and Trinidad.

As Peiss acknowledges, historians have found the zoot an attractive subject, and her study adds to the growing pile of recent work on it. The book follows two trajectories. First, Peiss examines the origins of the zoot itself, placing it into a longer history of American style, investigating the circumstances that led to its creation, and attempting to uncover what it meant to the young men who wore it. She then investigates the history of the zoot as an idea, looking at how it came to be regarded as unpatriotic and how it became popularly associated with resistance and defiance after the 1943 Los Angeles riots. As she says, her aim is to explore the social, cultural, and political meanings and values that were attached to the zoot and "to challenge and contest the mode of cultural understanding that reflexively reads the aesthetic as politics by other means" (4). She is exasperated at the enduring influence of the Birmingham school of cultural studies over contemporary American historians and argues that reading the

zoot – and, indeed, other aesthetic forms – solely as a gesture of political defiance leaves crucial questions about its social and cultural significance unexplored. She points to the problems with this approach – mainly that zoot suiters left no records to explain what the style meant to them – and is critical of the tendency among historians to recycle a relatively limited range of primary material or to rely on oral testimony that has been filtered through the decades of racial struggle after the Second World War.

Instead, Peiss has returned to the historical record to uncover how the zoot related to the cultural and political landscape of wartime America and how it fitted into the social lives and experiences of the youths who wore it. The book uses an extensive array of primary material and is grounded in an impressive amount of fresh research. It races through this at an almost bewildering pace and at times it feels as though Peiss (along with the research assistants she thanks) has examined almost every reference to the zoot available and that each and every mention of it has been slotted into the narrative. This is not a criticism, more a comment on the paucity of similar material in other studies, and this approach means that the reader is introduced to several anecdotes that illuminate contemporary attitudes to the zoot. My favourites were that Oliver Hardy received a special government dispensation for the fabric used to make the zoot suit he wore in the 1943 film *Jitterbugs*, and that “an egg painted to look like a zoot suiter won the Easter Egg decorating contest” at a Washington, DC boys’ club in 1943 (97). Sadly, there are no photographs.

This is an important and valuable book. The breadth of research upon which it is based and Peiss’s determination to question conventional assumptions considerably enrich our understanding of the zoot. The nuanced argument, and Peiss’s lucid, accessible prose style mean it will be of interest to a wide range of historians and scholars, including those studying American culture, fashion, consumption, and youth style, and more general readers. From a methodological perspective, it is an important reminder of the necessity of continued primary research, and of the need for historians to remain wary of theoretical frameworks that may ultimately limit our understanding of the phenomena we seek to investigate.

Birkbeck, University of London

THOMAS TURNER

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James T. Sparrow, *Warfare State: World War II Americans and the Age of Big Government* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011, £22.50). Pp. 336. ISBN 978 0 19 979191 9.

In opening his *England 1914–1945*, legendary British historian A. J. P. Taylor wrote, “Until August 1914 a sensible, law-abiding Englishman could pass through life and hardly notice the existence of the state, beyond the post office and the policeman.” This all changed, Taylor continued, with the outbreak of World War I. People’s lives “were shaped from above; they were required to serve the state instead of pursuing exclusively their own affairs . . . the history of the English state and the English people merged for the first time.”¹ War, of course, has often served to increase the powers of the nation-state; faced with the necessity of victory, many governments throughout

¹ A. J. P. Taylor, *England 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 1–2.

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