

Loza, Steven. *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles*. (Music in American Life Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xx, 320. Black and white illustrations, 13 musical transcriptions, bibliography, discography, index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper)

Tracy, Steven C. *Going to Cincinnati: A History of Blues in the Queen City*. (Greater Cincinnati Bicentennial History Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xxxii, 262. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, interviews, discography, general index, song index. \$29.95 (cloth) (US)

Warren Gill

Volume 23, Number 2, March 1995

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1016647ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016647ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (print)

1918-5138 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Gill, W. (1995). Review of [Loza, Steven. *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles*. (Music in American Life Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xx, 320. Black and white illustrations, 13 musical transcriptions, bibliography, discography, index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper) / Tracy, Steven C. *Going to Cincinnati: A History of Blues in the Queen City*. (Greater Cincinnati Bicentennial History Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xxxii, 262. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, interviews, discography, general index, song index. \$29.95 (cloth) (US)]. *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 23(2), 65–66. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1016647ar>

All Rights Reserved © Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine, 1995

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

Loza, Steven. *Barrio Rhythm: Mexican American Music in Los Angeles*. (Music in American Life Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xx, 320. Black and white illustrations, 13 musical transcriptions, bibliography, discography, index. \$42.50 (US) (cloth), \$16.95 (US) (paper).

Tracy, Steven C. *Going to Cincinnati: A History of Blues in the Queen City*. (Greater Cincinnati Bicentennial History Series). Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xxxii, 262. Black and white illustrations, bibliography, interviews, discography, general index, song index. \$29.95 (cloth) (US).

Two recent books from the University of Illinois Press on the musical life of minorities in two cities, both written by scholar/musicians, shed new light on the development of urban culture and musical style in the face of larger society. Professor Loza ambitiously details the evolution of the many musical forms drawn from Mexican heritage when confronted by other cultural and musical forces to create the vibrant musical scene of East Los Angeles. It is the story of both cultural adaptation and rediscovery. Dr. Tracy's book is more narrow. His focus is the blues and the blues musicians of Cincinnati and leaves the reader charged by that powerful art form. The book forms part of a series commemorating the bicentennial of Cincinnati and, in telling a previously untold story, is a most worthwhile addition to the history of that place.

In *Barrio Rhythm*, Steve Loza approaches the subject from both historical and ethnographic viewpoints. Part One consists of three chapters which attempt to delineate the connections between societal conditions for Mexican Americans in Los Angeles and their cultural expression through music over the long sweep of history from Spanish colonial days to

the present. This section contains elements of real interest, as well as repetitious passages that do not advance the narrative. The difficulty is in separating a long chronicle of events from those that are particularly relevant, e.g., the Zoot Suit/Pachuco movement of the 1940s, the period of repatriation (1931-34) and the Chicano Movement of the 1960s and 70s, from those which are less directly connected. As such, the theoretical perspective on culture derived from the rather odd juxtaposition of Ruth Bennett, Edmund Leach and Johannes Wilbert, which serves as an analytical framework for Part 3, Reflections, could have been usefully introduced earlier.

"The Chronicle of Musical Life: Los Angeles, 1945-90," which makes up the important third chapter, relies almost exclusively on reports from the Spanish language newspaper *La Opinión*, published in Los Angeles since 1926. While much information is presented, the reader is often left pondering lists of musicians and groups without a clear sense of the importance of each. (Given the diversity of traditional Mexican musical forms throughout the period it would have been helpful to have a glossary to enable the reader to determine the origins and nuances of such styles as *ranchero* and *jarocho*.) In the more contemporary period, groups which influenced the development of rock, such as The Premiers ("Farmer John"), Cannibal and the Headhunters ("Land of a Thousand Dances"), and The Midnighters ("Whittier Boulevard") tend to get lost in the catalogue of those of more local relevance. Frank Zappa's "Cruisin' with Ruben and the Jets" homage to East LA doo-wap groups is mentioned, yet little is made of these groups and the culture which they represented.

In Part 3, the ethnographic section, profiles of four pioneering Mexican-American members of the music business,

such as Andy Russell and Lalo Guerrero, and five more contemporary artists, including Los Lobos, are offered. Loza attempts to use the concepts of enculturation, the formation of style and intercultural conflict to illuminate the ethnographic analysis. In questioning the role of intercultural conflict in the development of a distinctive East LA musical style, he employs the concept of networks of marginality. The network of nightclubs and restaurants, as well as high school dances and battles of the bands, helped create an eastside sound that, while more influenced by R&B and rock than Mexican forms, was indeed distinctive. This performance network, which he compares to the ritual of the mariachis at Garibaldi Plaza in Mexico City, was not really different from that experienced by other bands in different locations, such as Seattle and Liverpool in the early 1960s. In each case remarkable subcultures and music were created by adapting forms from other sources. In his search for an ethnically-based voice, Loza often overlooks true richness in the local experience and culture. This is not to say that *Barrio Rhythm* is not an important achievement, only that the focus is occasionally misplaced.

While Cincinnati is not the first city one thinks of as home of the blues, in *Going to Cincinnati* harp player Steve Tracy draws a fascinating portrait of the long history of the blues and blues musicians in that city. It is in part a micro scale portrait of life under racism and segregation in the West End ghetto and also the story of King Records, one of the more original recording companies of the post war period. (King's biggest star, James Brown, does not figure particularly in the narrative, as the "Godfather of Soul", was not Cincinnati based, recording most of his early R&B hits in New York.) The lengthy introduction sets the context for the evolution of African-American music in Cincinnati and offers an excellent discussion of

the nature of the blues as an emotion, a musical and lyrical structure, a technique and a "way of life". Dr. Tracy presents an excellent, accessible introduction to the twelve bar root, fourth, fifth musical form and the repetitive lyrical patterns that are the foundation of most blues songs.

The first three chapters proper are part history and part detective story, where through the limited recordings, documents and personal reminiscences available, Tracy deconstructs the work of early folk artists such as Stovepipe No. 1 and Kid Cole. Making extensive use of lyrical comparisons of the often sexually-implicit texts, he attempts to reveal the common threads among the street musicians and jug band artists whose work was not well documented and identities obscured by the variety of nicknames under which they recorded. These chapters will be of interest largely to students of the evolution of the blues, but also reveal the urban and social context of the West End: the red light district on George Street which provided employment for black musicians in "sporting house" orchestras; Court and Sixth Streets where the street musicians performed. A fuller picture of the life of early blues artists is developed in ethnographic-style studies of piano players Pigmeat Jarrett and Big Joe Duskin and harmonica player James Mays. Through these stories a powerful sense of the locality is developed; coloured by youthful rebellion in playing the "devil's music" in the face of parental and religious admonition. Tracy's love of the blues and dedication to its history serves him well, as from his teenage years he had the good fortune to make connections with artists of earlier eras, hearing their stories and music and giving many of them the opportunity to play the blues once again. In the concluding chapters Tracy turns again to the ethnography, profiling more contemporary artists H-Bomb Ferguson and Albert Washington and others, as well as his

own work with the Crawling Kingsnakes to demonstrate that the blues lives in Cincinnati.

It is the story of King Records that is the heart of the book, however. In founding King in 1944, Sydney Nathan and his relatives began an enterprise that not only ensured the success of many performers, such as Roy Brown, Wynonie Harris, Bull Moose Jackson, Bill Doggett ("Honky Tonk"), Lonnie Johnson, The Dominoes ("Sixty Minute Man"), Ivory Joe Hunter, John Lee Hooker, Hank Ballard and the Midnighters, Little Willie John ("Fever") and Freddy King ("Hideaway"), but was notable for being integrated both on the shop floor and in musical and management direction, when this was not considered possible in a "border city" so close to the south. Henry Glover - producer, arranger, songwriter - was only the second black executive hired by a major US label and contributed much to the overall development of blues and R&B. As well as recording blues performers, King had a stable of country artists and interchange between them was encouraged. Like Sam Phillips of Sun Records in Memphis, Syd Nathan had country artists perform R&B tunes, but also, very successfully, had black artists record country tunes. This cross fertilization of black and white helped produce some remarkable records, although to Nathan it was simply smart business practice to cover both markets with good songs. King Records helped develop a pool of professional sidemen in Cincinnati who both played on the sessions and contributed to a lively blues scene at venues such as the Cotton, Ebony and 333 Clubs. Without King Records, the development of blues in Cincinnati would have been far less dynamic, but the label and its subsidiaries were influential far beyond the urban boundary. Dr. Tracy should be encouraged to take up this larger story.

Taken together, *Barrio Rhythm* and *Going to Cincinnati* offer the urban historian a wealth of individual experience to help comprehend the state of minority cultures in two 20th century American cities. On the larger scale, both are limited in the scope of their analysis. While replete with commentary on conditions for individuals in their respective cities, neither really makes the larger connections to place, society and agency that would elevate the analysis, although here Loza is the more successful (although his use of quotes from himself to begin chapters is a bit off putting). Tracy's is the livelier read, although he could have been more considerate of his northern neighbours by spelling Winnipeg correctly. Given the focus on individual cities and the ethnographic techniques employed in both studies, they are necessarily biased by the availability of subjects: other approaches could enable stronger statements on the culture of urban music.

Warren Gill
Department of Geography
Simon Fraser University at Harbour
Centre

Gordon, Robert B., and Patrick M. Malone. *The Texture of Industry: An Archaeological View of the Industrialization of North America.* New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. Pp. xi, 442. Illustrations, bibliography, place and site index, subject index. \$72.50 (cloth).

This is, without question, the most ambitious study of American industrial archaeology in print and the most sophisticated ever produced in any country. Given that interest in this relatively new, eclectic field of history has already leveled off in most countries, this book may stand as a final monument. Produced by a formidable partnership of experienced, highly interdisciplinary researchers, it provides a