

“The Most Amazing Chapter in the Southland’s History”: Mythmaking and Boosterism in the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics¹

The 1932 Summer Olympic Games, held in Los Angeles from July 30 to August 14, served as a unique site for the city’s elite developers, businessmen, and media to present a mythological view of LA to the wider nation and world. This mythmaking contradictorily claimed a multi-cultural utopian vision of the city’s past and present while simultaneously representing nonwhite folks in marginalized and subordinating positions, which ultimately served to other nonwhites and reinforce ideals of white Anglo supremacy. City boosters utilized the Olympics to raise the city’s profile on the international stage by tying the success of the Games to their mythological representations of the city’s past and present. In so doing, they were able to attract tens of thousands of visitors and millions of dollars to the city. The local reporting on the Games by the *Los Angeles Times* worked hand-in-hand with the booster narrative at the core of the event by advocating for public support for the Olympics and sensationalizing the grandeur and perceived success of the event. Additionally, the production of the Games and related events presented a mythological history of the city that ultimately supported Anglo American supremacy over the region through a depiction of the region’s Spanish Fantasy Past narrative and American progress. Finally, the local media’s coverage of nonwhite athletes and those of LA’s ethnic communities utilized language that illustrates the

¹ This work could not have been accomplished without the support and critical eyes of the faculty and students in the History Department of California State University, Los Angeles. Kittiya Lee’s class structure and useful feedback has kept me more-or-less on task, and Christopher Endy’s guidance and suggestions have helped illuminate the compelling questions surrounding this topic, as well as where I might go for answers. Each student in the Historical Research and Writing class has been a model of historical thinking, but particular thanks go to Brittani Alberto, Julio Cervantes, and Dana Gibson for their moral and historical support. I must also thank Azalea Camacho and Kendall Faulkner in the CSULA Library for their research help. My research relied heavily on the digital newspaper archives at ProQuest Historical Newspapers and UC Irvine’s California Digital Newspaper Collection. During the COVID-19 pandemic, it would have been impossible to meaningfully research the 1932 Olympics without the wealth of resources provided by these online archives.

marginalized and subordinate views of those considered outside the white American ideal. The production of the 1932 Olympic Games, then, served as an opportunity for city elites to expand their economic and cultural capital in the name of internationalism and athletic competition while actually reifying divisive racial and nationalist paradigms.

The 1932 Olympics was the tenth such event since the Games were recreated by Baron Pierre de Coubertin and the International Olympic Committee in 1896. The Xth Olympiad was uniquely precarious as it was held in the United States, a long journey away from the European organizers and athletes at the core of the Olympic movement. The only previous time the U.S. had been awarded the Games was the 1904 Games in St. Louis, which were considered by many to be a failure because of the lack of participation by countries outside of North America. On top of this, the 1932 Games were also held during the harsh years of the Great Depression, when states had little desire to spend their limited resources on expensive travel to far off California. However, the event was still considered a success, due in large part to the one million dollar economic surplus it generated through ticket sales and merchandising, making it the first of such events to make a profit.²

Much of that success is owed to the work of the local Olympic Organizing Committee and its President, real-estate developer William May Garland. The Olympic Organizing Committee was an initiative of boosters like Garland who for decades had been advertising the city as a sub-tropical paradise and “white spot” free of organized labor and ideal for white, Anglo Americans to visit or settle down. The Olympics were one of the grandest plans to bring in tourism dollars and increase the city’s reputation. To entice wary countries to participate,

² Gwynn Wilson and F.G. Browne, *Games of the Xth Olympiad, Los Angeles, 1932, Official Report* (International Olympic Committee, 1933), 777.

Garland arranged for discounted travel fares and produced the first ever Olympic Village as cost-cutting measures for traveling athletes.³ Though many were late to commit, thirty-seven nations ultimately took part in the Games, including large delegations from Japan, Germany, Italy, and others and the first participation of Colombia and China.⁴ The Olympic Organizing Committee worked with local officials and media to lay the foundations to host the Games more than a decade prior, including the building of venues like the Olympic Coliseum and the Olympic Auditorium. The organizers were so driven to prepare for the Games that when a bond measure to finance the construction of the Coliseum failed in 1920, the organizers subverted that decision by building the stadium using a private loan that the city and county paid off through “rent” payments.⁵ City boosters like Garland were heavily invested in the Games, and measured the success of the event by the tourism dollars and, to an even greater extent, the notoriety and publicity the city would gain on the national and international stage.

Simultaneously, the city of Los Angeles was by 1930 much more diverse than the whites-only paradise it had been advertised as. The San Pedro News Pilot reported that the city had a “foreign population” of over five hundred thousand, including over one hundred thousand Mexicans, fifty-five thousand Germans, sixteen thousand Italians, thirty-five thousand English-born and thirty thousand Canadian-born Anglos, and twenty-five thousand Japanese, within the total population of about two million.⁶ There were also over thirty-eight thousand African Americans living in the city at this time.⁷ However, these communities were deeply segregated

³ Gwynn and Browne, *Official Report*, 228.

⁴ Gwynn and Browne, *Official Report*, 335.

⁵ Sean Dinces, “The 1932 Olympics: Spectacle and Growth in Interwar Los Angeles,” in *LA Sports: Play, Games, and Community in the City of Angels*, ed. Wilson Wiggins and David Kenneth Wiggins (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 137.

⁶ “Olympics Stir Foreign Clans,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, May 17, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

⁷ Sean Dinces, “Spectacle and Growth,” 144.

from the white population and faced intense social and economic disparity. Restrictive housing covenants maintained segregated communities, and an active local membership in the Ku Klux Klan supported these covenants with violent vigilantism.⁸ The 1932 Games also coincided with the massive repatriations of Mexican-Americans from the United States, sending tens of thousands of Mexican Angelenos to Mexico throughout the 1930s.⁹ Thus the ethnic communities of the city were substantial but still systemically othered by Anglo elites and institutions.

Much of the historiography of the 1932 Olympic Games has focused on the elite boosters like Harry Chandler and William M. Garland who produced the event and guided the expansion of the city. This is best exemplified in Barry Siegel's popular history book *Dreamers and Schemers*, which relies on personal letters, Olympic Committee records, and *Los Angeles Times* articles to develop a top-down narrative that focuses on Garland's ingenuity and determination in his attempts to host the Games in LA.¹⁰ However, within the more scholarly books and articles about Los Angeles and the Xth Olympiad, historians have challenged this "great men" view by highlighting the hypocrisies inherent in the boosterism of LA and American nationalism that were at the heart of mainstream framing of the Games. In his seminal work on the dynamics of racialized boosterism in LA, William Deverell highlights how early twentieth century elites represented the city's history as tied to an ahistorical Spanish fantasy past that applauds the Spanish conquest as a civilizing mission while downplaying or infantilizing the histories of indigenous and Mexican people in order to harken back to a white European history that mirrors and justifies the later American conquest of the region.¹¹ Deverell's framing of the city's image

⁸ Mike Davis, *City of Quartz: Excavating the Future in Los Angeles* (Brooklyn: Verso, 1990), 162.

⁹ Sean Dinces, "Spectacle and Growth," 145.

¹⁰ Barry Siegel, *Dreamers and Schemers: How an Improbable Bid for the 1932 Olympics Transformed Los Angeles from Dusty Outpost to Global Metropolis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2019), 199.

¹¹ William Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of Its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 5.

as inherently tied to race, specifically the appropriation, commodification, and exclusion of Mexican people, culture, and history, is essential to understanding the way the city advertised itself surrounding the Olympics. Sean Dinces highlights this localism and further argues that the Olympic planning committee and other boosters created a “façade of interethnic and international harmony in Southern California” in their production on the event.¹² His analysis of promotional material and newspaper coverage demonstrates how this façade purposefully obscured the realities of housing discrimination and wealth inequality facing the diverse communities of the city.

Following Deverell’s and Dinces’ work, this research uses a top-down cultural approach to analyze the sensationalism and contradictions within the media coverage of the Olympics. By reading these newspaper articles against the grain, we see that underneath the boosterism of the city and the Games lay an insidious yet prevalent paradigm that venerated white English-speaking American men and cast those outside that identity as other and, therefore, inferior. In the midst of hosting an event that purported internationalism and goodwill, the media coverage of the Olympics and related events, as well as their nonwhite athletes and spectators, served instead to support and prop up divisive ideologies in order to justify Anglo white supremacy in Southern California.

Boosting the Games: The LA Times’ Sensationalist Reporting on the Xth Olympiad

¹² Sean Dinces, “Padres on Mount Olympus: Los Angeles and the Production of the 1932 Olympic Mega-Event,” *Journal of Sport History* 32, no. 2 (Summer 2005), 139.

The *Los Angeles Times* was the main mouthpiece of the city's elite boosters, and its sensationalized coverage of the Olympics was exemplary of the advertising of the perceived values of the city. One of Garland's most important allies, and closest friends, was Harry Chandler, owner of the *Los Angeles Times* and member of the Olympic Organizing Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, the All-Year Club, and other booster organizations. Chandler was not shy about using the *Times* to boost the Games, and the newspaper's coverage of the event was celebratory even before the event took place. Months before the Games were staged, sports editor Braven Dyer wrote that the city owed a debt to Garland and the other boosters who originated the idea of hosting the Games.¹³ The paper wrote explicitly about the value of the Games for the city, noting that the event would be "an advertising medium which will be felt throughout the world" that would surely benefit the city.¹⁴ The Games would also be valuable as a source of revenue for the city, as the *Times* reported that an anticipated \$40 million of tourism money would circulate in Southern California due to the Games.¹⁵ As the event approached and athletes, journalists, distinguished officials, and tourists began to arrive, the *Times* turned up its enthusiasm, noting that the Games would surely be "an unqualified success," "the greatest in history,"¹⁶ and the harbinger of "the most amazing chapter in the Southland's history."¹⁷

¹³ Braven Dyer, "Los Angeles Owes Debt to Himrod and Garland for Securing Olympics," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁴ "International Games to be the Fulfillment of William Garland's Cherished Dream," *Los Angeles Times*, July 6, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁵ "Olympics Cash Value Set High," *Los Angeles Times*, May 2, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁶ "Olympiad Certain to Be Greatest in History; Opening Less Than Three Weeks Away," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁷ Jean Bosquet, "Olympiad Focuses Eyes of World on Southland," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Indeed, the Times repeatedly referred to the 1932 Games as the most successful of all time throughout its coverage.¹⁸ At times this greatness was framed as a national success for the United States, as when Paul Lowry wrote “American athletes won from the cream of the world in a series of record-shattering performances that almost defy description. It was the greatest modern Olympiad ever held.”¹⁹ Here, the performance of American athletes evidenced the nation’s soft power, and the new world records represented American bodies as the greatest of human athletic potential. However, the *Los Angeles Times* celebrated the Games more often as a success in terms of organization, production, and advertising. Dyer wrote that the public response to the Games was “perhaps the most amazing feature of the entire presentation,” and that the hundreds of thousands of attendees gave a “body blow to pessimists of a few months ago.”²⁰ For Dyer, the attendance at the Games was its most important feature, disproving the fears of any who worried about the risks of hosting the expensive event during the Great Depression. The *Times*’ coverage demonstrates the boosters’ intentions for the Olympics to serve as an advertising opportunity for the city, raising its prominence and reputation in the eyes of the world. The income generated from that attendance was also vital to the paper’s framing of the 1932 Olympics as the greatest sporting event in history.

In their eyes, the financial success of the Xth Olympiad vindicated the work of Garland, Chandler, and the rest of the Olympic Organizing Committee. The *Times* happily reported unofficial estimates of over a million attendees and rumors of a one-million-dollar profit from

¹⁸ Examples include Harry Carr, “Earth Never Has Seen Such Display of Power,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Braven Dyer, “Marvelous Cast of Performers Made 1932 Olympic Games Greatest in All History,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and Grantland Rice, “Japan Triumphs Before 100,000,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

¹⁹ Paul Lowry, “America’s Supremacy in Athletics Emphatic,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 15, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁰ Braven Dyer, “Success of Games Amazing,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

the Games (estimates that proved to be accurate), further proof against any criticisms of the event.²¹ When it was reported that the surplus would be used to pay off the California bond measure, the *Times* took it as an opportunity to praise the organizers and further boast about the virtues of Los Angeles. Calling the Games “a difficult undertaking admirably accomplished,” the *Times* accused the East Coast pessimists of not understanding “the stamina of the Los Angeles men and women who were backing the enterprise or... the spirit of a community which has always risen higher the higher the hurdle.”²² This is a telling example of the connection between the production of the Games and the booster campaigns advertising the city. To such boosters, the Games’ success reflected more on Los Angeles than on the United States as a whole and provided further evidence behind their celebratory representations of the city. In their view, Los Angeles was unique as a recent and modern metropolis whose rapid growth was due in part to the virtues of the white elites who directed its anti-union industrial development, and in part to the natural beauty, climate, and resources of the Southland.

The *Times*’ coverage noted other instances in which the Games’ success resulted from the charms of Los Angeles. Long a crucial component of LA boosterism, the Southern California climate was often discussed, framed as “an ideal location for all Olympic contests with the exception of those requiring snow.”²³ The Opening Ceremonies took place under “a cloudless sky and our California sun,” revealing the local pride over the warm climate.²⁴ Such praise did not only come from locals, however, as the *Times* also printed a column by famed *New York Tribune* sportswriter Grantland Rice in which he argued that the “endless sunshine, tempered

²¹ “Olympic Profits for ‘36 Team,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 16, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²² “One More Olympic Record,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 18, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²³ Lynn J. Rogers, “Honors Will Be Awarded Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁴ Alma Whitaker, “Spectators Thrilled to Cheers by Mighty Drama of Ceremony,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

with a cooling breeze” was the main reason behind the surge of record-breaking athletic performances during the Games.²⁵ Such praise was likely well-received by the proud boosters at the *Times*. The newspaper also did not shy away from the city’s other source of fame, the many Hollywood celebrities who called it home. The shared interest between the film stars and visiting Olympic athletes was constantly covered throughout the Games. Douglas Fairbanks was particularly discussed as a sports fan and item of interest for foreign athletes.²⁶ The *Times*’ coverage also illustrates how the organizers of the Games utilized Hollywood star power for their own purposes. A front page story on June 27, 1932 announced that Fairbanks and his wife Mary Pickford were the featured speakers of a worldwide radio broadcast from the Hollywood Bowl and the Olympic Stadium inviting listeners to attend the Olympics, with Garland and California governor James Rolph as supporting roles.²⁷ During the Games, distinguished officials, athletes, and royalty from visiting nations were invited to an official luncheon co-hosted by Garland and MGM Studios head Louis B. Mayer, which included a studio tour and honored Governor Rolph and International Olympics Committee President Count Henri de Baillet-Latour.²⁸ Whether to popular or aristocratic audiences, the Olympic Organizing Committee understood the value of the film industry in its production of the Games, with the *LA Times*’ support in publicizing.

The production of the Games was a project planned from the ground up as an advertising opportunity for Los Angeles. Led by the real estate developer William May Garland, the boosters who organized the event understood the potential for economic and cultural capital that would

²⁵ Grantland Rice, “Perfect Weather Gave Athletes Great Start,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 14, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁶ Examples include Edwin Schallert, “Olympic Lure Wins Colony,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 9, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and Ralph Huston, “Win or Lose, They’re for Doug Fairbanks,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁷ “All Ready to Tell about Olympics,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 27, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

²⁸ Alma Whittier, “Thirty Nations Honored at ‘Jolly’ Studio Fete,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 7, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

come with a successful event, and they did everything they could to ensure that would happen. Harry Chandler's positions on the Olympic Organizing Committee and All-Year Club make this intersection clear, and his ownership and direction of the *Los Angeles Times* brought the paper in as an important resource in boosting the Xth Olympiad. The *Times*' celebration of the 1932 Olympic Games illuminates the importance of the Games to this booster project.

Mythologizing LA: Producing a Multicultural Utopian Past and Present

The production of the Olympics and related events hosted during the Games illustrates boosters' attempts to present a mythological view of Los Angeles' history and present as a multicultural city exemplifying the virtues of American progress. One important aspect of this myth-making was to utilize what historians have referred to as the city's Spanish Fantasy Past.²⁹ This ahistorical story of the city's early history represented the coming of the Spanish missionaries in the late eighteenth century as a benevolent mission that brought Christianity and progress to the uncivilized indigenous people of the region. City boosters connected the rapid development of Los Angeles with the Spanish Fantasy Past by linking what they saw as the progress of the Americanization of the region in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the civilizing narrative they used for the Spanish missionaries. The popularity of the Spanish Fantasy Past in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in a surge of Mission Revival style architecture, the production of events like the Los Angeles Fiesta, and the continued popularity of *Ramona*, Helen Hunt Jackson's novel about an indigenous orphan's life after the Mexican-American War. As one of the largest events in

²⁹ Carey McWilliams coined this term in 1946's *Southern California Country*, but see Phoebe S. Kropp, "All Our Yesterdays': The Spanish Fantasy Past and the Politics of Public Memory in Southern California, 1884-1939" (PhD diss., UC San Diego, 1999), 2-3 for a more recent overview of the term.

Southern California history, the production of the 1932 Olympics also intersected with the Spanish Fantasy Past myth.

The *Los Angeles Times* explicitly compared the spirit surrounding the Olympics to that of the Los Angeles Fiesta parades of the 1890s. The Fiesta was a parade and festival planned by the elite boosters of the time; Harry Chandler was at one point the main organizer for the third year of the event. Historian William Deverell illuminates how Chandler and other boosters developed the Los Angeles Fiesta as not only as money-making event, but also to represent a version of the Spanish Fantasy Past, to make the mythological past alive in their present. Though it had a Spanish name and the participation of Mexican, Chinese, and other nonwhite communities, the parade ultimately told a story of progress brought to the city through American conquest.³⁰ In writing about the Olympics, *Society* page writer Juana Neal Levy claimed that “the Olympiad seems to have brought back that old California spirit of bon camaraderie” that was true of the Fiesta, with “everyone trying to add his bit to make it a gala time.”³¹ With the Olympic Organizing Committee, the Chamber of Commerce, city departments, and numerous hostess clubs contributing to the beautification of the city in preparation for the Games, it was true that many Angelenos contributed to the production of the Olympics. And like the Fiesta, boosters leading the production also used it as a pedagogical venue to showcase the Spanish Fantasy Path myth.

Early arriving athletes who were staying in the Olympic Village had a full calendar of entertainment and events during their evenings, including a special performance of *The Mission*

³⁰ Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 65.

³¹ Juana Neal Levy, “Spirit of Olympic Games Captures Society Groups,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

Play on July 25, 1932.³² *The Mission Play* was an ongoing theater production held at Mission San Gabriel that represented Native Americans as uncivilized savages and the Spanish Missions as benevolent, bloodless institutions that uplifted the indigenous peoples despite themselves.³³ With its celebration of the Spanish conquerors and critical eye toward the secularization of the Missions under the Mexican government, *The Mission Play* is one of the most striking examples of the Spanish Fantasy Past in action. Though it had lost its popularity by the 1930s, the play was one of the most successful theatrical performances of the 1910s, and would serve as a perfect example of Southern California boosterism for the visiting athletes to attend.³⁴

However, another theatrical production with the same commitment to the Spanish Fantasy Past as *The Mission Play* also coincided with the Olympic Games. This was the play *La Paloma*, which ran from August 3-6, 1932 in the Eagle Rock neighborhood of Los Angeles. Ostensibly about the history of Eagle Rock, the coverage of the event in the local newspapers illuminates the centrality of the racialized Spanish Fantasy Past myth in boosters' representations of LA to the nation and the world. *La Paloma* was intended to be a tourist attraction that would take advantage of the many visitors coming to Los Angeles during the Olympics. The *Eagle Rock Sentinel* noted before production began that putting the play on "some time during the Olympic Games would be a very appropriate time."³⁵ They later wrote that the neighborhood organizers like the Eagle Rock Chamber of Commerce planned "to make LaPaloma [sic] one of the principal night features of the entire Olympic Games program" and that it was meant to be a

³² "Stage All Set for New Shows," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

³³ Deverell, *Whitewashed Adobe*, 219-222.

³⁴ Deverell, 209.

³⁵ "Sherman Writes Play Based on Fourteenth Dist.," *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, February 19, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

“Community Offering to Olympiad.”³⁶ Though on a smaller level than the Olympic Organizing Committee, the Eagle Rock boosters saw the Games as an opportunity not only for an economic boom from tourism, but also as an advertising opportunity. Just as Garland was supported by the *Los Angeles Times*, those producing *La Paloma* had allies in the local press, with the *Eagle Rock Advertiser* also covering the play and expectations that it would “result in much advertising value and cultural advancement for the community.”³⁷ In their excitement and surety of success, the producers invited many distinguished guests, including California governor James Rolph and Democratic nominee for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, though neither of them were ultimately able to attend.³⁸ Despite their absences, however, the *Eagle Rock Sentinel*’s front page coverage of *La Paloma*’s opening nights praised the event as a “brilliant and glamorous success,” particularly pointing to the two thousand guests in attendance.³⁹

La Paloma served both the economic and cultural interests of neighborhood boosters, providing evening entertainment for tourists with a pedagogical undertone that presented an uncivilized nonwhite history of the area that was entirely in the past. The play centers on the Verdugo family, who were granted land by the Spanish Empire in the area that would become Eagle Rock, and the indigenous people on whose land they were settling. Local indigenous groups were depicted as childlike, uncivilized, and aggressive, and the Verdugos as kind, benevolent masters. The Sentinel noted in its synopsis that *La Paloma* “portrays the fidelity and gratefulness of an Indian boy who is saved from a life of drudgery and abuse by a member of a

³⁶ “‘La Paloma’ is Historical Play for City,” *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, May 27, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

³⁷ “‘La Paloma’, Historical Play by Sherman, Set for August,” *Eagle Rock Advertiser*, June 3, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

³⁸ “Roosevelt and Rolph Invited to Eagle Rock,” *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, July 22, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

³⁹ “La Paloma Greeted by Large Audiences During First Two Nights Performances,” *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, August 5, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

Verdugo family,” and whose death at the climax of the play resulted from “an Indian uprising, which actually occurred on the Verdugo lands.”⁴⁰ The play was presented as grounded in historical fact, but its depictions of indigenous groups was heavily biased, and by framing the area as “Verdugo lands” they negate any indigenous claim to the area. Thus, tourists were fed a myth of the neighborhood, and the city at large, that subjugated indigenous communities to a quaint past that had little to do with the grandeur of the city’s present, and they paid the fifty cent price of a ticket for the pleasure.

Though it is focused on only one neighborhood, *La Paloma* is emblematic of how Los Angeles’ city boosters appropriated the stories and cultures of the historical and contemporaneous non-white communities of the city. The *Eagle Rock Sentinel* highlighted the “glorious” performances of its lead cast, but failed to examine the red- and brownface inherent in their production, with actors Annalee McClure, Jean Lierance Cameron, and Betty Binkley respectively playing Maria Terressa Verdugo, Relipe, and Pequita, “an Indian servant girl.”⁴¹ Just as *La Paloma*’s ahistorical tale of Anglo-American conquest ends with the erasure of indigenous and Mexican stories, the physical representations of those communities were replaced and appropriated by local Anglo actors. Indeed, the entire two-hundred-person cast was made up entirely by local Eagle Rock residents, showing that the intention of the performance was about legitimizing ownership of the area’s history for its contemporary Anglo residents and audience rather than truthfully or respectfully representing the stories of earlier residents. In hosting the performances of *La Paloma* as an unofficial part of the Olympic program, the Eagle Rock

⁴⁰ “Sherman Writes Play,” *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, February 19, 1932.

⁴¹ “La Paloma Greeted by Large Audiences,” *Eagle Rock Sentinel*, August 5, 1932.

boosters reproduced in miniature the Spanish Fantasy Past mythmaking that was also a part of the production of the Olympics at large.

Official events also were centered around the mythologizing of Los Angeles. The program for the Opening Ceremonies included a telling message from Dr. Robert Gordon Sproul, University of California President, in which he framed the city as the perfect location for such an illustrious event. Opening by calling Los Angeles a “magic city,” Sproul’s comments illustrate the Spanish Fantasy Past at play, as he continues by describing the city as “but yesterday a Spanish pueblo, today a far-flung metropolis.”⁴² This myth-making served not only to tie modern LA to a European, and not indigenous or Mexican, past, but it also framed the city’s present state as a representation of Euro- and Anglo-American modernity and progress. Sproul also used the occasion of the Olympics to tie Los Angeles to Greece, stating that “in California we are favored with many of the physical characteristics of the lovely land in which these games had their origin.”⁴³ By tying California to Greece, Los Angeles lay claim to a geographic Europeanness, so that even its natural environment became divorced from the indigenous people of the land.

On August 2, 1932, the Olympic Organizing Committee and the Hostesses of the Tenth Olympic Games presented a pageant at the Hollywood Bowl called “California Welcomes the World” as part of the official events surrounding the Games, which served as another venue for the city to present a mythological view of its past and present. This pageant included two thousand performers and musicians who, in thirty-one acts, performed dances and routines to honor each participating country. The pageant, written by *The Mission Play* author John Steven

⁴² *Official Program, Xth Olympiad, Los Angeles, USA* (California Xth Olympiad Commission, Los Angeles: 1932), 18.

⁴³ *Official Program*, 19.

McGroarty, opened with another retelling of early California history, with a Native American dance on stage until the arrival of the sixteenth century Spanish conquistador Hernán Cortés, followed by numbers titled “March of the Padres” and the “Birth of California.”⁴⁴ Again we see the coming of the Spanish as bringing civilization to the region, with no mention of Spanish violence or indigenous resistance. Indeed, the Queen of the Pageant, Alma Dorothy Priester, was labeled a “native daughter” because she was a “descendent of the third white family to settle in the community.”⁴⁵ This reveals how claims of nativity to the region were specifically correlated to whiteness, and how the pageant celebrated Los Angeles as a white city even with the recognition of other nations. Unlike in *La Paloma*, the pageant went out of its way to feature immigrants (or descendants of immigrants) from foreign countries to represent the fifty-eight countries featured in the rest of the program, but its focus was on “the contributions which their respective countries have made to the growth and progress of California.”⁴⁶ As with Sproul’s welcome message, the contributions of other nations were celebrated for the progress they brought to an implicitly Anglo-American California.

Viewed alongside the sensationalist coverage of the Olympics in the *Los Angeles Times*, the mythmaking at the heart of these events illuminates the hypocrisy of the city’s boosters. While celebrating the internationalism of the Olympics’ mission and claiming that LA is the perfect venue for such an event, their production of the Games and connected events told an ahistorical narrative of the city’s history that disregarded the region’s nonwhite communities. At best, the city could be seen as attempting to assert a Eurocentric view of internationalism, as with its attempts to connect to Greece, and trying to situate Los Angeles alongside the great European

⁴⁴ Braven Dyer, “State to Hail World in Bowl,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁵ “Leading Role Won in Games Pageant,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 27, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁶ “Leading Role Won.”

capitals of trade, culture, and history. Regardless, their use of the Spanish Fantasy Past in their mythmaking attempted to ignore the actual historic and ongoing inequalities of the city, much of which was directed at nonwhite communities. In so doing, they made clear the insincerity of their claims to goodwill and brotherhood.

Othering the World: The Marginalization of Nonwhites in Olympic Coverage

Despite the allusions to multicultural cohesion in Los Angeles, local newspaper coverage of the Olympics commonly utilized language that exoticized and othered nonwhites. The internationalist mission of the Olympics often prompted local newspapers to laud the city's role as a center of global connection and goodwill. The *LA Times* argued that hosting the Olympics made Los Angeles the new "International City," stripping the title away from Geneva, the headquarters of the League of Nations.⁴⁷ They also referred to LA as "the city of many tongues"⁴⁸ and to the Olympic Village created by the Olympic Organizing Committee as a present-day "city of Babel." A South Pasadena local agreed, writing to the Times' editor that "The mingling of nations will prepare those of today to make of Los Angeles a world center for tomorrow."⁴⁹ The majority of the coverage, however, highlighted the differences between Americans and foreign athletes, utilizing language that not only othered nonwhite visitors but also the nonwhite residents of the city.

The most explicit way the local media othered nonwhites was in describing the physical features of foreign Olympians. The visiting Indian athletes, for example, were constantly defined

⁴⁷ Braven Dyer, "Turbaned Tornadoes Hit Olympic Village as Indian Men Arrive," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁸ Jean Bosquet, "Olympiad Focuses Eyes of World on Southland," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁴⁹ Mrs. J. Paul Clark, "Letters to the Times: Influence of Olympics," *Los Angeles Times*, August 5, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

by their turbans, with the field hockey team referred to as “turbaned tornadoes” and “turbaned thunderbolts.”⁵⁰ The Times’ coverage of the Opening Ceremonies described the Argentinian athletes as “tall fellows browned by the pampas suns” and the Brazilians as “bronzed boys.”⁵¹ The Japanese athletes were particularly targeted, with the Times describing them as “little yellow men,”⁵² “child-like... little lovable brown men,”⁵³ “slant-eyed sons of Nippon,”⁵⁴ and as “little Jap[s].”⁵⁵ In casually and commonly describing these athletes in such ways, the Times centered race in their representations of these athletes, highlighting their nonwhite status through exotic and diminutive descriptions of their bodies and dress. These representations were tied to whiteness, as made clear in the contrast to the ways the *Times* covered European athletes. They described Swedish athletes as “mighty,”⁵⁶ Italians as “Mussolini’s Handsome Athletes,”⁵⁷ and Germans as “straight and stalwart.”⁵⁸ More often, the Times did not describe the physical features of the European athletes at all, instead highlighting their flags and the color of their uniforms. For the *Los Angeles Times*, the European athletes’ whiteness made them less exotic than those from India, Japan, or South America, and so their coverage of the former didn’t include the racialized othering that was present in that of the latter.

⁵⁰ Braven Dyer, “Turbaned Tornadoes,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1932.

⁵¹ Jean Bosquet, “Throng of 105,000 Roars Welcome to Olympics,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵² Frank Roche, “Japan Presents Horses from All Nations as Her Representatives in Olympic Games,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 5, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵³ Harry Carr, “Earth Never Has Seen Such Display of Power,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁴ Braven Dyer, “Athletes from Thirty-Seven Nations Ready to Go,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁵ “‘Rain on Olympics’ --- Gin Chow,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁶ “‘Rain on Olympics.’”

⁵⁷ Ralph Huston, “Italian Olympic Team Gets Riotous Welcome,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 18, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁵⁸ Jean Bosquet, “Throng of 105,000,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 31, 1932.

Local news coverage of female athletes reflected how gender and race intersected in the exoticification of nonwhite athletes. Competing women from all countries were constantly covered in gendered ways, with interviewers asking them about cosmetics, fashion, and romance, and articles constantly referred to their physical appearances and their marital status, questions and descriptions that were not directed at male athletes.⁵⁹ However, local newspapers' coverage of the female athletes from non-European countries mixed the racial and gendered styles to judge the beauty and habits of women seen as exotic, adding an element of objectification to the marginalizing coverage. The San Pedro News Pilot published an article about Eugenio Escudero, described as a "bright-eyed, dusky fencer of Mexico," and her English language skills, but the only phrases they included her saying were "I love you," "Geeve me a leettle keees [sic]," and "O.K. Baby," the latter of which they reported she said "with appropriate eye action."⁶⁰ Thus Escudero is not only described as other through her physical description and foreign accent, but her coverage also centered around her sexual availability to American men by highlighting her ability to flirt or seduce in English.

The local press covered Japanese women in a similarly racialized and gendered manner, but with a distinct focus on stereotypical expectations of their dress and manners. Photographs of these athletes were commonly printed in local newspapers, illustrating the importance of their physical appearance to the way they were covered. As can be seen in Figure 1, these photos often focused on the traditional garb the women wore as a reflection of their foreignness; the

⁵⁹ There are many examples of this gendered coverage of female athletes, but a sampling includes Muriel Babcock, "Beef-Fed Frauleins Are Here," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Muriel Babcock, "French Have Big Triumph," *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; Muriel Babcock, "Beef-Fed Frauleins Are Here," *Los Angeles Times*, July 17, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; "Olympics' Prettiest Girl," *Los Angeles Times*, July 22, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and "Germany's Girl Champs," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁰ Mary Alice Parent, "'O.K.' Fast Becoming Password of Olympics," *San Pedro News Pilot*, July 30, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

photograph's headline and description even misspell kimono as "kimonas," illustrating the little care given to accurate coverage of the culture of the women who are being written about.⁶¹ Elsa Schallert at the Los Angeles Times wrote the most respectful article about the Japanese female athletes, in which she reflected on her assumptions about Japanese women and provides an illuminating example of a journalist grappling with the expectations when covering these women.⁶² Schallert wrote that she "expected to see demure lotus-eyed kimono-clad [sic] Japanese girls," "wistful Cho-cho-sans with cherry blossoms in their arms," and "fleet-footed Suzukis bowing obeisantly." Instead, she was surprised to find the women were intelligent and well-spoken, and even relates an overheard conversation where an athlete argues for equal treatment and suffrage for Japanese women (who were not granted the right to vote until 1947). However, Schallert's tone is not only surprised but disappointed, demonstrating the power of the roles journalists expected Japanese women to fill. Even in the most developed piece on the female Japanese Olympians, written by a female journalist, the expectations of the athletes as exotic, racially other, subservient and objectifiable are so pronounced that they color all discussion of those women.

Though not objectified in the same way as the female athletes, the language used in newspaper coverage of male athletes illustrates how they were also subject to racialized expectations. The *Los Angeles Times* often described male Olympians from non-European countries in martial terms that reflected the threat they were seen to pose to American conceptions of white supremacy. Despite the diminutive descriptions of the size of the Japanese athletes, as

⁶¹ "Japan's Olympic Girls Wear Kimonas for Evening," *San Pedro News Pilot*, August 3, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

⁶² Elsa Schallert, "Japanese Don't Burn Out Stars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 21, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

competitors they were often described in threatening ways. The *Times* wrote that Japan was “the most dangerous rival of the United States for Olympic honors”⁶³ and used the term “legion” to describe its athletes.⁶⁴ Such language made clear the underlying perceptions of a Japanese threat, with Olympic competition as a stand in for a military rivalry. Likewise, the Indian team was referred to as “turbaned threats from far-off India”⁶⁵ and were repeatedly said to have “invaded” Los Angeles.⁶⁶ The martial language used to discuss these nonwhite athletes illustrates how they were represented not only as threats to the United States’ achievement in the Games, but also as larger threats to American ideas of white supremacy.

The othering newspaper coverage of the visiting Olympians was at times also directed at local nonwhite communities. Some American athletes were written about in ways that focused on their race, as when Paul Lowry of the *Los Angeles Times* asserted that the record-breaking athletic accomplishments of the four Black athletes competing for the United States proved that “colored boys” were naturally more athletically gifted than whites.⁶⁷ Even as they won victories for the United States, these men were represented as outside the white American norm. Local ethnic and racial communities in Los Angeles were very active during the Olympics, hosting visitors, raising funds, and putting on events and banquets. The *San Pedro News Pilot*, heavily focused on the arrivals of athletes on ships in the San Pedro port, commonly referred to these communities as “foreign clans”⁶⁸ or “colonies,”⁶⁹ highlighting their marginalized status from the

⁶³ “Rain on Olympics,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 8, 1932.

⁶⁴ Jean Bosquet, “Olympiad Focuses Eyes of World on Southland,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁵ Braven Dyer, “Athletes from Thirty-Seven Nations,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932.

⁶⁶ Braven Dyer, “India’s Trackmen Here,” *Los Angeles Times*, June 12, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers; and Braven Dyer, “Turbaned Tornadoes,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1932.

⁶⁷ Paul Lowry, “Negroes Prove Their Mettle,” *Los Angeles Times*, July 30, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁶⁸ “Olympics Stir Foreign Clans,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, May 17, 1932.

⁶⁹ “Japan Good Will Party Starts Olympic Tour,” *San Pedro News Pilot*, July 30, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

white, Anglo mainstream. In the *News Pilot*'s coverage, the local Japanese community was depicted as foreign in language, look, and manner, as when they welcomed the Japanese athletes with "banzais."⁷⁰ When seeing the Japanese community's own coverage in *The Japan-California Daily News*, however, we see a clear American identity existing alongside their Japanese identity, as when they held fundraisers for the Japanese Olympic teams that utilized American music and dance.⁷¹ The logos and photographs from such events make this hybrid Japanese-American identity clear with the continual use of both the Japanese and American flags as central motifs (see Figures 2 and 3).⁷² Unfortunately, the mainstream press coverage of the Japanese community and other nonwhites rarely represented them as American. Instead, they presented all nonwhites covered in the Olympics as different from a core American identity that was wrapped up in white supremacy, patriarchy, and military power. Even as they celebrated the internationalist ideals that the Olympics symbolized, Los Angeles' major newspapers upheld these divisive ideologies by marginalizing and othering nonwhites in their coverage.

Conclusion: The Boosterism and Challenges of 1984 and 2028

Though they the 1932 Olympics were praised by the *Los Angeles Times* and other local newspapers as an unqualified success, they did not make the Los Angeles "a better sport, a kinder neighbor, a firmer friend" as Mrs. J. Paul Clark hoped in her letter to the editor at the *Times*. The energy and resources put in to welcome the teams and attendees from around the world, building stadiums and the Olympic Village, granting discounts to athletes, and hosting celebratory events, were not to be found in alleviating the struggles of Angelenos during the Great Depression.

⁷⁰ "Japanese to Great Squad," *San Pedro News Pilot*, July 8, 1932, California Digital Newspaper Collection.

⁷¹ "Dance King Reigns in Lil' Tokyo," *The Japan-California Daily News*, June 18, 1932, Hoji Shinbun Digital Collection.

⁷² "Help Nippon Olympians From Land of Rising Sun!," *The Japan-California Daily News*, June 12, 1932, Hoji Shinbun Digital Collection, and *Farewell banquet for the Japanese Olympic team*, August 15, 1932. Japanese American National Museum (96.131.2).

Harry Chandler and his allies in the Merchants and Manufacturers Association continued to promote the anti-union open shop labor system in the city, working against New Deal initiatives to protect workers.⁷³ Racial disparities continued to affect the city after the Olympics, made most visceral in a *Los Angeles Times* article about a Mexican general and overseer of a penal colony who was tasked with overseeing the repatriation of two hundred Mexican Angelenos after he had come to the city to attend the Olympics.⁷⁴ In the coming years, tens of thousands of Mexicans and Mexican-Americans would be deported and repatriated from Southern California because they were seen as a threat to white labor.⁷⁵ The myths espoused by boosters and local newspapers and the tourism dollars brought in by the event's "success" had little effect on the lived experiences of these marginalized Angelenos.

After the Xth Olympiad ended on August 14, 1932, Garland remained involved in boosterism in Los Angeles and with the Olympic movement, remaining on the International Olympic Committee until 1944. In 1939, however, Garland once again endeavored to bring the Olympics to Los Angeles, forming the Southern California Committee for the Olympic Games (SCCOG) in order to bid for LA to be the back-up host to the 1940 Games, should Japan be unable to host due to its war with China. Those Games were ultimately cancelled, but the SCCOG continued to bid for Los Angeles to host every subsequent Olympic Games for decades, making Los Angeles the city that has bid for the Olympics more than any other in the world.

⁷³ Tyson Patros and Judith Stepan-Norris, "Navigating Class Power and Inequalities: New Deal Liberals and the Los Angeles Regional Labor Board, 1933-1934," *Labor History* 60, no. 6 (August 2019), 813.

⁷⁴ Wayne B. Cave, "Mexicans Sail for Homeland," *Los Angeles Times*, August 29, 1932, ProQuest Historical Newspapers.

⁷⁵ Abramam Hoffman, *Unwanted Mexican Americans in the Great Depression: Repatriation Pressures, 1929-1939* (Tucson, Arizona: University of Arizona Press, 1974), 100.

This bidding finally paid off in 1984, when the Olympic Games were hosted in Los Angeles once again.⁷⁶

Like the 1932 Games, the 1984 Olympics were considered an unprecedented success, especially after the debt-ridden Montreal Olympics of 1976 and the US-boycotted Moscow Olympics of 1980. However, also like the 1932 Games, Los Angeles' boosters in charge of the Olympic Organizing Committee were able to produce an event that shattered previous economic and attendance records through savvy deal-making and commercialization, ultimately resulting in a surplus of \$223.5 million.⁷⁷ With a second successful Olympiad hosted in the city, the SCCOG rested on its laurels until the new millennium, when it began to bid for the Olympics once again. Ultimately, city officials celebrated in 2017 when the city was selected to host the Olympics for the third time in 2028.

Not all Angelenos celebrated this news, however. A group of thirty local organizations, including Black Lives Matter LA, the Los Angeles Community Action Network, and the LA Tenants Union, collaborated under the umbrella of NOlympics LA to oppose the Olympics returning to the city. These activists argue that “the Olympics puts the interests of the mega-rich and corporate brands above the interests of athletes, fans, and working people in the cities it commandeers,” and that the Olympics will bring displacement, over-policing, and labor exploitation to already-marginalized communities.⁷⁸ When we take the boosterism that was central to the 1932 Games into account, the NOlympics movement's opposition is justified.

⁷⁶ Matthew P. Llewellyn, Toby C. Rider, and John Gleaves, “The Golden Games: The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics,” in *LA Sports: Play, Games, and Community in the City of Angels*, ed by Wayne Wilson and David K. Wiggins (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2018), 205.

⁷⁷ Llewellyn, Rider, and Greaves, 217.

⁷⁸ “Analysis,” NOlympics LA, accessed October 15, 2020, <https://nolympicsla.com/analysis/>.

The 1932 Olympics were built from the ground up to advertise Los Angeles to the world, bringing in an economic windfall for the elite real estate developers and businessmen like Garland and Chandler who organized the event. These boosters also took this opportunity to mythologize the city as a multicultural utopia, despite the rampant segregation and inequality that its marginalized communities faced on a daily basis. Though the 1932 Games were seen as a success, they did nothing to end this marginalization or to meet the needs of those suffering most during the Great Depression; instead, it consolidated more wealth to the city's highest earners and legitimized the Spanish Fantasy Past myth to the wider world. The 2028 Olympics offers similar results for the city: to bring in a great deal of money, which will mostly benefit the city's real estate developers and the Games' corporate sponsors; to drive new development, which will displace local communities and exacerbate the city's ongoing housing crisis; and to serve as a selling point for the city that veils the inequalities the Olympics will intensify. As in 1932, modern boosters use the multicultural character of Los Angeles as a signal of its progress and modernity while diminishing the system disparities that actually exist in the city. Without a larger push against the elite-benefiting commercialization of the Games, the 2028 Olympics will likely serve as another example of a "successful" event, if only for the city's wealthiest people.



Figure 1 – Photograph of Japanese female Olympians in kimono, with title and caption, from the San Pedro News Pilot, August 3, 1932. Courtesy of the California Digital Newspaper Collection.



Figure 2 - Logo, featuring the Japanese flag surrounded by the American stars and stripes, used to advertise a fundraising banquet for the Japanese Olympic Team in The Japan-California Daily News, June 6, 1932. Courtesy of the Hoji Shinbun Digital Collection.



Figure 3 - Photograph of the Farewell Banquet held for the Japanese Olympic Team by the Southern California Japanese Association, August 15, 1932. Courtesy of Dr. and Mrs. Setsuo Amano, the Japanese American National Museum.