

Wild, Mark, *Street Meeting*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Jordan Stanger-Ross

Volume 36, numéro 1, fall 2007

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1015829ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015829ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine

ISSN

0703-0428 (imprimé)

1918-5138 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Stanger-Ross, J. (2007). Compte rendu de [Wild, Mark, *Street Meeting*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.] *Urban History Review / Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 36(1), 71–71. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1015829ar>

who object to theory-laden prose must consider the possibility that the fault lies not in the syntax but in ourselves. After all, non-specialists do not open the latest issue of *Physics Today* and expect to understand it, so perhaps it is unfair to criticize historians for employing a jargon of their own. But one wonders if it was really necessary for Rutherford to positively pack the book with such phrases as: "In Habermasian terms, the public spheres or lifeworlds one finds in them were far from holistic" (p. xxii). Perhaps I am terribly old-fashioned, but surely history is best served when its practitioners remember that it is a literary discipline. In the foreword, Rutherford acknowledges Jack Granatstein as one of his intellectual mentors. No doubt the mentor approves of the book's intriguing line of argument, but one wonders what he thinks of his pupil's prose.

Graham Broad
University of Western Ontario

Wild, Mark, *Street Meeting*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005.

Mark Wild offers an unusual case study of urban ethnicity. Rather than following the broader tendency to discuss a single ethnic group, Wild focuses attention on the relationships in early twentieth century Los Angeles that crossed ethnic boundaries. He contends that such relationships encouraged the development of "inclusive notions of community" that "challenged established and . . . restrictive notions of national, ethnic, or racial identities" (6). The book details the demise of these inclusive communities in central Los Angeles neighborhoods, as efforts to find fellowship across racial and ethnic lines were sabotaged by their own internal contradictions and battered by hostile "Anglo" elites. The latter, who preferred "distinct, bounded ethnic communities that could either be isolated from white populations or incorporated, one ethnic group at a time . . . into the broader urban community" (39) ensured that the diverse political alliances and social liaisons of central Los Angeles faded by the end of the Second World War. Wild sees this shift as deeply troubling. The social division of the city erected walls later breached in the heat of postwar racial and ethnic violence.

The confrontation between two competing visions of community is clearest in Chapters 6 and 7, where Wild describes the efforts of the Socialist Party, the IWW, and the Communist Party of Los Angeles to mobilize a broad alliance of working people. Preaching from a soapbox in central Los Angeles in 1908, Rev. George Washington Woodbey, an African

American Baptist and Socialist orator, urged multiethnic crowds to welcome their Asian immigrant brethren: "if capitalists could not import Asian workers, he reasoned, they would simply export jobs to Asian countries" (162). In the decades that followed, Anglo elites, threatened by the varied "aliens" organizing in central Los Angeles, mobilized the LAPD to contain and then brutally squash such alliances.

However, in much of the rest of the book, Wild seems to strain against his own evidence. The Anglo elites seldom seem to behave as Wild would have us believe. In their efforts to "Americanize" foreigners in the city, local reformers lump ethnic groups together, rather than isolating national groups from one another (44–56). Methodist churchman G. Bromley Oxnam brings All Nations together at his central Los Angeles church (62–93). Playground planners seem untroubled by the mixing of children of diverse origins (101–102), while school teachers, as often as not, promote accommodation among their pupils of varied backgrounds (109). Although Wild is able to document discrimination in each of these contexts, the evidence seldom sustains the notion of an Anglo elite conspiring to drive wedges among ethnic groups. Instead, for the most part, the "established" and "divisive" notions of community emerge from within the ethnic groups themselves. This tendency is especially clear in the chapter on "mixed couples" which documents widespread antipathy toward lasting adult sexual relationships that crossed racial or ethnic lines (121–147).

The trouble is not with Wild's evidence. This is a richly researched book. Wild makes excellent use of institutional archives, a wide range of government records and reports, and a large body of oral history interviews. Instead, the book falters in its analytic framework. Wild ought to have followed the evidence, which suggests a complex contested ethnic landscape. Guardians of "restrictive" norms were found in both "elite" and "ethnic" circles, as were those willing to challenge narrow definitions of community. Wild leaves these varied alliances largely unexplained. Had he looked deeply into these questions, Wild might have found himself in dialogue with recent studies of urban ethnicity that have focused on the motives, interests, and strategies of ethnic leaders, as well as the complex interplay of ethnicity and race. By undertaking a fuller analysis of both the defenders and transgressors of ethnic boundaries, Wild would have arrived at more satisfying answers to his own intriguing questions.

Jordan Stanger-Ross
University of Victoria