

2014

Día de los Muertos

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Recommended Citation

Sherman, Emily, "Día de los Muertos" (2014). *2014 Symposium*. Paper 29.
http://dc.ewu.edu/srcw_2014/29

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Día de los Muertos



Emily Sherman

History

- ▶ Spanish conquered Mexico in 1521
- ▶ Found natives practicing a ritual that honored the dead
- ▶ The Spanish considered the ritual to be irreligious and wanted to get rid of it
- ▶ Catholic priests saw similarities between the Aztec ritual and All Soul's/Saint's Day
- ▶ Moved the Aztec ritual so that it would fall on the same day as an attempt to convert it into a more religious holiday



Mexican Celebration

- ▶ Hybrid between Aztec ritual and Catholic All Saint's and All Soul's day
- ▶ The modern celebration of Día de los Muertos has become a symbol of Mexico's identity
- ▶ The celebration recognizes death as a natural part of life
- ▶ The dead are believed to come back and take part in the celebrations



Mexican Celebration Continued

- ▶ Families will visit the cemetery to clean and decorate graves
- ▶ Altars are constructed in homes
- ▶ Pan de Muerto
- ▶ Sugar skulls



Chicano Movement

- ▶ Wasn't widely celebrated by Mexican-Americans until the Civil Rights Movement
- ▶ Chicano activists in California began to organize “Indigenous-inspired” Day of the Dead festivities as a way to celebrate their culture
 - ▶ Processions
 - ▶ Art exhibits



Chicano Movement Continued

- ▶ Purpose was to create a sense of unity and combat the struggle for equal rights in education, economics, and politics
- ▶ Was used as a way to reject the theories that the only way they could become American was to assimilate
- ▶ a symbol for Chicanos that put their indigenous roots before their European ancestry
- ▶ For many this was the first time they viewed their indigenous roots as something to be proud of.



U.S. Celebration

- ▶ Chicano activists and artists wanted to make the celebrations relevant to their life in the United States
- ▶ Art galleries, schools, community centers, and other public places replaced churches, cemeteries, and private homes
- ▶ Grave decoration has turned into craft workshops and vigils have evolved into public lectures
- ▶ The purpose is not to honor the dead, but rather to construct a cultural identity.



Day of the Dead vs. Halloween

- ▶ Halloween can be traced back to the Celtic New Year's festival and It was believed that the souls of those that had died that year came back to earth
- ▶ Both display similar symbols of death including skulls, skeletons, and soul



Day of the Dead vs. Halloween Continued

- ▶ Symbols and customs more closely tied with Halloween are entering the celebration of Day of the Dead
- ▶ In Mexico, the upper middle class have begun to dress their children up in Halloween-like costumes
- ▶ Witches, carved pumpkins, ghosts, as well as the colors orange and black can be found within Mexican newspaper advertisements



Media

- ▶ Media coverage has popularized the holiday & has helped it become an “American” holiday that can be enjoyed by all
- ▶ Presents the Latino culture in a positive manner and includes them as a part of American society
- ▶ By covering stories on Día de los Muertos, the media has played a huge role in educating the dominant culture on the Latino culture



Commercialization in the U.S.

- ▶ In the 90s restaurants in California and the Southwest began to advertise Day of the Dead festivities
- ▶ In 2004 Starbucks began having Day of the Dead displays
- ▶ Popular magazines have promoted Day of the Dead decorating ideas, crafts, and recipes
- ▶ Has become a way to attract tourists
- ▶ Products are produced and sold all across the U.S.



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