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Opening Statement

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We are here for one purpose: to serve justice. Everyone in this room is a part of our justice system, to dress the part, however, is in our freedoms as United States citizens. I can wear a suit [look at jury], you can wear a suit, but my client can't, at least not one that won't allow him to be physically and mentally assaulted by anyone in our streets. "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." Our very own president, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said those very words before he could understand that fear comes in different forms. At the time, the United States publicized that Nazis were the fear we had to fight, but for African-Americans, Mexican-Americans, and any minority communities, their fear was in the shape of our police, our soldiers, and any white men from classes above their own. Those fears were nightmares that you couldn't squeeze your eyes closed and count to three and forget about them. These were nightmares that would drag you, your friends, and your family into the street and strip you down, and beat you until you can't remember who you are. These suits that had been stripped of our fellow neighbors had super-sized shoulder pads, sprawling lapels, and peg leg pants. Simply, these suits were made up of too large suits that were cinched and tailored to create the desired silhouette. Our soldiers, servicemen, sailors, and whoever wanted to join in on "the fun", were assaulting innocents for wearing something they didn't like. On Monday, May 30, 1943, about a dozen sailors and soldiers were walking on a downtown street. After spotting a group of young Mexican American women on the opposite side of the street, the sailors and soldiers changed direction and headed their way. Between the military men and the young women stood a group of young men in zoot suits. As the two groups passed each other, Sailor Joe Dacy Coleman, fearing he was about to be attacked, grabbed the arm of one of the zoot-suited young men. Coleman was almost immediately struck on the head from behind and fell to the ground, unconscious. Other young civilians pounced on the sailors with rocks, bottles, and fists. After the ferocious attack, the sailors managed to escape and carry Coleman to the safety of the Naval Armory. Partly in retaliation, on June 3rd, 50 sailors from the local Naval Reserve Armory marched through downtown Los Angeles carrying clubs and other weapons and attacked anyone wearing a zoot

suit or other racially identified clothing. In the days following, mobs of U.S servicemen took to the streets and began attacking Latinos and our police officers often watched and after the beatings were dealt, they would arrest the victim of the beatings - including this man you see before you. Over the next few days, off-duty police officers and civilians joined the fray by marching into cafes and movie theaters and beating anyone wearing zoot-suit clothing or hairstyles. If you would think our soldiers would hold back, show some mercy on those who don't even look like Latinos or were wearing a zoot suit, were also beaten with a sadistic frenzy. An innocent man, a black defense plant worker - still wearing his defense-plant I.D - was yanked off a streetcar, after which one of his eyes was gouged out with a knife. Local papers framed the racial attacks as vigilante responses to an immigrant crime wave and police generally restricted their arrest to the Latinos who fought back. On June 8, the riots died down when U.S military personnel were finally barred from leaving their barracks. That very next day, as women and children mended the wounds of their brothers, fathers, friends, or even strangers, the Los Angeles City council issued the ban on zoot suits. Not even the blood that filled our streets was accounted for, have we - after all these years - truly known how many people were scared, traumatized, and how little boys and girls were scared to leave their mother's arms in fear they would end up with their own bodies mimicking their father's. Have we not fought for our rights in an independent society, from our founding fathers to uniting our country to fight the war to end all wars. Why is it that we keep fighting ourselves, even though we are the United States? I am truly worried that this fear and racism that we have sowed into this very land has produced the vilest and poisonous fruit. No matter its shape or what we douse it in, we keep it, we feed it to our justice system in the hope it tastes better. Thousands of people like my client have attempted to cut the supply, to save our children from facing this system. Look at where we are, another case, another day for our justice system to live up to its purpose; to provide justice for all of those within our borders. Is it not within my client's rights as much as it is in your rights, to live in the land made by immigrants and live as one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.