A Creative Mural on the History of Mexican Immigration to the United States

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Abstract

One of the most prominent issues in American history is how the country deals with immigration. As a cultural melting pot, America has a long history of immigration with people from all over the world congregating in this one country. Very few of the people living here today came from Native American descent, as most of American ancestry comes from outside of the country, making it feel as though it is a much more freely flowing, but controlled, nation of citizenship compared to the rest of the world. It's become apparent in recent decades that there's been much more corruption and mistreatment surrounding border patrol that has led to an increasing rate of violence and injustice towards immigrants, largely from Mexico. While there should be laws around keeping immigration controlled and organized, I want to persuade the public to not support a response to illegal immigration of violence or dehumanizing treatment. I want to see in what ways I can show the human side of the issue in order to gain sympathy from the public. I don't want this to be controversial, but rather raise a discussion that may make people think differently and more humanely on the topic.

This is why I have decided to do an artistic mural for my project, as it can express these issues in a more powerful and unique way without seeming as though I am directly preaching to people. It could also be a form of representation for immigrants and have some of their stories being

heard. What ways could I inform and even persuade the public about

immigration issues through a creative manner and my own stance on the

topic that will also get people thinking about it and discussing it? This is a

topic I've become passionate and informed about and wanted to express it

in this creative project.

Introduction

For centuries, one of the long standing issues in the United States has been their ever-changing policies and treatment towards immigration into the country. As a nation that was established and built upon people who immigrated and contributed to the flowing cultural melting pot, which made America a unique and diverse culture with different ways of thinking and ideas. Without this aspect, the country would never have the identity it has today as well as the notion that anyone can achieve success through the American dream. While these values have mostly prevailed since achieving independence as a country, these values seem to not pertain to everyone, with a specific focus on people of Mexican descent that have either immigrated or assimilated into the country.

There are a large number of Mexican immigrants in the United States, and a number of them have immigrated legally through documentation and visas, however there are also a large number of the Mexican population who have immigrated either illegally or had been brought in by family members who traveled in illegally. There are many rationales as to why these bold decisions are made, and they've often been scrutinized or deemed as criminals despite the hardships and sacrifices they have made. Even worse than this is that many Mexican immigrants have experienced high levels of violence, discrimination, and assault by police and citizens at the border. This includes documented immigrants,

not just those who traveled legally. This is a result of large levels of corruption at the border, and extremely brutal responses to people coming into the country.

Upon just those who immigrate at the border, there have also been a number of means through which Mexican citizens are unable to receive equal opportunities that other citizens and even other immigrants due. Ever since the Texas Annexation and the Mexican agricultural workers plan, many Mexican people have also been forced to assimilate to American culture and haven't been welcomed as a result. They also experience feelings of being trapped and unable to make it beyond their standing situation.

This issue still pertains today, and what is essential is to delve to the root of the problem as to see the true causation for all these problems, as well as to explore the history of Mexican immigration in the United States to gain a broader understanding of how Mexican people have been treated in America. There are many emotionally disturbing and impactful stories from Mexican immigrants sharing the hardships they've encountered, and by sharing those stories in a creative way, more awareness by the general public can be brought to the issue and people who've experienced those similar challenges can feel empowered by the stories.

The methodology I have chosen to go about achieving this is through a painted mural that showcases some of the most influential and heart-

wrenching stories of these immigrants, combined with key events and symbolism around the history of Mexican immigration. The mural will focus on the violence, discrimination, and abuse that Mexican immigrants have experienced and will be displayed in a public setting in order to display it to a larger audience. Art is one of the most emotionally dense ways to change people's minds, it is a form of expression that I have many years of experience in. I've been creating art since I was very young and have created many designs for posters, t-shirts, cards, and contests throughout my artistic career. I am currently majoring in Art and Design at Western Oregon University, and I feel as though that art is the most effective way I can express my ideas and opinions in a way to get people thinking about them. This is why I've decided to do a mural for this topic, as it is a topic I have become very passionate about and will be expressed through a medium that I am also passionate about.

Process

For this project, my process has been to go through four major phases. This gave me adequate time to think out the project as well as brainstorm ideas so that way when it came to execution it would go very smoothly and could accurately reflect what I wanted it to be. I believe that since this project represents a message that is valuable and important to the community, it seemed that it would be essential to make sure it was done right and every detail was a vital piece of the project.

The first step was the research phase, in which I scoured and consumed a number of sources that dealt with the issue of Mexican immigration to the United States. I focused on trying to find sources that had plenty of data and information, so that way the project had a very informed basis and had accurate context to back the work. I also looked for primary sources that gave first hand accounts from immigrants and families that provided their stories of immigrating to the United States and detailed their struggles in the process. This gave me material for the mural, to reference people who actually experienced immigration so that way they could be represented in the mural and make viewers connect to them, giving a unique and more clear point of view on the issue itself by showing people who were really in the middle of the issue.

The second phase was brainstorming the visual layout of the mural. This step included thinking about and even writing down some of the

different concepts I was thinking of, including organizing the different people from the stories into a large collage and also combining different representations of events around immigration from my research. I ultimately decided to combine both of these aspects, showing the important figures around this issue and depicting some of their stories and complemented these images with landmarks in the history of immigration.

After figuring out the direction I wanted to take this project, the next step was to create some sketches. I sketched out different layouts of the images and the mural itself. I wanted the mural to be large and wider than it was tall, so I took that aspect into consideration when making my sketches, plotting out large scale images with many different styles and ways of organizing it to figure out what worked and looked best. Once I got some ideas down, I could better visualize what looked best and could get started with execution of the process.

The next step was to gather materials so that I could create the mural itself. I found a six pack of ten by twenty inch canvas panels that helped me create the piece since I can break it up into sections and put them together, which was also helpful in installing the work since it seemed easier to do it myself this way. I also got adhesive strips for me to stick the mural to a wall and hang it up. Other materials I decided to use were art supplies, such as a pencil to draw out the mural as well as paint and brushes so I could color over the image and finalize it. I also had varnish to finish and protect the

painting, so that way it could last for a long time and wouldn't get ruined by any poor conditions.

Once the project was complete and was ready to go, the final step was installing the piece. In this process, I had to contact different businesses and venues in order to get permission to hang up the piece, and also think of potential locations that I would want to display it. Ideas I brainstormed included hanging up the image on Western Oregon University campus, seeing if it could hang it up downtown on an empty wall of a local business, and seeing if there were any open venues to create artwork like a community event or even a gallery. I ultimately decided to display it in Riverview Park in Independence, Oregon, as it was an open area where I had much more freedom to do what I wanted with the work and wouldn't have to worry about any concerns that any businesses would have with displaying it. This seemed like a great option for the community to experience the image as well, as it was in a public area for anyone to take in and interpret and the idea of it being in a park seemed appealing as it's a more peaceful area that people can pass by and observe it as they please. With all of that worked out, the project was done and could be put out into the world.

The process of this mural was quite lengthy and stressful at times, but it could also be pretty relaxing and fun. The painting process was pretty mesmerizing, as I could get into a good rhythm with doing so and could let

my mind just relax and take it all in, making the artistic process a somewhat meditative phase in completing the work. For much of the same reasons, I also enjoyed reading through the different books and stories of the immigration experience, as there were many intriguing stories I gathered plenty of knowledge from and the reading process itself I also found to be pretty relaxing and meditative. It was a good activity for my brain reading through them, especially with how much I felt for the stories, with many of the stories having some great triumphs that I could root for and some gruesome events that were at times difficult to read to make me better understand the fear some of these people had to go through. The ideation phase was also fun with how especially productive it was and how satisfying it was to see some of the different ideas come into fruition. The whole artistic process felt like it went in a smooth rhythmic pattern that made it an enjoyable activity and made me more motivated to complete it.

There were also a number of challenges I faced, such as how time consuming the project was. While the painting process went smoothly overall, it definitely was challenging to find time to complete the whole thing since the canvas used is quite large and definitely took a long time to get done, and at times it even felt somewhat demoralizing when I would stop and see how much more I would need to do. Another challenge was organizing the piece in terms of figuring out how to put it together, since it was in different sections it was difficult to figure out how it should be

organized so it could come together nicely. The biggest challenge though was finding out where to install the piece, as many places did not want to hang up the piece or had nowhere to hang it. On top of that, it was hard to decide what place would be best to display it so that a large number of people could see it and a place that it would best fit aesthetically, as well as somewhere that it would physically fit. By hanging up a piece of artwork like this publically, there always comes the risk of how it will hold up through different damages and conditions such as the rainy or stormy weather or how other people may treat it. By displaying on a public site there may also be areas that say that hanging it in certain areas could infringe on that private property or may take it down to make way for other installations or additions to the area. However, these were all aspects that I kept in the back of my mind so I could prepare for any worse case scenario and always have a back up plan. While the final outcome may or may not be perfect, it can be argued that it was the best that could be done given the parameters and what was best at my disposal.

The process of this piece may have been a lengthy, difficult, and at times problematic one, but in the end it was also very satisfying and fun to push through it and see the whole thing come together. The fact that I also made something that took me so much out of my comfort zone that turned out the way I wanted made it worth the struggles and felt very rewarding, and I'm glad I was able to do it in a way that was valuable and could help

others. I completed many of the goals I set out to do, such as create a large

piece that I was proud of, properly convey the message I was going for, and

be able to display it in a proper public setting for the public to endure.

Overall the process may have been more enjoyable than the final product,

and even when everything was completed it felt all the more like a huge

accomplishment.

Influences

When deciding on what I wanted to do for this project, I concluded that the final product should include two key factors. The final product should properly express myself and my way of thinking and conveying ideas and the project should also provide greater context and meaning in a topic that I'm passionate about and means a lot to people. These weren't factors that were decided just from my mind, but rather from my environment and how the things I've learned and the way I grew up shaped who I am and how I go about doing what I do best.

In order to properly express myself through the project, I knew it had to be an artistic one since that is the way I can accurately convey an idea and what I am thinking in an emotionally impactful way. Some of my biggest artistic influences include Banksy, a street artist who I have modeled a lot of my style after in terms of how he presents an idea and how he can emotionally captivate people with his pieces. I've also taken a lot of inspiration from artists like Kim Jung Gi and Jim Lee as their visual style appealed to me growing up, and I picked up many of their techniques when sharpening my craft. I was also greatly influenced by filmmaking, as when I was in fourth grade I had a teacher who told me I should submit a film to the Ashland Independent Film Festival, to which I did and won the launch contest. Seeing that success from artwork and that people respected and believed in what I could create gave me the push I needed to keep going,

and made me realize that I could accomplish great things with my art and make an impact on people. One of my biggest artistic influences of all would have to be my parents, as they always supported my journey to achieve my artistic dreams and encouraged me to become the best I can possibly be. Without my family and all they've done for me there is no way I would be pursuing it as a career.

In terms of my influences around making a project about Mexican immigration to the United States, much of my influence comes from school and everything I've learned around the subject. I've specifically become more knowledgeable about the subject at Western Oregon University, with professors such as Kathleen Connolly and Ricardo Pelegrin Taboada, who taught me practically everything I know to become knowledgeable about the subject and helped me learn to care about the subject more. Their classes on Chicano History and U.S. Borders helped me have an informed basis on the subject and made me become passionate about the issue and truly believe in it. Another influence comes from my friend and roommate, who immigrated to the United States from Ethiopia and him telling me about his experience and the experiences of his friends and family really opened my eyes to the problem, as he can't see some of his family members too often since they can't go to the United States themselves. Seeing how this issue effects people that I'm close with and care about made me realize how much this project can impact the lives of others and gave me a reason

to keep going with it. Other influences include some of my teachers in high school, who encouraged me to learn more about the world and become more passionate about important issues and stand up for what I believe in.

While this project reflects who I am and what I believe, it couldn't be done without all the important people in my life. Everyone I'm close with, everyone I've looked up to, everyone that has made me the person I am, and everyone that has taught me essential life lessons, are all a part of this project too, since they were some of the greatest influences behind it. I couldn't have done this without the help and support I've had, and hope I can give back by leading with what they taught me, which I have hoped to achieve with this mural.

Literature Review

Since 1970, there have been some of the most drastic changes in immigration flows from Mexico to the United States in the history of the relations between the two nations. One such source that specifically researches this aspect of migration changes is the Migration Policy Institute, who examines the period between 1970 and 2000. They state in the article that "throughout this period, demographic, economic, and social conditions in Mexico and Central America encouraged a high volume of migration outflows." (pg. 3). They pull together numerous visuals where they survey through cheats, graphs, and tables to get the most data possible to figure out what kinds of foreign demographics are residing in the U.S., and how those demographics are faring with the laws in the United States. The evidence they provide ranges those that have legal status, to education levels, and employment opportunities, and they use policies as well as historical evidence to provide why these demographics happen the way they do.

The studies go into very specific detail in terms of breaking down the population changes, and they do so by connecting a specific population change with the time period in which the change occurred. One such instance is where they highlight the rapid growth in the 1960's and 1970's, in which they claim "post-WWII population growth rates, at above 3 percent throughout the region, translated into the rapid growth of the

working-age population beginning in the 1960s." (pg. 3). Seeing as how after the war there were more jobs opening up due to budgets being allocated elsewhere, they connect this piece of America's history the demographic changes, as they can be tied together by the fact that when more job opportunities open up, immigrants ill gravitate more towards them. This is one of the most effective ways to understand what's happening with these migration flows, and it also provides perspective on their situation at hand to have a better view of their moral rationale, which the article also talks about.

Typically when looking at immigration statistics across many sources, what isn't exactly detailed is how much employment opportunities are a factor or how they connect to the population changes. This article does so by first presenting evidence about job increases and then pairing that with data of percentages of Mexican populations that are employed compared to unemployed. They coined the term "push factors," which essentially refers to factors that lead to these big pushes in populations migrating. What is made clear is that these push factors are not the only things leading to these changes, but are accompanied by things happening within the country of destination that lead them to make these large scale movements. The way that the article presents this idea is by saying that "these regional 'push' factors were accompanied by new pulls from within the United States." (pg. 4). By displaying this, they make a clear cause and

effect visual for the reader to understand, while also giving a guide into the process of determining these factors. They use this aspect to link it to the idea of job changes by then stating that "while Mexican immigrants were traditionally concentrated in agricultural jobs in a handful of border states, by the 1970s and 1980s downward pressure on US wages in traditional blue-collar jobs and growth in service-sector employment fueled demand for low-skilled immigrants in other sectors of the economy and more regions of the country." (pg. 4). Here they show not only cause and effect but change over time, incorporating how Mexican immigrants have been directly affected by the United States employment policies.

The change in policies is another aspect highlighted by the article which provides more insight into the cause and effect of these changes. One such instance is where they state that "changes in US immigration policy and policy enforcement during this period meant that an increasing portion of Mexican and Central American immigrants to the United States were unauthorized." (pg. 4). Here is where they use the policy changes as the reasoning for so many undocumented immigrants, and they further do so by highlighting specific policies that led to this. For instance, they state that "by ending the Bracero Program in 1964 and imposing numeric limits on permanent migration from the Western hemisphere in 1976, the United States eliminated most opportunities for legal employment-based migration from Mexico and Central America." (pg 4). By making policy

changes and putting an end to the Bracero program, which allowed for Mexican populations to travel to the United States for work opportunities, they effectively limited their ability to become citizens and travel legally, and the people who were already established in America for work had unknowingly committed a crime. The article goes into detail about how each law change leads to a domino effect that leads to these issues that occur with the Mexican population due to other immigration policies that are put in place. According to the article, this is also what has led to "Indeed, 60 percent of all unauthorized immigrants to the United States come from Mexico, and about 62 percent of all Mexican immigrants to the United States were unauthorized in 2009." (pg. 5). The policies put in place have proven to cause much of the immigration problems, with the undocumented Mexican immigrants in the country going against these laws outside of their control.

The Migration Policy Institute uses their resources to gather data on many facets as well as using sources to look at time period changes, and they effectively combine these aspects to see what exactly is happening and understand why it's happening. They use this strategy to understand the migration changes from Mexico to the United States, as well as use the policies in place to understand why they have been struggling in certain aspects such as education and employment, as well as legal status.

Context and Background

Mexican immigration to the United States has been proven to have a storied history with constantly changing parts. According to the Pew Research Center in the article titled, Hispanic/Latino Demographics, Mexican immigration has shown to be prevalent within the United States. According to them, there are 37 million Mexican people living in the United States, with 29% of them being born outside of the U.S. and 18% of them living in poverty, compared to white people in the United States who have a poverty rate of about 8%. There is also shown to be a strong correlation between the level of poverty with the lack of education access. It's stated that only 15% of the Hispanic population in the United States has a college degree. This introduces a side of the topic that presents a greater issue at hand, the lack of equal opportunities for Mexican immigrants to thrive in the United States through the history of discrimination and laws that limit them to succeed. There are many other sources that prove this through evidence based on thorough data and even primary source accounts.

One of the most important types of sources in terms of being able to touch on a first hand account of an immigrant's experience can be an autobiography by someone who went through the immigration process, as it is an easily accessible as well as emotionally based type of primary source that can give important details on the matter. One such example of this

that I found to be one of the most valuable is Reyna Grande's *The Distance
Between Us: A Memoir,* in which she describes her story with the struggles
she faced crossing over the border. Looking into the thematic elements of
the work can help with unpacking the deeper emotional side of the issue
from the author's point of view, with some of the important themes in the
book being identity, family, migration, resilience, and the search for
belonging.

The memoir centers on the experience of immigration and the deep
emotional and physical distance between Reyna and her parents. As a
child, Reyna's parents leave her and her siblings behind in Mexico to
pursue a better life in the United States, a decision that leads to years of
emotional neglect and pain, and because of their independence to figure
out their lives for themselves, it creates this sense that they need to
establish their own identities. Reyna's feelings of abandonment are evident
when her parents' letters from the U.S. promise a reunion, but years go by
without any substantial action to bring them home. This separation
becomes a painful motif throughout the book, and builds upon this other
central theme of separation. It's worth noting this as an ideal that
immigrants can grasp on to their experience for the rest of their lives, as
the struggles they went through define them and can be seen as a badge of
a success story to show who they are and define them. There is also a sense
of identity loss that she experiences with fighting between fitting in with

both Mexican and American culture making it so she has a hard time finding where she fits in and thus who she is

Reyna's relationship with her parents is another one of the central themes of the memoir. Their physical absence in her life creates a profound sense of loss, and Reyna is forced to grow up quickly while enduring a series of challenges. This can be seen when Reyna's father finally returns to Mexico, she feels resentment and confusion toward him. She struggles with his emotional unavailability and the realization that he has been living a new life in the U.S. without her. This is how she feels about her mother as well, feeling as She describes her relationship with her parents when she states "the distance between us and our parents was destroying our relationship more than any of us could have imagined. And the consequences would be great. But back then, as our little mother, Mago's job was to take care of us and to shelter us from the reality that only she could fully grasp. I had her as a buffer, but she had no one but herself." (Grande 57). Many Immigrants face the struggle of being separated from their families, as children may cross over the border independently or they are separated by their parents leaving them behind, and therefore experience very unconventional childhoods that flips a switch and their brains and makes them more likely to feel emotional detachment. This appears to be the case with Reyna, as she feels resentment towards her

parents even though she values family ideals greatly, making her feel as though she has to teach herself through her emotional journey.

Another problem that Reyna faces is her pursuit towards education, and how she will begin her journey as well as what her education means for her in her immigration process. Reyna's determination to improve her circumstances, despite the emotional challenges she experiences, is one of the most empowering aspects throughout the story. She seeks education as a way out of her difficult situation, showing the transformative power of learning. Even though Reyna struggles with language barriers and feels isolated at school, she works hard to learn English and achieve her educational goals. Her journey toward academic success becomes a key way for her to reclaim her own agency and sense of worth. It makes her and many other immigrants who travel to the United States seek a sense of worth and find greener pastures, as pursuing an education not only helps set them up for success, but takes their mind away from the troubles they face.

There is also this lingering concept throughout the book on the connection to what "home" means, which is difficult to grasp for someone who left their original life behind and starting a completely new one, such is the case for Reyna. Despite the physical and emotional distance from her parents, Reyna's love for them remains central to her life. The theme of family ties is explored deeply, especially the idea of what it means to be

"home" and how family can be both a source of strength and pain. Reyna's yearning for her parents' affection and approval is a recurring emotional thread. Even as she faces their shortcomings, she continues to seek out a connection with them, showing that family can still be a source of comfort even when it's split up. It shows that a person's home when immigrating is much more than just a place they reside, but is more like being around what is most familiar, whether that be family, friends, or a specific memory, it's an emotional safe spot for an immigrant to bring themselves back to. This can be seen when she describes a person as being her home by saying " I knew Abuela Evila was home because my eyes burned from the pungent scent of roasting guajillo chiles drifting from the kitchen." (Grande 10). Her home is often redefined constantly in the book as well, as seen when she is speaking to her father in a conversation that goes "I could hear the anger in Papi's voice, and I wished I could tell him that even though this was my home now, my umbilical cord was buried in Iguala." (Grande 159). "Home" is constantly changing, redefined, and abstract, it's a concept that can be up to the interpretation of an immigrant in terms of what home means to them.

Gender is another theme that plays a significant role in Reyna's life, especially in the context of her relationship with her father and the gender expectations in Mexican culture. As the oldest daughter, she often feels a sense of responsibility for her siblings and bears the weight of family

expectations. Reyna's role as the caretaker of her siblings after their parents' separation highlights the pressures placed on her as a young woman in a traditional, patriarchal society. Her father's disregard for her emotional needs also points to the gendered dynamics in their family. Gender can really redefine someone's experience in terms of what their role is in the immigrant's experience as it can reflect in how their family and society treats them and sees them through the process.

These themes are essential in showing the different emotions that immigrants feel, as well as displaying their shared experiences as well as aspects that may make their experience differ. It provides more depth and complexity to the issue, and really adds to the human connection when understanding their experiences.

There is also a slew of data to look into in terms of understanding the logistical context of the immigrant experience, as this gives more insight into what's really happening on the surface and what exactly the scale of the issue is. A large part of the issue has to do with how the government has been handling it, as there is significant evidence to prove that immigrants have been greatly mistreated throughout their history, and that citizenship is often difficult for them to acquire. My understanding of the logistical side, it will give the issue a factual basis will make the message more accurate. It provides the argument at hand with good faith seeing that is based largely upon real world data. As a result, this can also make

the message more emotionally impactful as well since it will make the feeling more realistic and give greater perspective in forming a conclusion on the matter.

More than Neighbors: An Overview of Mexico and U.S.-Mexican Relations by Andrew D. Selee offers a detailed analysis of the relationship between the United States and Mexico. The book explores historical, economic, social, and political factors that have shaped relations and continues to influence them over time.

Selee begins with a historical context, highlighting the early interactions between the two countries, including the U.S. annexation of Texas and the Mexican-American War. This set the stage for the political and diplomatic dynamics that followed. Over time, the relationship evolved, with both countries intertwining economically through trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which Selee argues has been a defining factor in shaping modern bilateral ties.

Migration is a central theme, with the author discussing both the flow of people between the two countries and the ongoing debates surrounding immigration policy. The challenges of border control and the societal impact of immigration, including labor migration and the role of migrants in the U.S. economy, are explored in detail.

The book also delves into security issues, particularly the U.S. and Mexico's shared struggle with organized crime and the drug trade. Selee evaluates the effectiveness of U.S. drug policies, the implications of the war on drugs, and the ways in which both countries cooperate to address transnational criminal organizations. Selee also explores diplomatic relations, reflecting on the ups and downs in the bilateral relationship, including tensions arising from political shifts and differences in national priorities. Despite occasional discord, the author emphasizes the deep cultural and social ties that bind the two nations, ranging from shared history to cross-border collaborations in fields like education, tourism, and arts.

Andrew D. Selee's *More than Neighbors* provides an insightful and thorough examination of U.S.-Mexico relations. The book is well-researched and clearly written, making complex geopolitical, economic, and social dynamics accessible to a wide audience, from students to policymakers.

One of the most notable strengths of the book is Selee's ability to balance historical context with current-day issues. The analysis of NAFTA's role in deepening economic ties is particularly compelling, as Selee shows both the successes and the challenges of the agreement, acknowledging its controversial aspects, especially concerning labor and environmental

standards. He presents evidence from both sides of the debate, making his analysis nuanced and grounded in empirical data.

Migration, one of the most contentious issues in the U.S.-Mexico relationship is explored greatly with empathy. Selee does not shy away from presenting the political struggles on both sides of the border, but he also highlights the human dimension of the issue, detailing how Mexican migrants have contributed to the U.S. economy while being caught in a complex web of legal and political challenges. This adds depth to the discussion and humanizes what is often a polarized debate. Selee also does well to address the security aspect, particularly the war on drugs, providing an analysis of U.S. drug policy and its consequences for Mexico. The discussion of cooperation between the two nations in tackling organized crime is balanced, pointing out both areas of success and persistent challenges.

The Library of Congress also includes an piece titled *Immigration & immigrant communities (1650-2016)* edited James S. Pula, PhD. that explores much of the historical events and documentation that led to the laws the United States holds today around Mexican Immigration. Many of the acts and speeches included here show clear shifts over time in terms of how much or how little immigration was restricted into the United States, further exemplifying the ongoing discussion around the issue and why it has never been fully resolved even now. One very influential event that's

highlighted in this history was the "Shut the Door" Speech on Mexican Immigration, in which South Carolina Senator Ellison Smith discusses support for the immigration act of 1924. This act set quotas for immigrants and their entry into the United States, in which Ellison Smith makes efforts to restrict the flow of immigration, essentially shutting the door on allowing immigrants to come through. That being said, it quickly became less applicable to Mexican immigration. This is because Mexican immigrants were not restricted as part of the act as they were seen as important for agricultural work purposes. This would later evolve into the Bracero Program that allowed for Mexican immigrants to come to the United States in order to do agricultural work. It seemed as though, however, that while Mexican immigrants were granted access in order to work, because of the "Shut the Door" speech and Immigration acts that Mexican workers were often mistreated and underpaid under the American working conditions. This led to "An Address" by César Chávez, a political and social advocate for immigration as well as Mexican immigrant himself, advocates for Mexican farmworkers' rights and how these workers are experiencing social struggles in their current state, establishing that justice needs to be sought after. This was an essential speech in immigration history as it established the issue at hand and displayed that Mexicans were being treated as though they were beneath the much of the American

population, and showed that there was a clear issue at hand around America's views on immigration.

In an article titled *Depression and the Struggle for Survival*, more stories are included in terms of the struggles that Mexican immigrants have faced, specifically focusing on the Great Depression. This article brings up an interesting fact that displays the ways in which Mexican immigrants were coerced into discriminatory situations solely on the basis of being Mexican. It states that "immigrants were offered free train rides to Mexico, and some went voluntarily, but many were either tricked or coerced into repatriation, and some U.S. citizens were deported simply on suspicion of being Mexican." (Library of Congress). There's been a clear effort to try to deport Mexican immigrants from the United States, and it seems to be done deliberately as a means of not making Mexican citizens feel welcome at all. This is one such instance of the ongoing threat that Mexican immigrants have felt towards their immigration status, and many have experienced not only trickery but also violence.

The Migration Policy Institute also provides a number of valuable statistics about the topic at hand, and gives even further context to the mass immigration from Mexico to the United States. This can largely be seen in the June 2011 Report titled *Mexican and Central American Immigrants in the United States* by Kate Brick and A.E. Challinor, which breaks down a lot of this data and gives important statistics and charts.

One portion of the report goes into detail by stating "Numerical limits on permanent migration from the Western Hemisphere and the ending of the guest worker programs of the mid-20th century, in combination with increased demand for low-skilled labor, translated into a substantial share of immigrants from Mexico and Central America being unauthorized. Because of this, as well as their low education levels and limited English proficiency, first-generation immigrants face substantial barriers." This demonstrates not only why so many immigrants have migrated to the United States, but also what factors have contributed to limiting some of the opportunities that they should have but don't such as education which is a problem that many immigrants have faced. It also gives background to the history of immigration. In the beginning of relations between the United States and Mexico as far as allowing people access across borders, the United States implemented guest worker programs, that allowed Mexican people to opportunity to American citizenship through the Bracero Program, which was a program that would give Mexican people citizenship so that they could be transported over and work for a period of time. These were some of the first instances of immigration between Mexico and the United States, and these guest worker programs established the culture of immigrants acquiring low education jobs such as farming and hard labor, as these were the jobs they would acquire through the program. Since then, the government has had numerous policies that

took away and reestablished some of the mutual relations through the Bracero program, creating the constantly fluctuating history with immigrants and their accessibility to United States citizenship.

There are a number of other statistics from the article that prove that immigrants from Mexico are more likely to be brought into poverty, highlighting that this issue persists with these factors such as lack of education contributing to Mexican immigrants being unable to establish a fruitful life in the country. Some of these statistics include those that state "About a quarter of Mexican, Honduran, and Guatemalan immigrants live below the poverty line," as well as " Mexicans and Central Americans lag behind other immigrants in terms of English ability." Lack of Education is a persisting issue and there is clearly a correlation between this aspect and the poverty levels. On top of this, it's important to note that "60 percent of undocumented immigrants in the United States come from Mexico," showing the issue is largely between the United States and Mexico as well as the hardships Mexican immigrants face with gaining citizenship despite their past of having great accessibility to it.

There are a number of charts as well that display the exact numbers in terms of lack of education and ability to gain citizenship. Here are pie charts comparing legal status from the Northern Triangle.
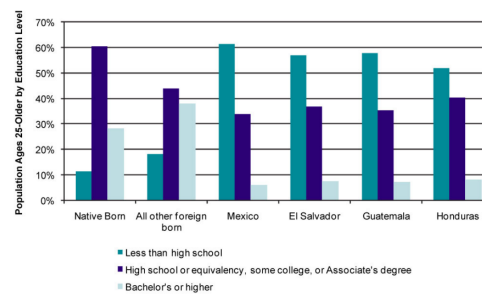
Figure 3. Immigration Status of Mexican and Northern Triangle Immigrants in the United States, 2009

Mexico **Guatemala**

El Salvador **Honduras**

- Naturalized
- Legal immigrants
- Unauthorized
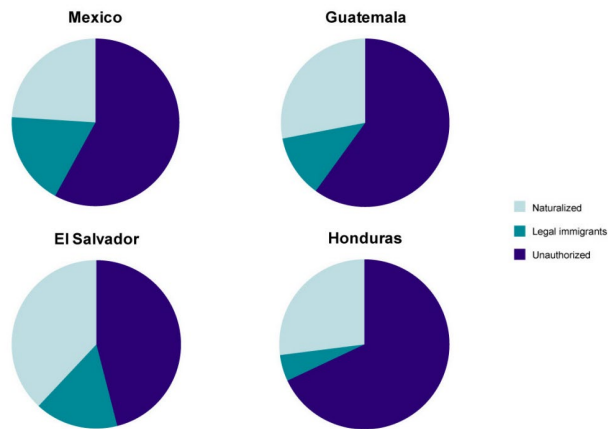
Source: DHS, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, 2009; US Census Bureau, 2009 ACS.

This can also be seen in this bar graph displaying the low education rates of
immigrants.

Figure 4. Education Levels among Mexican, Central American, Native-born, and All Other Foreign-born
US Residents, Aged 25 and Older, 2009

- Less than high school
- High school or equivalency, some college, or Associate's degree
- Bachelor's or higher

There's a table that breaks down the percentages of the immigrant
population by their country of origin to show the grand scale of the issue.
The majority are from Mexico.

Table 1. US Migrant Populations from Mexico and Central America, 2009

	US Immigrant Population (thousands)	Share of US Population (percent)	Country of Origin Population (thousands)	Expatriates in US as Percent of Native Population
El Salvador	1,150	0.4	6,194	18.6
Belize	49	0.02	313	15.7
Mexico	11,478	3.8	110,645	10.4
Honduras	468	0.15	7,616	6.1
Guatemala	799	0.26	14,377	5.6
Nicaragua	253	0.08	5,822	4.3
Panama	104	0.03	3,508	3.0
Costa Rica	86	0.02	4,640	1.9
Total	**14,387**	**4.7**	**153,115**	**9.4**

Source: US Census Bureau, 2009 American Community Survey (Washington, DC: US Census Bureau, 2009); Population
Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, *World Population Prospects:
The 2008 Revision*, http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/wpp2008/wpp2008_highlights.pdf.

The Stanford Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration (SCSII) has long been a key institution in the United States advocating for immigrant rights, providing comprehensive resources and insightful analysis on issues surrounding immigration policy. Through its research, the center strives to foster understanding of the challenges faced by immigrants in the U.S., offering evidence-based approaches to policy reform. One of the primary focuses of the SCSII is the ongoing debate surrounding the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program, a crucial protection for young undocumented immigrants, as well as the pressing issue of visa delays affecting immigrants, including international students. Both of these topics underscore the broader issues within U.S. immigration policy that prevent many immigrants from achieving security and citizenship.

The Stanford Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration has been instrumental in shedding light on these issues, advocating for reform and offering valuable insights into the experiences of immigrants in the U.S. As the legal battles for DACA and the challenges of visa delays continue, it is clear that comprehensive immigration reform is necessary to ensure that the rights of immigrants, particularly those who have long called the U.S. home, are fully protected. Until meaningful reform is achieved, the future of immigrants in the U.S. awaiting visas remains uncertain. The SCSII's continued advocacy is crucial in pushing for a more equitable and efficient

immigration system that benefits both immigrants and the nation as a whole.

DACA, first introduced in 2012 by the Obama administration, was created to provide relief to undocumented immigrants who arrived in the United States as children. Through DACA, individuals typically classified as "dreamers" are protected from deportation, granted the ability to work legally, and allowed to pursue educational and professional opportunities. However, the program has been embroiled in legal challenges since its inception, with its future constantly under threat.

As the Stanford Center for the Study of Immigrant Integration states on its website, the center has consistently supported DACA, recognizing its positive impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of young immigrants. The center emphasizes that Dreamers contribute to U.S. society in various sectors, including healthcare, education, and technology, making DACA a policy that not only provides protection for vulnerable individuals but also benefits the country as a whole. Yet, despite its social and economic benefits, the program remains in legal limbo, exacerbated by recent judicial rulings.

In 2022, the Biden administration issued a new rule intended to preserve DACA and create a more durable solution for its continuation. However, that same year, the program was once again ruled illegal by a federal judge, with the court asserting that the executive branch

overstepped its authority by implementing the program without congressional approval. Although the ruling allowed those already enrolled in DACA to maintain and renew their status, it effectively barred new applicants from the program, leaving many individuals without a clear path to protection. This ruling, along with the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' recent decision that reaffirmed the program's illegal status, illustrates the deep uncertainty that still surrounds DACA.

The future of DACA remains uncertain as ongoing trials continue to weigh its legality. This prolonged legal battle is significant because it highlights the ongoing vulnerability of young undocumented immigrants. While DACA provides crucial protections for those enrolled, it is still a temporary solution and remains subject to changes in political or judicial sentiment. The lack of a final resolution creates an atmosphere of anxiety for Dreamers, as their future is constantly contingent on the results of court cases and political shifts.

For the Stanford Center, the DACA debate is emblematic of a much larger issue: the inadequacies of the U.S. immigration system, particularly in its treatment of undocumented individuals. The constant back-and-forth on DACA underscores the need for comprehensive immigration reform that offers long-term solutions for Dreamers and others in similar situations.

In addition to the ongoing struggles surrounding DACA, another significant issue in the U.S. immigration system is the widespread delay in visa processing, which has left many immigrants in limbo. The issue of visa delays has been particularly problematic for individuals seeking to achieve citizenship, as well as for international students hoping to study in U.S. universities. The delays in processing not only hinder these individuals' ability to fully integrate into society but also make them vulnerable to being categorized as undocumented while they await approval.

The SCSII has highlighted the growing concern over visa delays, recognizing that the delays contribute to a larger problem in the U.S. immigration system, one that discourages immigrants from seeking the opportunities they rightfully deserve. The issue is compounded by a letter from members of Congress urging the federal administration to take action in addressing the backlog of visa applications, which has led to frustration and uncertainty among applicants. For international students, these delays can result in them being unable to attend classes or be classified as undocumented, further complicating their ability to study, work, or remain in the country.

The Stanford Center's research indicates that these visa delays are not just an inconvenience; they are a significant barrier to the economic and educational contributions that immigrants could make. International students, in particular, are often highly skilled and educated individuals

who, upon receiving their visas, would add immense value to the U.S. economy through their studies and professional expertise. However, the delayed processing times leave them in a vulnerable position, potentially jeopardizing their ability to legally stay and contribute.

Furthermore, these delays also highlight a deeper issue within U.S. immigration policy: the lack of a streamlined and efficient process for individuals seeking citizenship or temporary status. The immigration system's inability to provide timely responses creates unnecessary hardship for individuals who are already in a state of uncertainty. This, in turn, affects their ability to fully integrate into U.S. society, perpetuating cycles of instability and insecurity for immigrants who seek to establish roots in their communities.

Both the ongoing challenges faced by DACA recipients and the issues surrounding visa delays reveal significant flaws within the U.S. immigration system, which continues to place unnecessary obstacles in the path of those seeking security and opportunity. The uncertainty surrounding DACA, exacerbated by the legal battles and federal rulings, highlights the need for a permanent legislative solution that provides a clear and lasting path to protection for Dreamers. Similarly, the delays in visa processing underscore the inefficiencies in the immigration system that prevent immigrants from contributing to the economy and integrating fully into society.

The Tortilla Curtain by T.C. Boyle is a novel that explores the human side of immigration through layered themes such as anger and bigotry, nature and survival, fate and egotism, and ultimately the deeply personal pursuit of belonging in the American Dream. Told through the overlapping perspectives of Delaney Mossbacher and Cándido Rincón, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, the novel forces readers to confront the brutal and often inhumane realities faced by immigrants living on the margins of American society. Boyle's portrayal is not simply a political statement, but rather it is a strong depiction of survival, dehumanization, and hope that reflects the systemic failures that define the immigrant experience.

One of the most prevalent themes in the novel is anger, hatred, and bigotry, which is presented not just as a personal prejudice but as a societal issue that bleeds into institutions and communities. The tension between Delaney and Cándido is symbolic of the cultural divide in America, where fear and racism often overpower empathy. Delaney, who sees himself as a progressive, begins the novel attempting to rationalize his fear, but quickly descends into irrational paranoia. This is evident when one character defends immigration by saying, "Do you realize what you're saying? Immigrants are the lifeblood of this country—we're a nation of immigrants—and neither of us would be standing here today if it wasn't." (101). This quote encapsulates the contradiction at the heart of many

American attitudes, since it shows acknowledgment of a nation built by immigrants, paired with a deep-seated resistance to welcoming new ones.

The novel also offers a connection between the natural world and human suffering. Boyle uses nature as a symbol that both unites and divides. Cándido and América, living in the canyon, are at the mercy of wildlife, weather, and a harsh, unrelenting terrain. This reinforces their position as outsiders, not just socially but ecologically, forced to survive in a world that was never meant to welcome them. Delaney, by contrast, sees nature as something to be preserved, but only as long as it serves his own values and backyard aesthetics. The environmental symbolism becomes an extension of human power dynamics, illustrating how privilege allows some to romanticize the wild while others must endure its dangers just to stay alive.

Fate, luck, and egotism also run throughout the novel, especially in how the characters perceive their circumstances. Delaney sees himself as someone who earned his place through intelligence and effort, while Cándido's struggle is dismissed as the product of his own poor decisions. This ideology of individualism ignores the systemic obstacles Cándido faces, reducing his suffering to a character flaw rather than a consequence of larger inequalities. When the narrative reflects that, "He was a criminal for daring to want it, daring to risk everything for the basic human necessities, and not even those were to be denied him." (200), it articulates

the brutal reality that many immigrants face—that even the dream of safety and stability becomes a punishable offense.

Belonging and the American Dream are central to the novel's emotional core. Cándido and América's journey is shaped by a vision of America that promises hope, yet delivers hostility. The promise of a better life is continually shattered by the violence, poverty, and systemic neglect they face. For Delaney, the American Dream means gated communities and protection of assets. His declaration—"This is a community... an exclusive private highly desirable location. And what do you think's going to happen to property values if your filthy coyotes start attacking children?" (221)—underscores how the ideal of "community" is used as a weapon to exclude, control, and dehumanize others. His words not only equate immigrants to animals but reveal how deeply the American Dream has become intertwined with exclusivity and fear.

One of the most painful and underrepresented themes in the novel is violence against women, which Boyle addresses through the character of América. Her suffering is both a result of her gender and her immigration status. She is rendered voiceless and powerless, not only by society but by the men around her. Her rape, isolation, and the trauma she experiences are tragically emblematic of the vulnerability many immigrant women face. América's journey reflects how gender-based violence is amplified by immigration status, poverty, and invisibility. Unlike Delaney's wife, who is

insulated from the world by gates and privilege, América is left to fend for herself in a hostile environment that refuses to acknowledge her humanity.

Much like the memoir mentioned in the sample essay, Boyle's novel focuses on how immigration deeply disrupts one's sense of identity and belonging. Where Reyna's emotional distance from her parents defines her struggle, Cándido and América are defined by their physical displacement and the psychological toll it takes. They exist in a constant state of fear and survival. Their homelessness isn't just physical, but emotional. A disconnection from a society that refuses to see them. Their pain is made invisible, except when it becomes convenient to blame them for systemic issues, as seen in the quote, "I agree that everybody's got a right to work and have a decent standard of living, but there's just so many of them, they've overwhelmed us, the schools, welfare, the prisons and now the streets…" (185). This attitude reduces immigrants to statistics and problems, erasing their humanity in the process.

Ultimately, The Tortilla Curtain does not offer easy resolutions. Much like Reyna's memoir, it emphasizes the long-lasting emotional and social wounds caused by immigration. But while Reyna finds strength and identity through education and familial bonds, Cándido and América are continually pushed further into isolation, making the novel a grim but necessary commentary on the American immigration system. The

characters' suffering becomes a mirror reflecting back society's unwillingness to confront its own hypocrisy and cruelty.

Boyle's novel reveals that the immigrant experience is not just about legal status or economic hardship, it is about loss, rejection, invisibility, and survival. It shows that the American Dream, when filtered through racism, xenophobia, and privilege, becomes a nightmare for those who most need its promises. Through powerful themes and haunting imagery, Boyle forces readers to look closely at a reality that is often ignored, and to consider what it really means to belong in a country that claims to welcome all, but only truly embraces a few.

To understand this issue further, it's worth having further context as to the logistics of the illegal immigration that is occurring. By understanding where and why illegal immigration occurs, it makes it easier to pinpoint where much of the violence and discrimination is occurring and also allows the conversation to be opened up to alternative perspectives. Sean McMinn and Renee Klahr look into this in their NPR podcast titled *Where Does Illegal Immigration Mostly Occur? Here's What the Data Tells Is?* in which they analyze specific data about illegal immigration in order to locate and delve into the problem at hand. They go into great detail as to what has led to illegal immigration from Mexico to have such a major influx by looking into some of the major push factors that occur. They show this with the statistics that say that "these migrants are fleeing

pervasive violence, persecution and poverty, and a large number do not seek to evade arrest, but present themselves to border officials and request political asylum. Many are de facto refugees, not illegal border crossers." (McMinn & Klahr). This not only shows that most immigrants are trying to escape their violent situation through the standard immigration process, but also that many of them are not initiating violence themselves. They present themselves to the border officials in a peaceful manner and aren't looking to start violence but rather do what they can to pass through into the country.

On top of this, they go into great detail about the level of security that is established at the border and further proving why any greatly higher security beyond what is established is strictly unnecessary. The data shows that in 2017, the Border Patrol employed more than 19,000 agents, almost double the number in fiscal 2003. And the agency's budget grew from $263 million in 1990 to more $3.8 billion in 2016. The budget for Customs and Border Protection which includes the Border Patrol has grown from $5.9 billion in 2003 to $13.2 billion in 2016. Despite consistently high apprehensions in sectors that do contain fencing, Homeland Security Secretary Kirstjen Nielsen said at the White House on Wednesday that "everywhere we put up a wall, illegal immigration has been reduced 90 to 95 percent." (McMinn & Klahr).

Ultimately the data shows that large sums of money have already been invested into securing the border and the efforts are already effective. Anything beyond what has already been done just seems to be strictly overkill. From what has been shown, it appears as immigrants don't want to resort to crossing the border illegally, especially with how secure it is already, but there appears to be other factors at hand that limit their ability to go through the process and that make it increasingly difficult to become citizens. It shows that any efforts to further secure the border may not just be a means of restricting illegal immigration, but immigration as a whole.

In San Lorenzo Huipulco's article titled *Mexican Immigration the the US, the occurrence of violence and impact of mental disorders*, he looks in depth on the everlasting impact caused to Mexican immigrants as a result of the violence they experience. From his research, he discovered a strong link between the violence they experienced and mental health disorders. Something also worth noting about this article is that he, in particular, looks at the risk factors that have led to Mexican born citizens to experience violence. These risk factors include immigration, US nativity, and return migration, which ultimately shows the clear mistreatment that is given towards Mexican Americans who were shown to immigrants, however this doesn't just include immigrants. In the article, Huipulco outlines that US born Mexican-Americans were at higher risk for violence victimization of a sexual nature. Return migrants were at increased risk for

being kidnapped or held hostage. Compared to those without a mental disorder, those with a mental disorder were more likely to suffer any violence, regardless of the migrant experience.

He introduces multiple factors that contribute to the issue of violence, and shows the correlation between aspects like mental health disorders that many people may not really consider. He ultimately concludes his findings by stating "The impact of immigration on the occurrence of violence is more complex than usually believed. Return migrants are more likely to suffer violence such as being held hostage or beaten for someone not a partner." (Huipulco).

The issue around the violence specifically is very complicated and there could be a large number of factors that could contribute to its occurrence that may or may not be considered. What can be seen is that there's ongoing discrimination towards the Mexican population in the United States, and there seems to be an ongoing violent response to the immigrant population that hasn't been resolved. The issue may be a complex one, but it's important to recognize what is really occurring within the country and to address it.

Final Mural

Description and Rationale

The final mural is a large-scale piece that depicts many of the struggles that immigrants face. In the painting, there are three figures who are emphasized by taking up the space in over half the piece. These figures are all Mexican immigrants, and they are also seen softly touching some sort of emblem or symbol that are framed by a cloudy shape, with them each having their own symbol. The woman on the left is holding a leveled scale, the woman in the middle has her hands around her parents, and the man on the right is grasping at a document intended to be a college degree. All these aspects and the people grabbing for them are separated by a long bold line that that is drawn throughout the middle, with the title reading "On the Side of Humanity" across the piece.

For this painting, there was much intent put behind the presentation and the people involved. The people showcased aren't all exactly meant to be a specific person, however each of their resemblances are heavily based on specific people. The reason why I made this decision and made it so it wasn't entirely clear who they were was to make the message more broad and make sure that people who are immigrants themselves can see the subjects and see themselves in them. However, I also wanted to use their likenesses to draw credit to majorly influential people around this issue.

The main instance of this is the woman in the middle, whose appearance is heavily based on Reyna Grande. Her book and her story was

based around many different themes that I felt needed to be expressed, but in the broadest sense her themes around separation I felt best fit for the kind of artwork I wanted to create, so I felt as though it was only appropriate that her likeness was included. Along with that, I also included her parents, as she was separated from her parents from a young age and thus I used her to have her putting her hands around them.

On the left, the woman depicted is meant to resemble the character America Rincon in The Tortilla Curtain. The reason I chose her was similar to why I chose Reyna Grande, as the book she's in displays a number of important themes around the struggles faced through immigration. In both cases, the themes expressed revolve around how these experiences affect them and change them as people, which I felt was needed since my piece is so focused on showing the human aspect of the issue as well as the people depicted representing an individualized story around immigration that people can connect to and follow. In the book, America faces a number of hardships but the one I wanted to focus on was violence, as a major aspect of my research was the ongoing violence that Mexican immigrants experience when crossing the border, and I felt it was absolutely necessary to include that aspect and that her story really resonated with that idea. In the piece, she is grasping towards a leveled tipping scale that is meant to be a symbol for justice and equality that is sought out by the Mexican

immigrants who greatly experienced discrimination and violence in the United States, as well as in Mexico.

The final figure who stands on the right is meant to bear resemblance to Cesar Chavez. The reason I included his resemblance was because of how influential he was to farmers rights and working rights for the Mexican immigrant population, especially with his address. His inclusion however was a part of the reason I didn't want the figures to be direct representations of real people, largely due to how controversial he was with him being said to leave behind a legacy of contradictions, so I wanted to open it up to be whoever the audience could connect to so that the political aspects of it won't take them out of the piece. He appeared to be the best figure to base this piece off of in order to resemble the aspect of work and education opportunities because of his advocacy for the Mexican farm workers and them being treated equally. In the piece he is seen grabbing towards a college degree representing the idea of completing an education and pursuing a career. This seemed important to include for the reasons of work discrimination experienced by immigrants as well as the research showing that many Mexican immigrants weren't able to receive a higher level education compared to their American peers.

This piece represents some major themes around the topic of Mexican immigration, those being justice, violence, family, gender roles, workers rights, and education. Essentially many of these things are meant

to be both push factors as well as aspects that turn them away from America. The scale is meant to be a push factor to seek equality, but the turn away is the discrimination faced when crossing over the border. The parents are a push factor to reconnect with separated family, but are pushed away due to the betrayal they feel or lack of communication with their lost family. The degree is a push factor to seek better work and education, but the turn away is the low pay and difficulty faced by immigrants to receive a higher education.

These turn aways are illustrated by the cloud that frames each emblem, as it is a desire that is uncertain to be a real and in many cases may not be. The cloud frame is also meant to symbolize the idea of The American Dream, intended to be a social commentary around the idea that these are all aspects people envision in obtaining through the American Dream, particularly immigrants, however they may be just that: a dream. It puts into question whether these aspects really do exist or if it's just the way America has been perceived, specifically through the immigrant's experience.

The line that goes through the center is meant to represent two aspects. The first being the separation, specifically between immigrants and these aspects they desire to obtain but can't because they are in Mexico while these aspects are in America. This is to provide empathy to Mexican immigrants to show that they make these journeys for reasons that anyone

else would, they are very human aspects which is what I wanted to focus on. It's to show that immigrants should be treated like the humans they are and not less than such, because they cross over because of these aspects that are essential to living a fulfilling life. The second aspect illustrated here is the border, with the shape and way the line is guided throughout the piece resembling a real map of the wall layout spanning across the border between the United States and Mexico. This shows that with these people grabbing over for the emblems included on the other side of the line, that these things are push factors that encourage immigrants to cross the border into the United States as well.

I had a number of goals going into this piece. My goals with this piece were to make it emotionally impactful to a wide audience, to show the human connection to immigrants, to show the challenges faced by immigrants, to uplift people rather than cause outrage, to have themes of unity, history, and the American Dream, and to make something that I'm very proud of and that I feel is important.

Reflection

After further reflection and looking at the final result, I am incredibly pleased with how the piece came out. I feel as though I accomplished everything I set out to do with it with the resources I had and I believe I successfully accomplished all of my goals while making it as readable and clear as possible. Not only was I able to include all the aspects I set out to include through my goals through thematic elements and as well as how I wanted the piece to come across, but I was pleased to have accomplished my final goal which was to make something I was truly proud of.

While I am very proud of the pieces, there are small aspects about it I see that I feel as though I can improve on, such as how I mixed colors and the incorporation of the darker strokes and how readable they are, since in some spots they tend to blend in too much with the paint. I don't paint very often compared to other art forms so it was certainly something that proved to be a challenge at times in terms of being patient and not letting these aspects blend in by accident. Many of these are notes that can help me improve my work in the future and considering this was something I had never really done before, I was pleasantly surprised with the result and it's nice to have created my very own mural.

I feel as though the research I found really helped drive the piece, as it gave me better context and made me better plan what I wanted to do and how to execute it effectively. I think that greater context could certainly be

seen here, as it was something that made the ideation process flow easily. Even the process of physically creating the work felt in went by smoothly because of how much direction I felt like I had with this. This piece best exemplifies everything I've learned in a cohesive way that is also not too convoluted, and I think that is because these aspects were things that were in the back of my mind when creating it. Overall, the research certainly drove the piece, and I think the result is an accurate representation of what I had in mind.

Conclusion

I learned a lot from this project and it was very fun for me. It taught me not only about the history of immigration, but also about determination and working towards a particular goal no matter how challenging it may be. This project was extremely time consuming and was challenging at times, but it taught me to push through it no matter how difficult it may be.

I'm even more passionate about this issue than I was before, there is so much discrimination occurring in the world even to this day, and it's becoming increasingly hidden with Mexican immigrants and the discrimination they face in the United States. I hope my project is even able to make the smallest change, or even a push in the right direction. I want to use my art to change the world because it's what I do best, and if this mural is able to make any sort of change then I would call it a success.

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