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Rockets, Cable Cars, and Protest Marches: Past SoCal Fourth of July Observances

By Nathan Masters

July 4, 2012

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Automobile decorated for a Fourth of July Parade in Compton, 1921. Courtesy of the South Bay Photograph Collection, CSUDH Archives.

On July 4, 1847, roughly 700 U.S. troops congregated on a hill overlooking the recently captured *ciudad* to celebrate the Los Angeles' first American Independence Day. Californio forces under Andres Pico had **surrendered just months before**, and as the war raged on far to the south, the troops constituted an occupying force in what was still legally Mexican territory. They were, in fact, assembled in an earthwork fort meant to secure the Americans' hold over the city.

At sunrise, Army Lieutenant J. W. Davidson raised the Stars and Stripes. From nearly anywhere in the city, Angelenos would have seen the flag flapping in the wind atop a 150-foot mast. Later, perhaps for the benefit of the diverse and largely Spanish-speaking population below, orators recited the Declaration of Independence twice -- first in English, then in Spanish, according to one source.

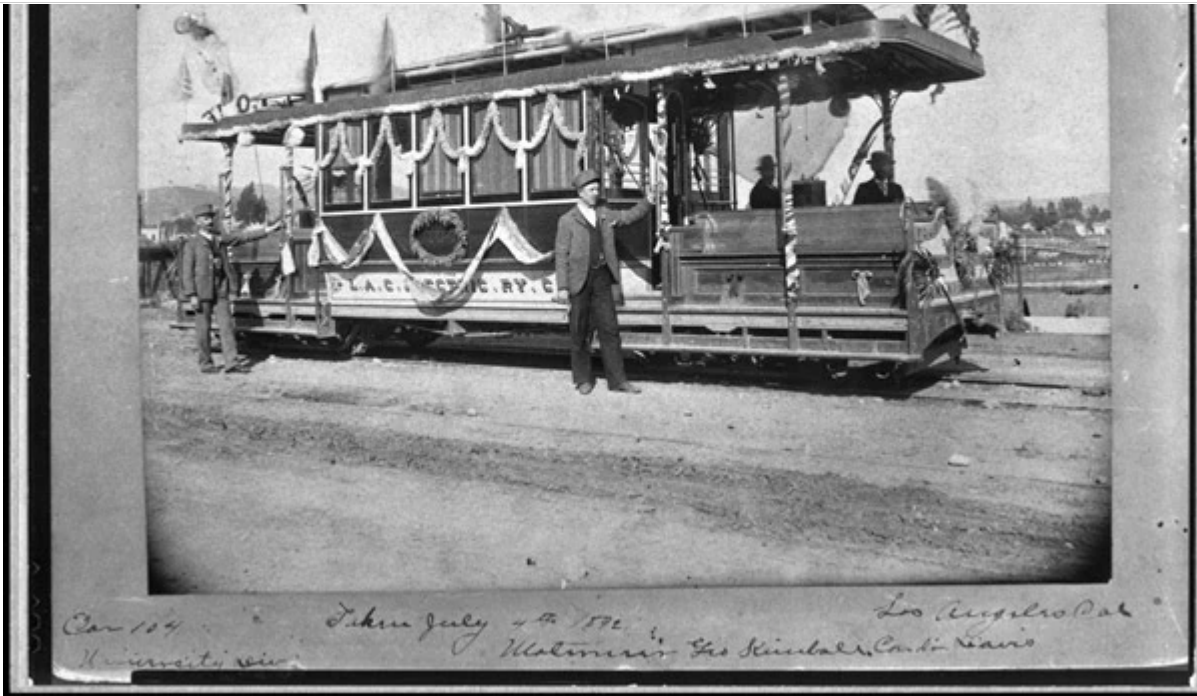
Today, Southern California's Fourth of July celebrations are less fraught with high political drama. For some, the holiday is an occasion for fireworks and pool parties. For others, it is a day to raise awareness of social justice issues. Now, as the region marks the nation's 236th birthday, join us for a look through historical images at how Southern Californians have observed the holiday in the past.

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In 1892, the Los Angeles Cable Railway decorated one of its cable cars to celebrate the July 4 holiday. Courtesy of the Metro Transportation Library and Archive.



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Carolyn Castoe pretends to hang on to a rocket in this photograph, shot to promote a fireworks show in Pasadena's Rose Bowl. Courtesy of the Los Angeles Examiner Collection, USC Libraries.

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Angeles region. Our posts here provide a view into the archives of individuals and cultural institutions whose collections inform the great narrative—in all its complex facets—of Southern California.

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