Día de los Muertos

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Día de los Muertos

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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 who had died that year came back to earth.

- Both display similar symbols of death including skulls, skeletons, and soul.
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.
References