

Revolution, Freedom, and Oppression from Rivera to *Coco*

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Abstract

The Mexican Revolution of 1910 attempted to redefine Mexico where the peasantry would be more involved in political decisions and where economics would combine agriculture and industry. Economic interests from foreign enterprises in the United States were successful in transporting the workforce north of the border to farm the agriculture for American farms. Poor treatment of Mexican laborers led to Cesar Chavez and the Chicano Movement to push for equality. In this essay, I will demonstrate that art provided the outlet for the Chicano community to secure justice for themselves during the turbulent times of the 1960s and 1970s and that this movement was successful during the time frame in which it was; however, it was not sustainable beyond those decades due to the dominance of American culture.

Keywords: art, Chicano, Mexican, movement, culture

1. Introduction

According to Aztec legend, every 52 years a cycle of death and rebirth occurred marking the end of an era of rule. When Hernan Cortes and his Spanish envoy landed on the shores of modern Mexico, it coincided with the Aztec belief that their supreme deity, Quetzalcoatl, had returned to signal in a new regime. Retold by Anita Brenner (2002), “In Mexican mood, the messiah is always accompanied by disaster: an earthquake, a conquest, a revolution, the sacrifice of a ruler; death and pain” (p. 17). The Spanish arrival marked the end of the Aztec empire, igniting nearly 400 years of European domination; however, as the 20th century began, death and pain for the Mexican population was the norm, sparking a series of revolutions and movements aimed at returning Mexico to an independent, prideful nation. On the other hand, economic opportunities in the United States brought many laborers north to fields and businesses, promising hope for a better future, where death and pain, again, waited for them. Following the examples set by other revolutionary leaders promoting non-violent revolts, the arts became the desired medium for expressing anger and frustration. In searching for non-violent protests to advance the message of unity and change, artists joined the crusade, and The Chicano Art Movement of the 60s and 70s was born. The movement provided stinging social commentary against the exploitation of Latino migrant laborers and Mexicans in general. Although the movement was successful during its time, the political and social climate has changed. Many Latin American communities are still marginalized within the nation without the artistic voices to defend them. It seems the influential art of earlier Chicano movements does not seem to galvanize the Chicano hearts to speak out against oppression and discrimination.

2. Revolución Parte Uno

The 20th century saw Mexico gain its political independence, and simultaneously, become economically enslaved. Continued European colonial rule of Mexico, prior to the Revolution of 1910, the social issues which plagued Europe, wealth inequality, racism, and peasant (low income laborers and farmer) suppression, became the misfortune of Mexico. The ruling regime of Porfirio Diaz, intent on maintaining political and economic control of the nation, looked to strengthen political and economic ties to the United States (Bentley & Ziegler, 2009).

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To keep foreign money flowing in and make investment more attractive, Diaz began gifting land grants to non-Mexican nationals, stealing it out from under the feet of his own people (Bentley & Ziegler, 2009). Frustrated with years of mistreatment, oppression, and witnessing their nation's land in the hands of non-natives, the revolution to oust Diaz broke out in 1910 (Bentley & Ziegler, 2009). For ten years this conflict shaped Mexico, with the goals of self-determination and independence driving those seeking to reclaim their homeland (Bentley & Ziegler, 2009). Brenner (2002) succinctly evaluated the reasons for revolution by writing, "Mexico has died and killed for a phrase: Land and liberty. Never does it open interested eyes to the slogan Prosperity. The cult of health, wealth, and happiness is meager for people who practice the three heroisms that they preach: of emotion, and thought, and expression" (p. 351). European influenced domination was not fully eliminated from the political and economic sphere, but the people of Mexico enacted a renaissance where outside influences waned which allowed the country to reorganize itself according to its own values and ideals.

The Revolution was successful in creating a constitution and guaranteed land rights to some but, for most rural and poor Mexicans, their economic status did not change. However, a new awakening of ethnic spirit and national pride began to emerge, coupled with a glorification of the native past, *indigenismo*, "...in which the narrative of native cultural continuity under colonial rule broke with conventional art histories of the time which emphasized European cultural influences" (Skirball Cultural Center). Once the dust from war had settled, Mexican artists reflected on the events as eye-witnesses, such as Jose Clemente Orozco, or as Mexican nationals living abroad, like Diego Rivera. In chronicling Mexican art and its roots, Brenner (2002) wrote, "...like all residents of Mexico born before 1930, Orozco was intimately affected by the revolution, and made to travel, as all the population did, either by crusading, freebooting, pioneering or in quest of sanctuary" (p. 271). The life of a refugee witnessing the horror and violence his people inflicted on themselves deeply influenced Orozco as the plight of the common Mexican citizen became central to his work. Like Rivera to follow, Orozco focused his attention on the ramifications of war on the countryside and inhabitants. The misery and anguish of his subjects is evident. His drawings, "...create dramatic 'testimonies' of the savagery inflicted upon the humble, unnamed masses of Mexicans--those for whom the revolution was simply one more episode in a centuries-long history of suffering the cruel whims of those more powerful" (Greeley, 2016, p. 264). *The Rape* (fig. 1) speaks directly to this notion of brutality.



Fig. 1 Jose Clemente Orozco, *The Rape* (1926-1928)

In the foreground, it is plain to see the caps worn by the soldiers lying on the ground next to the crime being committed. Two soldiers are seen in the room: one engaged in the sexual assault of an unidentified woman and the other getting dressed. The destruction of the room demonstrates an unsuccessful struggle by the victim. Drawings similar to this by Orozco visually recreate the brutality forced upon the Mexican people by the combatants. Another demonstration of the effect of the conflagration is Orozco's painting, *Combat* (fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Jose Clemente Orozco, *Combat* (1927)

Immediately, the audience is aware of the nature of the image, as a knife protrudes through the abdomen of an unidentified soldier in the center of the work. The placement of the weapon highlights the violence inherent in armed conflict. Bodies and faces of the scene are indistinguishable, not drawing attention to any specific personage, but instead, depicting men wrapped and contorted together further expressing the chaos of battle. For Orozco, the plight of the people was paramount, and while he focused his attentions on the cruelty of wartime, Diego Rivera focused on forging a new Mexico, one in which the ordinary Mexican played a major role.

The revolution in Mexico inspired not just *indigenismo* amongst the people, but it allowed leftist political activists to spread their message. At the onset of revolution, Mexican laborers already experienced the struggle of being subject to foreign corporations seeking only profits and exploiting the labor force. With growing discontent amongst the labor force, “The radicalization of the working class and artisans...came about through the hiring of Mexican workers by U.S. firms, by the growing awareness of the inequities of capitalism from the worker’s perspective, by the deteriorating living conditions..., and by the influence of revolutionary thinkers from within and outside of Mexico” (Spencer & Stoller, 2008, p. 59). Muralist Diego Rivera fell under the Communist spell as he spent the revolutionary years living in Paris, reading about the developments of his country’s revolution in the newspaper. In 1927 and 1928, “Rivera traveled to the Soviet Union as part of the official delegation of the Mexican Communist Party to attend the celebration of the 10th anniversary of the Russian Revolution” (Porchini, 2016, p. 274). Following the trip, Rivera’s work began to bring forth the idea of worldwide workers’ revolution.

Rivera’s works the *Ballad of the Agrarian Revolution* and *Ballad of the Proletarian Revolution* painted between 1926 and 1929 on the Ministry of Public Education in Mexico City portrays, in vivid detail and color, Rivera’s ideal of what his nation can accomplish. In these frescoes, Rivera, “...reconstructed and consolidated stereotypes, defended revolutionary virility, updated myths, and reread nineteenth century visual satire” (Porchini, 2016, p. 273). Focusing on Panel 25, titled *Security* (fig. 3 detail of plate), Rivera depicts the breath of Mexican society solidifying their economic future.



Fig. 3 Diego Rivera, *Security* (photograph, 2015)

The light skinned banker dressed as a thief is attempting to escape the vault with riches only to be happily cut down by the people. The soldier's bayonet pierces his heart, of which a cross sits on top signifying the waning of the Catholic Church's influence over the hearts of the people. Restating Rivera's message disavowing capitalism to return to an agrarian society, the foreign moneymen are being slain by a hammer and sickle, the two tools adorning the flag of the Soviet Union. Rivera contrasts the light skin tone of the oppressors with that of the Mexicans. Naming the entirety of these two works as he did, Rivera is hoping to inspire a renaissance within the people of Mexico. The heroes of his works are the common people of the nation and the rural life is idealized. Emiliano Zapata, one of the main leaders of the peasant revolution, is frequently seen, bright clothes adorn the people, folk customs abound, agrarian work is foremost, and removal of oppressive capitalist regimes is always done communally. Brenner (2002) described how Rivera showed throughout his art that, "...the Bad Government is presented in terms of sterility, the betrayal of the peasant by the politician, the false priest, the mercenary, and the subsequent desolation, while the Good Government...is a sense of cultivation" (p. 283), referring again to his pastoral vision for Mexico. The struggles of Mexico would not be saved by the Revolution of 1910, as the United States would again flood the country with foreign money and import Mexican laborers after World War II. However, the work of Orozco and Rivera would be used as inspiration to unite the Chicano community in a smaller, bloodless revolution to carve out economic freedom and security in the workforce.

3. Economic Oppression Disguised as Opportunity

The onset of World War II sent many young American males overseas to fight in Europe or the Pacific, leaving a massive labor shortage in the agricultural regions of the Western United States, particularly California. American companies, again, turned their eyes south to the Mexican labor force that had been previously exploited for its cheap labor. Events at the turn of the century in the southern Arizona mining of Clifton and Morenci targeted against the Phelps Dodge Corporation foreshadowed the work of Cesar Chavez 60 years later in his struggle against California grape producers. Described by Gordon (1999) in her book, *The Great Arizona Orphan Abduction*, "Mexicans replaced the Chinese as the designated cheap labor..." (p. 51) within the mines, with American corporations eager to pay them cheaply because the, "Mexicans took low wages precisely because, to them, it was high wages" (p. 51). The culture that developed within the mining towns was similar to other areas where cheap labor was sought: racial inequity. As Gordon (1999) mentioned, "With so much wage discrimination, the discrepancy derived also from the exclusion of Mexicans from most of the skilled or supervisory jobs" (p. 214). Most Mexican workers earned 60 cents to every dollar earned by a white worker but still faced the same dangers as their counterparts, for copper mining's, "...fatality rate was higher than that of any other work, including coal mining" (Gordon, 1999, p. 215). The strike against Phelps Dodge ultimately failed, but it was successful in further alienating whites from Mexicans, solidifying the belief that Mexicans stood below white in the social order. Unfortunately for their part, Mexican laborers understood that, although they were not content about their working status, the economic discrepancy existed within the labor hierarchy to which they were not powerful enough to alter the system in place. The strike in Clifton-Morenci and the Revolution of 1910 set in motion the radicalization of the working class that helped prepare the way for the labor disputes of the late 1950s and early 1960s.

In 1942, the State of California enacted the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement allowing temporary worker status to nearly 4.7 million Mexicans over the course of 20 years (Mitchell, 2012). This, collectively known as the Bracero Program, was a boon for those living in Mexico as they looked to their northern neighbor for better paying jobs, hoping to improve the lives of their families. What was believed to be an opportunity to better their station, turned out to be a repeat of previous hegemonic actions by the United States. As part of the agreement, employers were to provide housing, food, and competitive wages for the immigrants. However, this was not the case, as farmers skirted any corner they could to keep profit margins high. Mitchell (2012) wrote that the status of, "...labor camp condition in California, in particular, were simply horrible" (p. 453). Furthermore, Mitchell (2012) explained that, "Acceptable housing was supposed to be provided by employers," (p. 453) but, "The California Commission on Immigration and Housing's (CCIH) own records are filled with inspection reports detailing how hard California growers worked not to provide even minimally acceptable housing for their harvest crews" (p. 453). Besides being provided with poor housing, the braceros also faced the uncertainty of their contracts. Once they signed on to come to the U.S., they were at the mercy of the growers, who were able to send braceros to any number of farms all over the nation. In addition, Mitchell (2012) noted the following:

...a bracero could refuse a posting (which usually meant he was sent back to Mexico) but he could not contest its terms: he was *subject* to his contract, not party to it. He could not switch jobs, even with notice... Braceros had no right to strike. They were not free labor; they were indentured labor. They were, as *El Angelino* put it in 1949, 'esclavosmodernos'- modern slaves. (p. 457)

Many of the braceros whose contracts had ended chose to stay in the United States, specifically in California, which saw a huge influx of Mexican immigrants. As more Mexicans made their way into the United States and the poor treatment of laborers continued through and outside of the Bracero program, demand for improved treatment and opportunity grew with the population. The 1960s saw Cesar Chavez call for increased representation in government and greater respect for the culture and heritage of Chicanos. As more Mexican-Americans joined the political and social movement, artists used this turbulent time to express their dissatisfaction with life, creating impressive murals, inspired by Rivera and others, throughout the Los Angeles basin, as well as stinging art decrying the struggle of the Chicano community.

4. Revolución Parte Dos

In 1962, to protest the feudal work conditions of his fellow Mexican laborers, Cesar Chavez formed the United Farm Workers Association with the aid of Dolores Huerta. Chavez and Huerta began to spread the message of, "*La Causa*, the struggle to bring dignity and justice to farm workers" (2012), and in 1965, the Filipino farm workers took to the picket lines. Although Chavez and Huerta were unprepared to fully strike on their own, the actions of their Filipino counterparts in the fields forced their hand, prompting the UFWA to cease work and take to the streets in protest. Without question, the strike was met with anger by the growers who employed the local police to the cause. The success of the strike ebbed and flowed, prompting Chavez and his people to march in protest from Delano, California to the capital of Sacramento. The small group that began in Delano swelled to thousands as the march headed north. For eight long years, the union struggled to win over the public, but when the message—toboycott California grapes—made its way to concerned consumers, supporting the strike with their wallets, the tide shifted. On July 29, 1970, the California grape growers signed official contracts with the worker's union effectively ending the strike and finally bringing dignity and justice to the farm workers, not just of California, but all of the United States (2012). Capturing images of the movement with her camera was photographer Mimi Plumb. For over a year beginning in 1974, she moved up and down the San Joaquin Valley visually documenting the plight of the farm workers to establish rights for themselves.

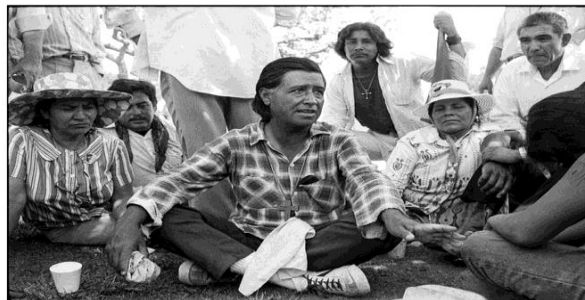


Fig. 4 Cesar Chavez meets with laborers in Central California. Mimi Plumb. (Photograph, 1975 -2006)



Fig. 5. Officers protect fields in Central California. Mimi Plum (Photograph, 1975 - 2006).



Fig 6. Cesar Chavez leads protestors in California. Mimi Plum (Photograph, 1975 – 2006)

As documentation of the fight of the Mexican laborers became national news and in response to the, "...civil rights movement in states across the Southwest and along the East Coast, Latino artists from various ethnic and radicalized groups, with deep roots in the U.S., began to express oppositional identities and give image to the culture and history of communities marked by social erasure" (Ramos, 2012, p.7). The UFWA's objection to deplorable working conditions prompted Chicano communities all over the state of California to unify in protest over substandard treatment by society and police in predominantly Mexican areas of California.

While focusing the attention on the plight of the agricultural worker, Chavez sparked a much wider movement beyond the farms. Non-farm workers joined the movement for equality and justice, not just in the fields, but in their hometowns and communities alike. Stemming from this unity came the Chicano Arts Movement, where artists used the backdrop of the struggles of Mexicans to create works condemning the mistreatment of Chicanos in America. Coinciding with the rise of *La Causa*, many artists used their talents to reinforce the need for change in the agricultural arena and support the work of Chavez and Huerta, while others took to their own communities to inspire social and political changes. These artists found inspiration in the revolutionary work done by Rivera. Where the murals of Rivera sought to unify the Mexican people underneath the auspices of the political ideology of Communism, the later murals of the Chicano Art Movement attempted to unify communities of Mexicans to fight for equality in all aspects of life.

Post-revolutionary art in Mexico sought to reconnect with the past glory of the Aztecs and other great civilizations of the nation. These empires represented strength and self-rule, a Mexico run by Mexicans, based on Mexican traditions and cultural beliefs. European rule attempted to snuff out the old culture, but the revolution of 1910 had rekindled longing for the past. As farm workers united to change the present, artist Xavier Viramontes, in his work *Boycott Grapes, Support the United Farm Workers Union*, embraced his Chicano heritage.

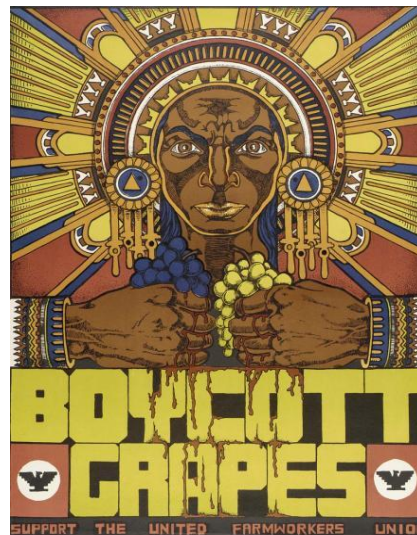


Fig 7. Xavier Viramontes, *Boycott Grapes, Support the United Farm Workers Union* (1973)

Bold, bright colors grab the eyes of the audience and focus is directed squarely on the strong, brown-skinned god-like figure. His traditional headdress evokes the power of kings in pre-contact Mexico. The firm grip squeezes the juices from both the red and green grapes, which drips down over the words “Boycott Grapes”, representing the blood and sweat spilled by his people as they toiled for economic oppressors. The message is clear and simple; however, Viramontes’ work was not made for the general public. While the people of America viewed the injustice being done to the farm workers as deplorable, they were not ready to accept such an overt appeal to Chicano strength. *Boycott Grapes* was originally made as a lithograph, which could easily be reprinted and distributed to meeting houses and union halls around the state with ease.

A similar piece was produced in 1981, after the farm workers had won employment rights. Ester Hernandez, who joined in with Cesar Chavez to secure those benefits, created *Sun Mad* (fig. 8) to bring to light the continued use of pesticides on grapes and the effect it was having on the pickers.

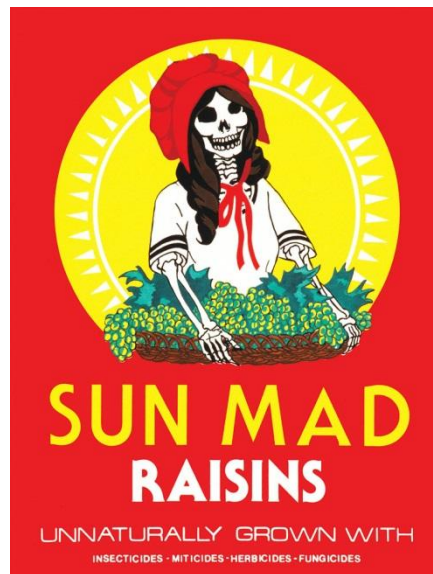


Fig 8. Esther Hernandez, *Sun Mad* (1982)

In the pop art style made famous by Andy Warhol, *Sun Mad* brings to mind the iconographic Sun Maid raisin box, but instead, relates the harmful exposure to chemicals farm workers were subjected to while providing the nation with raisins and grapes. In order to protect the grape vines from insects and pests, planes continuously sprayed chemicals, like DDT, onto to fruits, where the pesticides slowly infected the pickers through the ground water which doubled as drinking during work hours. Shining bright against the red background is the warm California sun centered on—in lieu of a happy, lovely brunette woman displaying delicious green grapes—a skeleton. Like Viramontes, Hernandez chooses imagery and narration that is simple and striking, “Unnaturally Grown.” The viewer makes the connection to the subject matter at hand, with the metaphor quickly understood.

Following the footsteps of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Gandhi, Cesar Chavez professed non-violence in his protests and strikes. He understood that this form of civil disobedience could produce better results for the Chicano cause. Protests also spilled over into movement against the Vietnam War. Minorities were continually being drafted into battle, while white college students would be able to skip the draft. In 1969, Luis Jimenez created his sculpture *Man on Fire* (fig. 9) to reflect current events occurring globally.



Fig 9. Luiz Jimenez, *Man on Fire* (1969)

Ramos (2012) described the connection by saying, “*Man on Fire* was inspired by the worldwide media coverage of the Vietnamese monk who set himself ablaze to protest the American presence in Vietnam, for which Jimenez reverberated with the rise of antiwar sentiment in many Chicano communities” (p. 11). She also notes that Jimenez was deeply influenced by the mural, also titled, *Man on Fire* by Jose Clemente Orozco. According to Ramos (2012), Jimenez, “...began to alter significantly the pop art mold by incorporating a distinct Chicano or Latino perspective” (p. 10).

The revolutionary influence of Chavez in the 60s coupled with the subversive works of Rivera and Orozco with their muralistic stylings helped establish a new path of Chicano art. As Erin Curtis noted in an interview with Shapiro (2017) from NPR:

Chicano muralists worked really hard on breaking down those distinctions between high art and low art. They often worked outside of museums because institutional spaces did not welcome Chicano artists at that time so they forged their own paths and started to work in a different style. (Para. 8) Again, the murals painted around the time of the work of Cesar Chavez speak directly to the discontent within Mexican communities around the nation concerning the mistreatment and marginalization by the white population of the United States.

Focusing on the murals that span Los Angeles, the influence of discontent within Chicano communities is evident. The exhibit *Surface Tension: by Ken Gonzales-Day* at the Skirball Cultural Center, and part of the larger *Pacific Standard Time: LA/LA - Latin and Latino Art in LA* project happening throughout Southern California, highlights how murals portray the experiences of the diverse communities throughout the city and help define them. The exhibit also brings to light many of the issues that still plague Chicano neighborhoods throughout the city, which shall be highlighted later. The murals of the streets of the city during the Chicano Art Movement, as well as recent murals, express ideas and emotions that cannot be voiced through words. Murals served as backdrops for the crisis of segregation and mistreatment. At the same time, the art unified and conveyed the frustration of a people who continually faced violence and oppression.

Inspired by the murals of Orozco and Rivera, Judith Baca, founder of the Social and Public Arts Resource Center (SPARC), was contacted by the Army Corps of Engineers about creating a mural in the flood control channel as a way to cover up a concrete eyesore as Los Angeles continued to grow in population. Where the original idea was to trace the history of California through the mural, Baca chose to focus on the diverse ethnic groups of California and their contributions and struggles to overcome obstacles.

Kenneth Gonzalez-Day focused his exhibit's eyes on two specific sections of the "Great Wall of Los Angeles," the detail of the Zoot Suit Riots (fig. 10) and the Japanese internment at Manzanar (fig. 11).

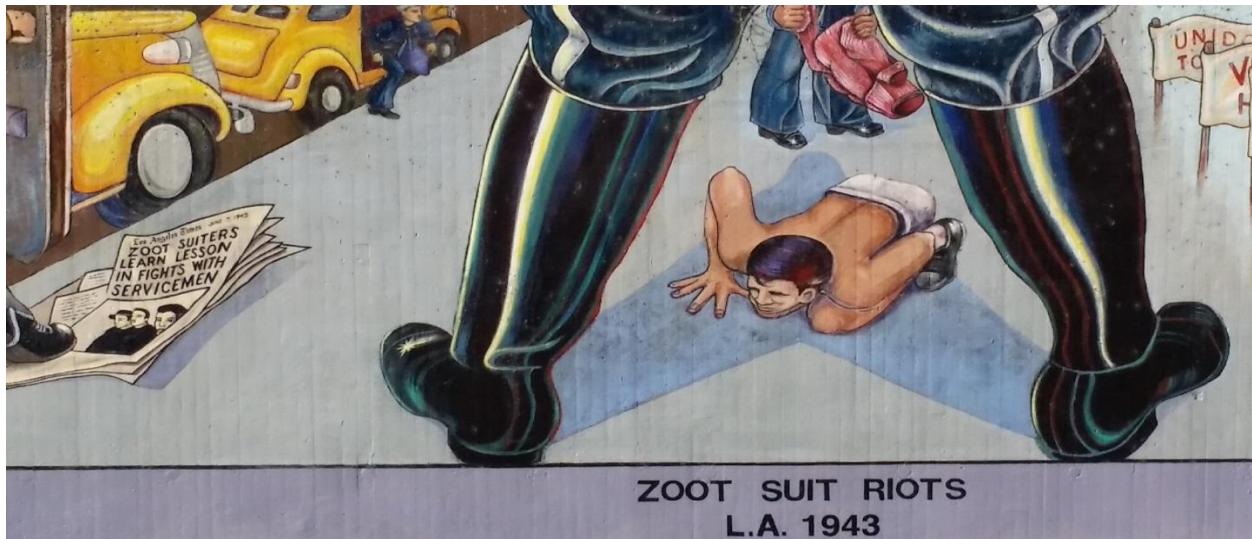


Fig 10. Gonzalez-Day, Kenneth (Photograph, 2017) of mural "Zoot Suit Riots," detail from, "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," 1974-1983



Fig 11. Gonzalez-Day, Kenneth (Photograph, 2017) of mural "Manzanar," detail from "The Great Wall of Los Angeles," 1974-1983

Though the internment of Japanese citizens during World War II did not help to unite Chicanos, many leaders of the Chicano movement correlated their struggles with that of the Japanese, similar to the coalescing of the United Farm Workers with the Filipino pickers. Created during the Chicano Arts movement, "The Great Wall of Los Angeles" brings to light both the successes and failures of the city to embrace its diversity.

Moving eastward in the city of Los Angeles, the tone of the murals change. One of the most iconic murals of the Chicano Art Movement was created in the predominantly Mexican neighborhood of Boyle Heights: "We Are not a Minority" painted by El Congreso de ArtistasCosmicos de Las Americas de San Diego (fig. 12). The revolutionary figure of Che Guevara, key to the communist takeover of Cuba, takes the iconic stance of Lord Kitchener (fig. 13) and Uncle Sam (fig. 14) who inspired their nations to support the military effort of World War I and II.



Fig 12. Gonzalez-Day, Kenneth (Photograph, 2017) of mural “We Are Not A Minority” 1978.

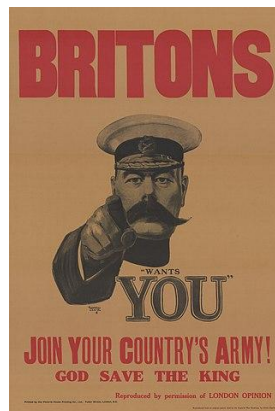


Fig 13. Lord Kitchener



Fig 14. Uncle Sam

With a simple message, the mural challenges both the members of the community and the city to respect the fact that Mexicans, and increasingly, other Latino immigrants were slowly becoming a large percentage of the city's population. Although Guevara was a polarizing figure, his image reminds viewers that for change to take place, unity is needed to create lasting change. In addition to discrimination, the loss of traditional Mexican culture became alarmingly evident as migrant Chicano families integrated themselves into the American system.

In the mural, “Read Between the Lines” by David Botello (fig. 15) the Chicano family stares into the giant television displaying a large American flag, two guns, and a couple exuding sexual tension.



Fig 15. Gonzalez-Day, Kenneth (Photograph, 2017) of David Botello’s mural “Read Between the Lines” 1975.

The size of the technology eclipses the family, with the father drinking an American beer and the mother bringing popcorn, a popular American snack, to their children. The loss of connection with traditions and the culture of Mexico spelled trouble for maintaining the Chicano cultural identity. This phenomenon can be seen when talking to students whose families have migrated to the United States. The first and second-born children still speak Spanish and remain in touch with their roots, but the younger children either speak Spanish brokenly or not at all. Western culture, as Botello warned in his mural, would break the chain from the traditions of their ancestors, and once that occurred, the revolution for Mexican independence and self-determination will finally conclude.

5. Culture for Sale

The Chicano Arts Movement of the 60s, 70s, and even the early 80s succeeded in unifying communities and a large portion of the Mexican population to crusade for change in hopes of receiving many of the rights and privileges long denied to them. However, in 2017, the movement is being forgotten. As the Chicano diaspora continues and with many ethnic groups beginning to climb the social ladder, “Latino arts leaders [are] clearly recognizing a crisis in the preservation of their history and identified factors that make it difficult, if not impossible, to do as much as they would like toward that goal” (Grimm & Noriega, 2013, p. 100). Gentrification throughout the Los Angeles basin is prompting many of the cultural treasures created many years ago to be destroyed in the name of progress or non-art. According to Shapiro’s (2017) interview, Erin Curtis explained:

I think it speaks to the collective value we place on the artworks based on who is making them...Within this community (they are in Boyle Heights) this work is valued. But often outside this community it’s not seen in the same way and not regarded in the same way. (para. 12-14). European art treasures depict celebration, glamor, and achievement, whereas Latin American art focuses on struggle, oppression, and breaking chains to rediscover suppressed ties to Mesoamerican culture and traditions.

The goal of the art of Rivera, Orozco, and artists of the Chicano Art Movement was to reinvigorate the pride Mexicans held of themselves and to redefine the conventional images held by non-Mexicans of their people. In Shapiro’s (2017) interview, muralist Wayne Healy described why he joined an artist collective and painted, “One of the things that was motivating was the negative images that were always heaped on us in movies...you see the Mexican asleep under the cactus, stereotypes like that,” (para. 19) and of the self-image he wanted to change of his people, he said, “I wanted people to look at the mural and think of it as a mirror.

They would see themselves in it and would feel good about themselves. Yeah, that’s us” (para. 21). While murals and paintings are vital treasures that need to be preserved, static art is slowly losing its importance to entertain and alter social thought. More and more, “...the drive toward art as entertainment is rationalized as a necessity for attracting audiences unaccustomed to deeper connections” (Sanorman, 2012, p. 77). The question remains whether Chicano art should be considered an art worth saving. To the communities they are in, that answer varies. In Boyle Heights, the most iconic murals remain, but others, like the one Wayne Healy painted in the 70s, have been removed.

However, the neighborhood of Pacoima has seen an increase in muralistic art, as well as a small renaissance of pride due to the work of actor Danny Trejo. Since his rise in Hollywood, he has returned to his community to reinvigorate both Chicano and civic pride. He randomly visits local schools and gives back to the community in order to promote positivity around the neighborhoods.

The influence of Danny Trejo highlights the importance of how Hollywood and the film industry is quickly becoming the new medium for artistic expression. However, for the Mexican role in film, it quickly reverts back to the stereotypes described by Healy. With the popularity of Netflix series, such as *El Chapo* and *Narcos*, along with movies centered around the drug cartels of Mexico, the drive for creating a strong sense of pride and dignity for Latin American culture through the revolutionary imagery of Rivera and Orozco, and later Chicano artists, has given way to the idealized glamor of the Latin American drug culture. Even Disney attempted to profit from the appropriation of Mexican culture. The 2017 Pixar film, *Coco*, follows a young, Mexican boy named Miguel Rivera—perhaps a nod to Diego Rivera—during the traditional celebration of Día de los Muertos, also known as Day of the Dead. Disney has told stories through cultural lenses in the past with movies such as *Moana*, *Mulan*, and *The Princess and the Frog*, but in 2013 during *Coco*'s creation, Disney attempted to trademark the term “Día de los Muertos”. According to the *CNN* article, “Day of the Dead Trademark Request Draws Backlash for Disney,” when Disney requested to have “Día de los Muertos” trademarked, the Mexican community spoke up: “On Tuesday, a petition went up on change.org to stop the Disney effort, stating that the attempt to trademark Día de los Muertos was ‘cultural appropriation and exploitation at its worst’” (Rodriguez, 2013, para. 11). According to Rodriguez (2013), the creator of the petition also wrote:

Our spiritual traditions are for everyone, not for companies like Walt Disney to trademark and exploit...I am deeply offended and dismayed that a family-oriented company like Walt Disney would seek to own the rights to something that is the rightful heritage of the people of Mexico. (para. 12)

Like the Mexican braceros being shipped across the border to help drive the agricultural economy, Disney saw the opportunity to exploit and profit from Mexican culture.

After receiving strong backlash from the Hispanic community for attempting to commercialize an important and revered holiday in Mexico, Disney worked to create an authentic depiction of Mexican culture. Aguilar's (2017) “A Gringo's Guide to *Coco*,” declared that the depiction of Día de los Muertos and the Mexican characters in the film, “...are vastly more authentic and carefully researched than most American depictions of Mexicans or Latinos in film and TV have been in the past” (para. 3). The film focuses on Día de los Muertos, but it also brings in other elements of Mexican culture including *alebrijes*, or spirit animals. Alebrijes were created by Mexican artist Pedro Linares and, “...drew the interest of many, including Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo” (Aguilar, 2017, para. 7). A united effort of the Chicano community enabled them to stop Disney from taking advantage of Mexican cultural heritage, and while not nearly on the same level as what Chavez and Huerta did for the farm workers, it does reinforce the importance for active participation in preserving the arts and cultural individuality of different ethnicities. Attempting to preserve slowly disappearing Chicano art, Grimm and Noriega (2013) noted that:

“While cultural competency and understanding are obviously required when working with ethnic archives, ultimately, a willingness to seek community members’ active input on legacy and historical significance alongside that of subject efforts may be even more essential. The day-to-day process has to develop in dialogue with the community patterns and be oriented toward a shared vision (that maybe in fact have different goals), and then be tailored to the resources at hand. (p. 107). Had Disney consulted Chicano artists, ethnographers, and cultural activists instead of attempting to monetarily capitalize on the sacred traditions of the Mexican culture, they may have been celebrated for their attempts to promote the arts and bridge the gap between mainstream American and Chicano cultures.

The history of Chicano and Mexican art illustrates the impact of artists whose works confronted the hegemonic rule of dominant cultures. Artists like Diego Rivera and Jose Orozco highlight the mistreatment of Mexicans, with their message being amplified by the voices of Chicano rights activists like Cesar Chavez and artists who embraced the Chicano Movement in the second half of the 20th century. However, the future envisioned by David Botello, not Rivera, has come to pass. Western, and more directly, American dominance has enveloped and even removed the vibrancy of Chicano art from the national stage. Murals and artwork by Chicano artists do not seem to inspire the same unity and strength of culture as they did in the past.

It is possible, however, that Disney may inspire a new generation of Mexican-Americans to rediscover their heritage and invest time remembering the greatness that the culture ascribed to, and for non-Mexicans, understanding the meaning of rituals and celebrations eases tensions and opens up the mind. In a city, whose name is Spanish and where every other street name is also Spanish, art should be able to bridge the gap and unite, not just Mexican-Americans, but all ethnicities to celebrate diversity. The arts have the power to create bonds, and when the song *Despacito* becomes the most downloaded song in the history of music, maybe the gap is not as wide as previously thought.

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