

SACRAMENTO'S DAY OF THE DEAD
A History of Art and Politics

PROJECT REPORT

by

JOYCE M. BISHOP, PH.D.
Assistant Professor
Department of Anthropology, CSUS

Serna Center Scholar in Residence
Spring, 2005

jbishop@csus.edu
(916) 278-5627

Copyright
2005

Presented to

Professor Santos Torres, Interim Director

THE SERNA CENTER
CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, SACRAMENTO
SEPTEMBER, 2005

Any and all uses of the following document
require the written permission of the author.

SACRAMENTO'S DAY OF THE DEAD

A History of Art and Politics

INTRODUCTION

On All Soul's Day, November 2, 1975, a group of Chicanos, many of them students and professors at California State University, Sacramento, walked in procession from Hiram Johnson High School down 65th to St. Mary's Cemetery, where they held a ceremony in memory of the departed. Carrying candles and censers, some of them dressed in the plumes of a ritual confraternity known in the U.S. as the Danza Azteca, and carrying one of their group in a coffin, they would have presented an image at once startling and almost incomprehensible to many people who saw them along the way. One participant recalls that someone spat upon them and that another threw a cigarette on the ground. Certainly, in a city dominated by an Anglo Protestant majority at a period in its history when recognition of death had been relegated to commercialized funeral homes and cemeteries, this procession of brown people wearing or carrying images of death must have seemed strange at best.

The reader must not think that the procession described above sprang fully armed from its creators' collective brain like Huitzilopochtli from his mother's womb. Rather, this highly symbolic event followed a decade of social and political activism in the schools, at the university, and in support of farm workers, as well years of development of forms of artistic expression in support of their causes. The decision to walk through the streets in religious procession, a common sight in Mexican rural communities on saints' days and at funerals, was, I believe, a public statement of these young people's choice not only to fight for their civil rights but also to remain Mexican in the face of immense pressure to adapt to mainstream American cultural patterns and values. In other words, the Chicano Movement was and remains, albeit much changed, not only a struggle for political and economic enfranchisement but also an assertion that people can be American, "United Statesian," in more than one way. I suggest that the revival or recreation of Day of the Dead activities on American, that is, U.S., soil was a visualization, an enactment, of that theme.

It is unlikely that most people at the time, including some of the participants, would have expected this local, very Mexican, observance of an ancient holiday to have become thirty years later an annual celebration much anticipated by Chicanos and others as well. Even less would they have expected it to have spread in one form or another to cities throughout the United States. Furthermore, in spite of some dismay over its recent commercialization, the original participants continue to gather each October at La Raza/Galería Posada, the cultural center which grew from their original efforts, in order to build altars to the dead and to prepare for the annual procession on November 2. Through their art and through workshops which teach the various crafts traditional to the event, they use the holiday as a way to build and maintain a sense of ethnic identity and solidarity within the growing community of Sacramentans of Mexican ancestry. As one young artist said in a recent interview, "It's all about the 'cultura'."

From those simple, earnest beginnings in 1975, the observance of the Day of the Dead, the Mexican celebration which honors the departed--saints, sinners, and innocent children--has come to

mean many things to many people in Sacramento and other parts of the country. The day has developed a mythology of its own, as well as a new set of customs which make the observance accessible to many, including some for whom Mexican culture is probably unknown in any but the most superficial sense. At the same time, it continues to be a vehicle whereby members of the Chicano Movement and their political offspring express spiritual, cultural, and political concerns in a more or less public manner.

As a scholar, a lover of Mexico, and an interested observer of Chicano art and politics, it is both this persistence of the Chicano observance of Day of the Dead in Sacramento and, as well, its adoption, for better or worse, by other segments of the population that make me want to look at all these phenomena with the eye of a cultural anthropologist. After three decades of having witnessed and sometimes participated in Day of the Dead observances in Mexico, Sacramento, and occasionally in other U.S. cities, two specific incidents called me to consider formal research on the subject. One was the above-mentioned remark about negative treatment at the time of the first procession. Another was my chance encounter of an article in the Southwest Airlines flight magazine, "Spirit," about elaborate plans for Day of the Dead in the state of New Mexico, most particularly the suggestion that the reader "follow the Path of the Souls to Santa Fe; for further information call...or log on to ..." Knowing something of the extent of Day of the Dead activities in the cities of northern California, I was, nevertheless, struck by the immense growth of public interest in what was originally a familial or community based event. In other words, Day of the Dead appears to have become a cultural phenomenon, at least in the western United States, that speaks to people in what anthropologist Victor Turner calls a "multi-vocalic" manner. To put this another way, the Chicano Day of the Dead observance, like Mexico's primary symbol, the Virgin of Guadalupe, has from small local beginnings evolved into a medium of expression for a multitude of yearnings, meanings, uses. Moreover, irrespective of whether one is comfortable with what many would deem cultural appropriation by individuals and groups outside the Chicano community, altars and related activities have come to hold much meaning for many non-Mexican, non-Catholic people here in the United States.

The extraordinary growth of Day of the Dead in the United States has taken place in three short decades since the young Chicano activists first ventured into the streets of Sacramento. Yet, in spite of the exuberance with which so many American cities--their museums, their cultural centers, their arts councils--have embraced this colorful and profound moment in the Mexican ritual calendar, many of those who join in the event, including young people of Mexican descent, hold misconceptions about its history, both here and in Mexico. Even less do they understand, in these days of multiculturalism, the courage it took for a few young individuals to challenge the cultural status-quo: to open a bookstore, to build an altar, to gain access to a cemetery. Concerned that what I perceived as a vital piece of Sacramento history was not being recorded, I resolved to make a small contribution toward the resolution of that lack. Furthermore, as an anthropologist, I believe that choices made by founders of the Sacramento Chicano Movement are best understood by giving full attention not only to their cultural antecedents, but also to the social context within which they were made and to the cultural developments which they appear to have given birth.

What follows then is a report on a project sponsored by the Serna Center, a CSUS institute created to support research in all fields of import to the Chicano/Latino communities of the Sacramento Metropolitan area. Named after Professor and Mayor, Joe Serna, Jr., and Professor and

Associate Vice President Isabel Hernandez-Serna, both key actors in the Chicano Movement in Northern California, ardent supporters of Chicano art and artists and of the role of Mexicanos in the life of the university and of the city, the Serna Center seems to me to be the appropriate "home" for this research. Although the grant from the Serna Center was for release from one course for one semester, the field research actually began in the fall of 2004 and will continue through this coming fall semester, 2005. Using oral histories and the collection of semi-ephemeral fliers and other printed materials, my aim has been to begin a reconstruction of the history of Day of the Dead in Sacramento. In this report I have not used the names of those I have interviewed due to their concern that no single individual be singled out as responsible for what all perceive as a communal effort. In later writing, I will identify particular actors as seems appropriate.

As part of the overall project last fall, I supervised a team of six CSUS students, five from the Department of Anthropology and one from Ethnic Studies. We visited Muertos celebrations in Oakland, Stockton, and various locales in Sacramento. Except for one student who pursued the history of Day of the Dead activities in Stockton (which post-date the emergence of this phenomenon in Sacramento), the students were concerned primarily with ethnographic documentation of current Day of the Dead activities in local colleges and other organizations. My own work this past spring and summer involves parallel tracks of formal interviewing of the founders of Sacramento's Day of the Dead, continuing library research, and the archiving of photographs and other collected materials. The archival materials include over seventy fliers and programs from La Raza/Galeria Posada founded in 1972, as well as other organizations in Northern California and beyond. One very special item is a video of the second procession made by an anthropology students and professors from CSUS (Arvizu, 1976). Printed materials, photographs, videos, and recordings will ultimately be housed in the CSUS Archive. I welcome contributions to the collection. During fall semester, 2005, I expect to continue participant observation with the assistance of two of the students from last year. As I write I am expanding the scope of the interviews to include younger participants and/or newer participants, as well as individuals, regardless of ethnicity, who take a particular interest in Day of the Dead either in the U.S. or in Mexico. It is my purpose to provide an initial understanding about Sacramento's Day of the Dead both historically and as it exists today. Corrections and suggestions from others acquainted with the object of this inquiry will be appreciated.

CULTURAL BACKGROUND: DAY OF THE DEAD IN MEXICO

To begin, then, what is the Day of the Dead? El Día de los Muertos, el Día de los Difuntos, la Noche de Ánimas, Todos Santos -- it goes by many names -- is a celebration over three days which memorializes those who have gone before. On the surface, at least, Day of the Dead, is the popular enactment of the official Catholic holiday known as All Soul's Day, November 2, and its counterpart, All Saint's Day, observed on November 1. October 31, the eve of All Saints Day or All Hallow's Eve is, in many Mexican communities, often the day Muertos activities begin. Throughout Mexico, Catholic families, especially of the popular classes, clean and decorate family graves in community cemeteries and attend mass on one or more of the three days concerned. Such customs, in a general sense, can probably be found in Roman Catholic communities throughout the world.

All Soul's celebrations in the indigenous communities of central and southern Mexico,

usually involve the construction of an altar, or "ofrenda, in the home, often on October 31 for "angelitos," babies and small children who have died, and for deceased adults on Nov. 1, the eve of all Soul's. Although in many indigenous towns families build altars yearly, in others home altars are built only during the year of the death. Even in these towns, though, all of a family's departed will be honored at the cemetery, which each family helps to clean and decorate for the culminating event--a mass or rosary or simple night-long vigil with most of the community in attendance. The visual impact of Day of the Dead decorations in small villages and towns can be powerful. While a variety of types of flowers, live and artificial, are now used, the traditional flowers for the day are marigolds and a type of deep red amaranth known in English as cockscomb. Their combination with small anthropomorphic bread, known as "muertitos," can be stunning, even in the simplest altar.

Although in some rural communities one may find a ludic element within the activities, such as the rowdy street theater in the Zapotec town of Mitla portrayed in the well-known film, "La Ofrenda" (Portillo and Munoz, 1986), most rural communities, whatever the variation in custom, observe the day with decorum. In cities, on the other hand, the playful exchange of candy skulls and bread of the dead and the publishing of "calaveras," verses which mock the mortality and failings of the rich and powerful, make for an event of quite a different character. As with all traditional expressive cultural forms--folklore, folk art, folk customs--variation in form, texture, or context usually serves as a marker of ethnic, gender, age, regional, or class distinctions.

Although an abundant popular literature on Day of the Dead has appeared in the past three decades or so, ethnographic and analytical treatments were rare until recently. Works by Scheffler (1976), El Guindi (1977), Green (1980), and Nutini (1988) represent careful treatments of ethnographic cases in Mexico. A more recent, rather reflexive, attempt at broad coverage is that by Garcíagodoy (1998). The most prolific academic writer on the subject has been anthropologist, Stanley Brandes, who has made careful inquiries into origins (1997), iconography (1998), literary humor (2003), and the relationship of these celebrations to Mexican national identity (1998). Little scholarly work on Day of the Dead in the United States has been published. Commentaries of substance include book chapters by Turner and Jasper (1994) and Rodgers (2002). Beyond the scope of this report, a full treatment of the scholarship will be given as I develop this research.

It is suggested in much of the popular literature on the subject that Day of the Dead is an ancient Aztec ritual moved in date by the Catholic missionaries to coincide with All Soul's Day. (See, for example, Carmichael and Sayer, 1991). In fact, this is probably an oversimplification of the processes set in motion by conquest and colonization. This report is not the place for a detailed commentary on Mexican cultural history, but a brief acknowledgement of its complexity is perhaps in order. On the one hand, the Aztecs were not the precursors of all the peoples of Mexico. They were late arrivals who, like many other groups before them, adopted a cultural tradition we call Mesoamerican which, as can be seen in the archaeological record, had been evolving for some 3000 years. Although each Mesoamerican society and era was unique, together they shared a cosmology characterized by a view of life and, indeed, of the very existence of the world, as cyclic. As a function of this cyclic vision, human death, like the death of all living things, was perceived as participant in the regeneration of new life and, ultimately, the regeneration of the cosmos (Carmack, et. al., 1996).

To be sure, the Aztecs celebrated holidays related to death; and, in fact, their most famous

ritual activity, the heart sacrifice, was aimed at regenerating the sun. Whether or not the Aztec elite engaged in ritual cannibalism, we do know that they made figures of their deities out of sweetened amaranth seeds. Certainly the anthropomorphic *muertitos*, the other breads of the dead, and the candy skulls so characteristic of modern Mexican celebrations look very much like continuations of such behavior. At the same time, if one surveys photographs of traditional home altars and related activities in indigenous regions very distant from one another, including those who probably had little direct cultural input from the Aztecs, one finds considerable similarity of form. (See, for example, the photographic studies by Andrade, 1996, 2001, 2003) In spite of regional differences, their structural similarities lead one to suspect that these customs may greatly antedate the Aztecs. An alternative explanation is given by anthropologist Stanley Brandes (cited above), who points out that many Day of the Dead customs, including the use of yellow flowers, can be found in Spain today. Such parallels, which are probably not coincidental, suggest that the Spanish friars and others may have reworked the observances in more ways than by just changing their date.

Whatever the cultural antecedents of the Mexican Day of the Dead, and they are probably more complex than we can ever fully work out, the fact is that the forms of the celebration that we think of as most Mexican have been practiced by the indigenous peoples of central and southern Mexico for a very long time. Their visual beauty, their power to connect and reconnect friends and family, and, in some instances, their witty, even raucous, reversals which provide tools for strong social and political criticism, have in the past one hundred years caught the imagination of the Mexican, the Mexican American, and, more recently, the Anglo American intelligentsia. It is their deliberate use in the Chicano Movement primarily that concerns us here. Secondly, we are led by recent developments in the United States to consider the richness of these observances--the fact that so many different kinds of people, poor and wealthy, urban and rural, educated and untutored, privately grieved or publicly aware, find them a vehicle for expression.

SOCIAL CONTEXT: THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

As is well-known, part or all of the states of Texas, New Mexico, Colorado, Arizona, and California comprised part of the Spanish colony of New Spain and, upon Mexican independence in 1821, became part of the newly formed Republic of Mexico. Less than thirty years later, most of this land was claimed by the United States and opened up to settlement and the twin economic engines of extractive industries and large scale agriculture. The Spanish-speaking residents of these regions suffered loss of land and other property, along with concomitant linguistic, cultural, and political discrimination. The areas of most dense hispano/mexicano settlement and previous agricultural development: south Texas, northern New Mexico, and the communities of the California coast have quite different histories from that point. Suffice it to say here that all three, in spite of their differences, have long histories of overt and covert resistance. (For discussions of this history, see Chavez, 1984, and Acuna, 1985).

After some sixty years of the marginalization that followed annexation, the Mexican Revolution during the decade following 1910 provided the unintended function of revitalizing the mexicano population of the new southwestern states as Mexican families fled north to escape the violence. Increased migration in the decades following World War II along with the first real

educational opportunities due to the G.I. Bill gave rise to a population receptive to calls for change. Active drives toward political redress and self-determination surfaced in the 1960's in the form of the Colorado-based Crusade for Justice, the call for land reforms in New Mexico, the organization of the Raza Unida Party in Texas, the Los Angeles-based Chicano Moratorium on the Vietnam War, and the founding of the United Farm Workers in the Central Valley of California. These efforts coalesced into a unifying movement for the civil rights of mexicanos in the United States with multiple bases in key universities, community centers, churches, and labor unions. Borrowing the in-group word, "Chicano," from the parlance of the Mexican working class, young movement members overtly rejected the terms "Mexican American," "Spanish American," etc., names imposed upon them by the dominant society, thus taking for themselves the right to a self-created identity. (Rosales, 1996, provides a general synthesis of information on the movement.)

As alluded to above, the civil rights movement of Mexicans in the United States revolved around different issues in different parts of the country: land tenure, voting rights, the military draft. In Sacramento, the movement has from the beginning focused on two concerns: support for the farm workers and political and social enfranchisement of all mexicanos through enriched education. In the Sacramento, these are not separate issues, given that until recently the greatest portion of mexicanos living in the city worked in the fields or in the canneries. The fact that Sacramento was built in the triangle formed by two rivers meant that one could live in the center of the urban area and be in the fields in just a matter of minutes. Although family farms often provided workers with housing, usually substandard, and although beginning in the 1930's the Resettlement Administration and its successors built what were at least intended to be model camps for migrant workers up and down the Valley, Mexican and Filipino farm workers, the predominant agricultural labor force beginning in World War II, often lived in the barrios of the small towns and cities of the Valley, working seasonally though not migrating as much as farm workers in the Midwest.

The Chicano generation, those few who managed to complete high school and, thanks to the GI Bill, EOP, and other social programs, found themselves in colleges and universities, encountered institutions ill-prepared to offer an experience meaningful to young people whose families grew and harvested the food for America's table but lived on the margins of society. In California, while active recruitment of Mexican students also began in the late sixties in the U.C. system, it was the state colleges and universities which became the destination for most college-bound Chicano youth. Sacramento State College (now CSUS), an easy commute from the Mexican neighborhoods, became the destination for many local youth from Spanish-speaking families. Yet, however well-meaning the college administrators, the transition for these students was sometimes rough. Faculty of Mexican background were rare, and resources were limited for students with an intense interest in Mexican culture and in anything that would help them make their way without giving themselves over to what they perceived as wholesale acculturation. Former students from that era love to recall how in 1965 a group of Chicano faculty and students demanded that the campus bookstore provide a single shelf of books by Mexican American authors!

While the grace with which the university responded to challenges by militant Chicanos may be a question for debate, especially on the part of some Chicano and Latino faculty, the fact is the university did respond in ways which provided some support for the goals of the protesters. Like the

revolutionary government of Mexico in the 1920's, the university was persuaded to offer public walls on the student services building and inside the administration building for the painting of murals. Perhaps more substantive, the university initiated a program of Chicano Studies, while the Departments of Art and Anthropology made concerted efforts to hire Chicano faculty. Additionally, the Department of Anthropology sponsored a special Master's Degree program for public school teachers working in Chicano neighborhoods. The fruits of the Art Department's effort can be seen in the three generations of artists trained by the first Chicano art faculty. The Anthropology Department project not only returned to the realm of public education a number of teachers and administrators, theoretically at least, better prepared to work in cross-cultural settings, but also provided the base for a group of individuals who went on to receive doctorates in education and to found the particularly active bilingual education program at CSUS.

Although Chicano students and faculty managed to find fertile ground at the university, it was in the barrio that the real work took place. In the oldest Mexican neighborhood remaining after Sacramento's first efforts at urban renewal, a community action group called the Washington Neighborhood Council opened the doors of a non-profit center, the Washington Neighborhood Center, which ultimately housed or sponsored a variety of community-based projects, some of which were created by former CSUS students and by the very Chicano faculty who had been hired as a result of student demand. Moreover, most of the projects, which also involved collaboration with a variety of social service agencies, provided on-the-ground training for students from many academic majors in what for want of a better term I will call community-based social work. These included the Chicano Science Project, the Breakfast for Ninos Program, the Barrio Art Project, and, for the more advanced art student, the Centro de Artistas Chicanos. (See Rios, 1978, for an articulation of the theoretical framework in which these projects were conceived.)

If the movement in Sacramento had a strong urban base, it projected itself beyond the city to the struggle of the farm workers. Most Chicano students and faculty and, indeed, many of the people of the Washington barrio and other Mexican neighborhoods had powerful reasons to identify with the farm workers. In most cases, they or their parents were or had been employed in commercial agriculture, enduring long hours and low pay in the hot fields and packing sheds or in the equally uncomfortable canneries. The children of these laborers, whether recent immigrants or of the second or third generation, belonged to families with few employment options and little opportunity for advancement. The charisma and sacrifice of Cesar Chavez and his followers inspired the fidelity of the artists and others involved in community action. Chicano artists, in order to raise public attention to the farm worker struggle, found their training in silk screen print-making to be a powerful tool. "Old timers" enjoy reminiscing about making posters for the farmworkers in Joe Serna's garage. And, in fact, it was Serna's political action committee office at 12th and F which, when in 1972 he moved his operation to bigger quarters, which became the first permanent home of La Raza Bookstore, one of earliest Chicano cultural centers in the United States.

In sum, the difficult lives of Mexican families in both barrio and field provided the impetus for the Chicano Movement in Sacramento. It was in the context of moving from the call for social justice to its attempted implementation through collaborative community education that the Chicano political movement in Sacramento gave birth to an art life of extraordinary vitality.

EXPRESSIVE CULTURE IN THE CHICANO MOVEMENT

Chicano arts in Sacramento include permanent studio and public arts and, as well, ephemeral ceremonial traditions, especially those related to Day of the Dead, such as the making of masks and other ritual paraphernalia and the design and construction of the altars known as "ofrendas. First a word about the standard forms:

To a great extent, artistic expression within the Chicano Movement in Sacramento parallels similar developments in cities with large Mexican populations around the country, such as San Diego, Los Angeles, San Antonio, Chicago, and, of course, other cities of the Central Valley and the north coast, such as Fresno and San Francisco. The explosion of easel and mural painting which both grew from and nourished the Movement has been portrayed in "C.A.R.A., Chicano Art: Resistance and Affirmation," the catalogue of the seminal exhibit at UCLA published in 1990. More recently, the two volume work, "Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art," published by Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue in 2002 continues the chronicle. Although the work of numerous Sacramento Chicano artists is recognized nationally, it is in graphic media, principally works made by the silk screen process, that artists of the Sacramento Chicano Movement have collectively made their mark. What began as a way to promote support for the UFW and other Chicano causes has become the signature medium of the Royal Chicano Air Force (RCAF), a loosely defined group of artists who go back to the Barrio Art Program and the Centro de Artistas Chicanos at the Washington Neighborhood Center.

The ephemeral arts in the Sacramento Chicano community hark back to the folk Catholic traditions of indigenous and other rural communities in Mexico. In the process of migration, folk arts rooted in place become highly simplified or do not make the transition at all. For example, the rich craft tradition of Mexico is almost entirely abandoned in this very different economic environment. Foods, so much a part of a group's identity, have in the U.S. lost much of the regional diversity they have in Mexico. Religious observances appear to be more standardized and more subject to the control of the Church. How remarkable, then, that, in the face of these losses, a group of Chicano activists should have recovered a key aspect of Mexican ceremonial life. How did this come about?

People interviewed emphasize the alienation they felt as youth in twentieth century North American society. They speak of a deeply felt need to validate the culture of Sacramento's Mexican community. As volunteers and workers at the Washington Neighborhood Center and the then recently founded La Raza Bookstore, they began to sense or suspect the unifying potential of the sorts of communal celebration their families had left behind. In 1975, a meeting was held in which these individuals met with Dr. Solis, a Chicano psychiatrist (rars avis in those days) who worked for some time with the projects sponsored by the Washington Neighborhood Center. Reportedly it was he who, remembering his own roots in the state of Tlaxcala, suggested that workers and neighbors in the Washington district join together in an observance of Day of the Dead Tlaxcaltecan style. Although interviewees do not report that he openly suggested the use of folk traditions for therapeutic effect, I cannot help but be reminded of the proverb oft quoted by Movement participants, "La cultura cura."

Though participants in the meeting felt that a celebration less regionally specific would be

more appropriate, they made decision to design and prepare for a community-wide Day of the Dead observance the coming fall. They acted on this by deciding to involve as many people as possible, including elders from different parts of Mexico, teachers of indigenous and folkloric dance, academics, artists, community advocates. Meeting at the Washington Center, participants in the planning sessions engaged in what we would now call brain-storming, a deliberate, collective attempt to design an observance that would be as inclusive as possible. As a result of the exploration process, a determination was made to hold a procession from Hiram Johnson High School to St. Mary's, the cemetery where the majority of Sacramento's Mexican families had for generations bury their dead and to offer both a Catholic Mass (given that it was a Catholic cemetery, as one interviewee told me with a smile) and an indigenous ceremony, as well.

Once there was a plan, students and others were sent into action. People interviewed their own parents as to how All Soul's Day was celebrated in their home towns. Young people and old worked together to design altars to be built in the Washington Neighborhood Center. Many people participated in dance classes and in mask-making and theater workshops. "Why mask-making?" I asked. "Masks are rarely part of Day of the Dead in Mexico." "Because as children we had celebrated Hallowe'en," my friend replied. They had enjoyed masking as children and felt that masks could be used effectively, he explained.

Preparations for the event not only included the creation of rituals and ceremonial paraphernalia. Planning and implementation were seen as ways to teach effective lessons in community organizing, or more simply put, in how to get things done. Until then, Mexican bakeries in Sacramento were not in the habit of making "pan de muertos". La Esperanza, flagship of the Sacramento "panaderías" was approached; the owners said they would be willing to try. Zempoasuchitl, the long-stemmed marigolds esteemed by the ancient Mesoamericans as the flower of the dead, were not available in quantities. It was necessary to approach local florists to see if they could obtain them for the projected date.

Young people also needed to learn how to deal with public authorities. They applied for a parade permit. They contacted the cemetery administration in order to receive permission to hold a ceremony. And, in spite of their nativistic fervor, their desire to be in touch with their indigenous past, they learned to be diplomats. They may have yearned to be Aztec, Maya, Purepecha; but they lived in homes that were Roman Catholic. Accordingly, they invited the participation of the Guadalupanas, a local female sodality devoted to the Virgin of Guadalupe--undoubtedly made up of their mothers, aunts, and the "viejitas" down the street. Then, after months of planning and preparation, on the evening of November 2, 1975, all these people marched from the high school to the cemetery, where they spent an evening which they have now repeated almost thirty times.

Sacramento has changed very much in the years since the first "Muertos" procession. Few people today imagine the challenge faced by the founders in putting together a successful and satisfying experience. La Raza Bookstore, host of the event now for most of its history has made three moves since then--first from the original storefront in the downtown barrio to two Victorians mansions, one on the National Historic Register, and most recently to regular gallery space in a redesigned midtown building housing another gallery, a nightclub, and a trendy cafe. With the latest move public acceptance of what was originally a rebel, anti-establishment organization seems

complete. Day of the Dead is now an annual exhibition attracting a much wider audience. The Sacramento Bee praises the RCAF, gently alluding to their "irreverent and provocative art" (1992), provides increasingly generous coverage of the altars and the procession (2003), and now lovingly refers to La Raza/Galería Posada as "Casa Sacramento" (2004). Twice the Crocker Art Museum has provided space for Muertos altars, the first in 1987 when the museum received the traveling exhibit of the Nelson Rockefeller collection of Mexican folk art, more recently as part of a collaboration with "the bookstore," as LRGP is known.

Yet, if today Chicano Day of the Dead has become an established part of the Sacramento art scene, in the beginning these proposed activities met with considerable resistance. That first year, the authorities made it difficult for the organizers to get a parade permit. A small number of bystanders harrassed the participants. In fact, the logistics and politics of the procession were so problematic that the decision was made to begin at the gate of the cemetery in future years. It is possible, indeed probable, that the promotion of this, to many, exotic celebration may have seemed a direct challenge to mainstream Protestant and secular values. At the same time, some of the Mexican community and their traditional supporters were uncomfortable with the indigenous/non-Catholic aspects of the ceremony. The Church was hesitant to participate, and, after many failures, the organizers had to go all the way to Roseville to find a priest who would offer Mass on the occasion. Even some Chicano activists did not take easily to the overt religious aspects of the event. If this revived and recreated custom seems less strange today than it did thirty years ago, it is perhaps as much because of changes in public attitudes in Sacramento as because of the undeniable persistence of the founders. Yet even this past fall, while attending a Day of the Dead lecture in Stockton, I heard a local artist/activist in the audience, a man who participates annually in Day of the Dead exhibits, speak with considerable negativity about the Sacramento procession, complaining that the children who participate do not even know what they are doing.

Looking back one can see that, like the more wide-spread Black Civil Rights movement, which it paralleled and to some extent drew inspiration from, the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement aimed at obtaining social justice for its people on the one hand and at validating its native culture, its own ways of being, on the other. Like African Americans, Mexicans in the United States have dealt with rejection by using expressive forms, both sacred and secular, to express their anguish and to strengthen their resolve. And like the Black Civil Rights Movement, the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement exhibits strong ties to the religious base of the people.

In contrast to the quintessential African American verbal forms of gospel and religious oratory used so effectively by African American leaders, participants in the Chicano Movement for the most part have favored visual forms. Certainly political oratory did have its role at the height of the Movement; poetry and theater continue to be highly valued. Yet I believe most Chicanos and outside observers would agree that the visual arts, permanent and ephemeral, are the expressive forms which characterize the Chicano Movement in people's minds. Moreover, the intense religious faith of many Mexicans and the inextricable link between the home-based, street-based popular Catholicism of Mexico and the Chicano sense of cultural identity, has provided the Movement, at least here in central California, a set of effective visual tools. The image of the Virgin of Guadalupe and the procession-like marches of the UFW have imparted sense of sacred mission to an essentially political struggle. In a similar manner, the building of public altars for Day of the Dead in Chicano cultural centers along with the Muertos processions to the cemetery, both re-workings of the original

folk customs in Mexico, underline the profundity of the task of preserving ethnic identity within an essentially alien society by making reference, directly and indirectly, to sacred customs of the homeland. Criticisms from some individuals notwithstanding, the pervasiveness of religious themes and forms in Chicano art and politics is a commentary on the depth of spirituality in Mexican American life, even among those who are not church goers. Some founders of the Movement speak of Sacramento as a special place. Their speech and their posters are peppered (pardon the expression) with references to "Sacra," "Sacras," and I paraphrase the words of one of the individuals who has taken the time to speak with me, "Sacraztlán," the new home which is the ancient home, a special place where people come to build their lives, to create themselves as they choose to be.

REFERENCES CITED

- Acuña, Rodolfo
1988 "Occupied America: A History of Chicanos, 3rd. Ed.," New York:
Harper & Row.
- Andrade, Mary "Day of the Dead/Through the Eyes of the Soul" Series:
San Jose, CA: La Oferta Review, Inc.
1996 Mexico City, Mixquic, Morelos
1996 Michoacán
1999 Oaxaca
2001 Puebla, Tlaxcala, San Luis Potosí, Hidalgo
2003 Yucatán
- Arvizu, Steve
1976 "Día de los Muertos, Chicano Style," a video produced The
Cross Cultural Resource Center, CSUS.
- Brandes, Stanley
1997 "Sugar, Colonialism, and Death: On the Origins of Mexico's Day
of the Dead," in Comparative Studies in Society and History,
39: 277-81.
1998 "Iconography in Mexico's Day of the Dead," Ethnohistory, 45:
189-94.
1998 "The Day of the Dead, Hallowe'en, and the Quest for Mexican National
Identity," in Journal of American Folklore, 111:359-380.
2003 "Literary Humor in Mexico's Day of the Dead," in Peter Narvaez, "Of
Corpse: Death and Humor in Folklore and Popular Culture, Logan:
Utah State University Press.
- Carmack, Robert, Janine Gasco, & Gary H. Gossen

- 1996 "The Legacy of Mesoamerica, History and Culture of a Native American Civilization," Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall/Simon & Schuster.
- Carmichael, Elizabeth & Chloe Sayer
1991 "The Skeleton at the Feast," London & Austin:
The British Museum and the University of Texas Press.
- Chávez, John R.
1984 "The Lost Land: The Chicano Image of the Southwest," Albuquerque:
The University of New Mexico Press.
- El Guindi, Fadwa
1977 "Lore and Structure, Todos Santos in the Zapotec System,
in the Journal of Latin American Lore.
- Garciagodoy, Juanita
1998 "Digging the Days of the Dead," Boulder: University Press of
University Press of Colorado.
- Green, Judith Strupp
1980 "The Days of the Dead in Oaxaca, Mexico: An Historical Inquiry,"
in Richard Kalish, "Death and Dying, Views from Many Cultures."
- Nutini, Hugo
1988 "Todos Santos in Rural Tlaxcala," Princeton: Princeton
University Press.
- Portillo, Lourdes & Susana Muñoz
1987 "La Ofrenda," a film produced by Portillo/Muñoz Productions,
San Francisco, CA.
- Rios, Sam
1988 "An Approach to Action Anthropology: The Community Project,
C.S.U.S.," in "Decolonizing Anthropology," "Grito del Sol,
A Chicano Quarterly, 3: 51-65.
- Rodgers, Nicholas
2002 "Border Crossings," in "Hallowe'en, From Pagan Ritual to
Party Night," 139-157, Oxford & New York: Oxford University
Press.
- Rosales, F. Arturo
1997 "Chicano! The History of the Mexican American Civil Rights

Movement," Houston: Arte Publico Press.

- Scheffler, Lilian
1976 "La celebración del día de muertos en San Juan Totolac, Tlaxcala,
México, D.F.: Boletín del Departamento de Tradiciones Populares.
- The Sacramento Bee
1992 "Call to La Causa," by Victoria Dalkey, in Scene, April 1, pp. 1 & 5.
2003 "A Day for Mourners to Find Peace," by Jocelyn Wiener, in Metro,
November 2, pp. B1& B6.
2004 "Casa Sacramento: La Raza Galeria Posada opens a new center for
arts and culture," Sunday Ticket, April 4, pp. 1 & 28-31.
- Turner, Kay & Pat Jasper
1994 "Day of the Dead: The Tex-Mex Tradition," in Jack Santino,
"Hallowe'en," Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press.
- Various Authors
1990 "C.A.R.A., Chicano Art: Resistance & Affirmation, 1965-85,"
UCLA: The Wight Art Gallery.
- Various Authors
2002 "Contemporary Chicana and Chicano Art, Volumes I & II,"
Tempe: Bilingual Press/Editorial Bilingue.