

## GEOGRAPHICAL REVIEW ESSAY

### WHEN THE DOZERS CAME, ONLY MUSIC WAS LEFT: RY COODER ON CHÁVEZ RAVINE\*

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CHÁVEZ RAVINE: A Record by Ry Cooder. Produced by RY COODER, with LITTLE WILLIE G., LALO GUERRERO, ERSI ARVIZU, DON TOSTI, FLACO JIMENEZ, BLA PAHINUI; 66 minutes; CD with 15 tracks. New York: Nonesuch / Perro Verde Records, 2005. \$20.98. Nonesuch 79877-2.

CHÁVEZ RAVINE, 1949: A Los Angeles Story. By DON NORMARK. 144 pp.; ills., index. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1999. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 0811825345; \$19.95 (paper), ISBN 0811840573.

CHÁVEZ RAVINE: A Los Angeles Story. Directed by JORDAN MECHNER; produced by JORDAN MECHNER, DON NORMARK, ANDREW B. ANDERSEN, and MARK MORAN; photographs by DON NORMARK; music by RY COODER; narrated by CHEECH MARIN; 24 minutes. Oley, Pa.: Bullfrog Films, 2004 (featured on PBS Independent Lens, 2003). \$195.00 (VHS), ISBN 1594582459; \$195 (DVD), ISBN 1594582467.

Music is history. It's a form of history, a vernacular form, and the experience and the knowledge contributes in various ways such as in the ability to play instruments and the ability to write songs about your life. It's songs about something that you know deeply, something about our world and the people here and what they were like. . . . [Chávez Ravine is] my fantasy about a community.

—Ry Cooder, *Nightline*, 2005

Each of us has personal benchmarks, things we look forward to, whether professionally or socially: family peregrinations; arrival of the last volume of Don Meinig's *Shaping of America* quartet; the explosive great-shouldered entry into the plaza of the first of six Victorino Martin bulls; screening of a new film offering from Quentin Tarantino, however quixotic and deviantly self-indulgent; the rare great and much-anticipated celebratory night out or, I remember from my own youth, the lingering pleasures of a determinedly odd meal in an exotic clime; contained glee at opening a new John Le Carré cold war novel; the delight of sitting down to read a Pauline Kael film review in *The New Yorker*. Honest writers in our academic midst share feelings about multifarious activities they favor as practitioners in the evolving cult

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\* No inconsiderable thanks are owed to David J. Larson, whose sense of the impact of activities such as the move of the Dodgers is infinitely surer than my own. On a par is Sally Kerr's command of the intricacies of American English, which I always put to a test. Lyric translations are sometimes corrected from those in the album libretto.

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