

Codex Espangliensis

By the time the Spanish discovered the Americas, Mesoamericans had been creating books for centuries. These books, often in scroll and codex form, included maps, calendars, and manuscripts that told of the history and culture of the people. Most of these books were burned by the Franciscan monks since they contained pagan beliefs and historical details that conflicted with Christianity.¹ Only a few pre-Columbian codices survived the Spanish conquest, although hundreds were originally contained in Mesoamerican libraries.² The destruction of these books resulted in the loss of hundreds of years of Mesoamerican culture and knowledge; thus they are a powerful symbol of Mesoamerican heritage that has come to be popularly explored and honored by Latin American artists. Although the Spanish destroyed these books, they also began to use and adapt the indigenous bookmaking techniques to suit their needs. Scrolls and maps written with indigenous scripts were used for legislative concerns and some colonial codices attempted to recover lost Aztec history.³ Books written with these scripts were also made to teach Christianity; it was thought that using familiar hieroglyphs and calendar markers would attract more interest.⁴ Thus the Mesoamerican codex is not simply a symbol of a conquered and lost heritage, but a reminder of the almost immediate cultural intermixing that occurred between the Spanish and the indigenous population.

For this reason it is particularly appropriate that the codex format was used for the *Codex Espangliensis*, (fig 1), a collaborative project originally conceived by Felicia Rice of the Moving Parts Press in California. In 1992 Rice approached two well known

¹ Gordon Brotherston. 1995. *Painted books from Mexico: Codices in UK collections and the World They Represent*. London: Published for the Trustees of the British Museum by British Museum Press. p 11, 17.

² Philip Kranya. "History Unfolded," *Print*, Jan/Feb 1999, 53, 1, p 90- 93.

³ Brotherston, 17

⁴ Ibid.

Chicano⁵ artists, Guillermo Gomez-Peña and Enrique Chagoya, about collaborating on a book project. Rice is a book artist and publisher who started the Moving Parts Press in 1977. She grew up in Southern California and considers herself a "...member of a hybrid community of immigrants and artists..."⁶ Since she established Moving Parts Press, Rice has published numerous books in collaboration with artists of many backgrounds, including the *Literatura Chicana/Latina Series*.⁷ Gomez-Peña is a performance artist who also writes critical essays and poetry focused on cultural and political issues that address U.S./Mexico border relations. His book *New World Border* won the American Book Award in 1997, and he contributes regularly to National Public Radio.⁸ Chagoya's visual work also focuses on the politics between the two countries, combining drawing, painting, and printmaking with collage techniques. A highly respected visual artist in the U.S. as well as abroad, Chagoya received both his MA and MFA from the University of California, Berkeley and currently teaches at Stanford University.⁹

The *Codex Espangliensis* combines Gomez-Peña's written word with Chagoya's images across a 21 foot fold out that is constructed in the same manner as the original codices, opening right to left. There are no clear page markers or structured chronology so that when the book is completely unfolded, the viewer is allowed to read the whole book in either direction, and fold different screens into multiple configurations. Yet the

⁵ According to Oxford English Dictionary Online "Chicano" refers to "a person of Mexican birth or descent resident in the U.S..., especially one who is proud of this Mexican origins and concerned to improve the position of Mexicans in the U.S.; a Mexican American." "Mestizo" refers to "a person of mixed European and non-European parentage; specifically (originally) a man with a Spanish father and an American Indian mother; (later) a person of mixed American Spanish and American Indian descent." Oxford English Dictionary Online Edition, John Simpson ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2010). www.oed.com, Accessed June 16, 2010.

⁶ Felicia Rice. "Felicia Rice," in *Codex Espangliensis: from Columbus to the Border Patrol*, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, and Felicia Rice. San Francisco: City Lights Books (2000), p 1. All further references will be to this edition.

⁷ See <http://www.movingpartspress.com> for a list of publications. Last accessed March 25, 2010.

⁸ Kranya, 90.

⁹ *Enrique Chagoya: Borderlandia*, ed. Patricia Hikson. Illinois: Des Moines Art Center (2007).

majority of the individual screens read from left to right.¹⁰ This play between western and eastern reading traditions is the first obvious homage to the notion of hybridity, a common theme throughout the *Codex Espangliensis*. Lacking a definitive structure, the work fosters a sense of timelessness and dislocation, becoming a liminal space where contemporary pop icons meet 500 year old legends. The first edition of the *Codex Espangliensis* was letter-press printed on amatl paper, made from tree bark, which was a type of paper used in traditional Mesoamerican codices.¹¹ Rice published an edition of fifty original editions of the book in this manner, five of which were hand painted by Rice and an assistant. In 1999, a trade edition with artist statements was published by City Lights Books in order to make the work available to a larger audience.¹²

The book can be described as a politically charged deconstruction of the popular history of the conquest of the Americas and events that have since followed, although it is also a personal account of Chicano and Mestizo struggles with identity. Chagoya mixes images of historical and popular icons such as Columbus, Cortés, President George H.W. Bush, Superman, Mickey Mouse, Jesus, and the Virgin of Guadalupe amongst others who function as symbols of Mexican and western culture. Important themes include the political upheaval and exploitation that Mexicans have faced since the Spanish conquest of Tenochtitlan.¹³ Mexico gained independence from Spain in 1821, only to face several military coupes and shifts in government throughout the following decade. Later the U.S. took an aggressive territorial stance toward Mexico, resulting in the Mexican-American

¹⁰ "Screens" refers to individual folds of the *Codex*. For the purposes of this essay I have numbered the pages of the *Codex* from right to left since it opens that way.

¹¹ Rice, 3.

¹² Rice, 4.

¹³ Jennifer Gonzales, "Critical Commentary," in *Codex Espangliensis: from Columbus to the Border Patrol*, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, and Felicia Rice. San Francisco: City Lights Books (2000), p 1.

War of 1845-48, and ending in the occupation of Mexico by the U.S. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo in 1848 Mexico ceded more than half of its territory to the U.S. including the land that makes up California, Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico. Political turmoil had strong negative effects on the Mexican economy and government. In addition, the movement of “Anglos” into what used to be Mexican territory caused racial tension to run high. Over the past 150 years, racist American policies and rhetoric regarding Mexican population resulted in attempts at segregation, mass deportations, and labor abuses. Yet throughout the past five hundred years, as borders, policies, and landscapes shifted, Mestizo's continually remained and adapted, creating a hybrid culture all their own.¹⁴

Born out of frustration from constant discrimination, the Chicano movement in the U.S. in the 1960s began alongside other civil rights movements and activism was at its peak during the 1970s and 1980s. In the mid-1980s, just as Chagoya, Rice and Gomez-Peña were emerging as artists, a renewed Chicano movement arose in response to California Governor Pete Wilson's policies, including Proposition 187 that was designed to cut off social, educational, and health funding to illegal immigrants.¹⁵ Then in 1994, NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), in which tariffs between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada will be phased out over time, was implemented. NAFTA was strongly criticized because although it opened the doors to trade between the U.S. and

¹⁴ For more reading on Mexican political history see Damián Baca, *Mestiz@ Scripts, Digital Migrations and the Territories of Writing: New Concepts in Latino American Cultures*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan, (2008). p 33-61.

¹⁵Ibid, 56.

Mexico, the terms were said to be more advantageous for the U.S. thus encouraging further exploitation of Mexico and its people.¹⁶

It is clear that the intent of the three artists is to expose the challenges that people of Mexican descent face when trying to find a balance between the traditional and contemporary worlds along the border. The encounter between the “First” world and the “Third” world creates odd cultural juxtapositions, where identity is unstable and often a source of great difficulty when racism is added to the mix. In his artist statement for the *Codex*, Gomez-Peña writes that he uses his art to “research and reveal the multiple processes of acculturation and hybridization that the Mexican Psyche undergoes when crossing the border.”¹⁷ The *Codex Espangliensis* is a manifestation of this hybridization, and the political and personal struggles of a people caught between multiple worlds and histories. This work also functions as an act of reclaiming, rewriting, and revisualizing history, which was the goal of many multicultural movements of the 1970s and 1980s, including the Chicano movement. All three artists, Rice, Chagoya and Gomez-Peña, consider themselves a part of this political movement, having lived in California during those decades.

Both Chagoya and Gomez-Peña share a similar life story. They grew up in Mexico City, attended UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) and left Mexico for the United States in the late 1970s.¹⁸ Gomez-Peña describes Mexico in the 1960s as “an era of artistic diaspora,” in which artists left the country in order to find

¹⁶ Calvin Zon, “NAFTA Spawns Diverse Union of Critics : Trade Pact Exploits Labor, Poor, They Say.” National Catholic Reporter, vol 29 no 13, (Jan 29, 2993), pp 5.

¹⁷ Guillermo Gomez-Peña. “Guillermo Gomez-Peña,” in *Codex espangliensis: from Columbus to the border patrol*, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, and Felicia Rice. San Francisco: City Lights Books, (2000), p 2.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 1.

political and aesthetic freedom. He said he was attracted to the energy being generated by the Chicano movement in the American Southwest, and eventually ended up in San Diego, while Chagoya went further on to San Francisco.¹⁹ In his artist statement, Chagoya also recognizes to the similarities in artistic sensibilities between himself and Gomez-Peña, stating

We mirror each other's work in different artistic languages. Perhaps the experience of growing up through similar political and cultural contexts both in Mexico and in the U.S. has had an impact on the development of our similar concepts. The differences in our work are only in form, not in content."²⁰

Indeed the content of the work of these two artists is striking in its similarities. Just as Chagoya's images are a mish-mash of popular icons and symbolic references to the political and cultural history of Mexico and the U.S., Gomez-Peña's writing is a blend of languages and personalities, a verbal manifestation of his many conflicting identities. Moving from English to Spanish to Spanglish and then even to French within a few sentences, Gomez-Peña's multiplicity of voices detail the inner monologues and poetic ramblings of both the Mestizo and Chicano soul. His ability to play on words and his performance aesthetic mimic Chagoya's postmodern visual style of pastiche and appropriation.

In a four page section at the beginning of the *Codex Espangliensis*, Gomez-Peña's spoken word piece, "El Existentialist Mojado," (Figs 2, 3) addresses the difficulties of moving across the border, losing homeland, and adjusting to the new culture of the U.S.²¹ These themes are woven between images of the Virgin of Guadalupe, La Catrina (Jose

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Enrique Chagoya. "Enrique Chagoya," in Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Enrique Chagoya, and Felicia Rice. 2000. *Codex Espangliensis: from Columbus to the Border Patrol*. San Francisco: City Lights Books, p 1.

²¹ "El Existentialist Mojado" means "the wet existentialist." All translations in this paper are by the author unless otherwise cited.

Guadalupe Posada's skeleton wearing a sombrero) and Mickey Mouse. In the center of the first screen (Fig 2), Disney's cartoon dog Goofy stands on top of an Aztec Cihuateteo²² statue, while an indigenous woman and La Catrina look on. Mickey Mouse in turn stands upon La Catrina's hat and offers a skull to Goofy or to the statue (the viewer can't be sure), perhaps as a sacrifice or maybe a gift. The text wanders through these images, and into the next screen, in which a turn of the century anatomical drawing of a woman stares passively at the viewer. Inside her intestines, D.C. comic's Wonder Woman aims a gun at the Virgin of Guadalupe who hovers left of the anatomical figure, offering advice on a better choice of weapon. Wonderwoman tells the Virgin to "go to hell," and the ever-forgiving Virgin simply responds "I love you." From the Virgin's feet springs a serpent held up by a man with wings, or an eagle, as it spits water onto a fire from which a woman in broken chains is rising like a phoenix. Underneath the serpent is a small simple figure of a burning man, his hands held high like the woman engulfed in flames. Both text and image move together, referencing flames, mothers, longing for home, and the abrupt shock of American culture experienced by the new immigrant.

At first Chagoya's choice of imagery seem random, but the history and meaning behind these symbols adds unexpected depth to the story. The serpent and eagle, part of the coat of arms on the Mexican flag, are a reference to the Aztec creation myth.²³ More importantly, the name of one of the most important Gods, Quetzalcoatl, means "bird-serpent, or plumed serpent" and "represents matter and earthly phenomena, while the bird

²² José López Portillo, Demetrio Sodi M., and Fernando Díaz Infante. 1982. *Quetzalcoatl, in Myth, Archeology, and Art*. New York: Continuum, p 239.

²³ See variations of Aztec creation myths in Maarten E. R. G. N. Jansen and Gabina Aurora Pérez Jiménez. 2007. *Encounter with the Plumed Serpent: Drama and Power in the Heart of Mesoamerica*. Mesoamerican Worlds. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, pp 65-113.

symbolizes spirit and heavenly aspects.”²⁴ Thus Quetzalcoatl, who is considered a creator and mentor of humans, teaches “man to better know his internal duality.”²⁵ It is this internal duality or splintered identity that Gomez-Peña seems to struggle with in his texts. In the text accompanying these particular images, Gomez-Peña ruminates on his Mexican past, showing a map of Mexico and saying “Ay, la nostalgia.” He goes on to talk about his past, and then asks for a translation of his obscure utterances. When none appears he says to an invisible friend, “See pollito [dude] we are alone in this gringo [white man] world.” Further on in the text he describes himself in satirical terms as “el go-mex siempre [always] horney, scared and interstitial, filled with all these ancestral memories.”²⁶ Towards the end, he expresses his conflicted feelings about living in America, juxtaposing the excitement of making it to the mythic New York City with the loneliness of living in an alien culture. At first he says “finally, New York, New York, wowww! (I sing) “Stop singing the blues...” What blues, man? Pura alegría [happiness]...” and then,

America at its best, America, ca, ca, ca-put. Digital mortis. La gran soledad [the great loneliness] de los united. Pero bien united [but well united]...absolutely lonely es bien [good] Ameerrican, like sexual violence, racism, and apple pie. Que fucking picudo [odd] country...”²⁷

Reading these words, one can see Gomez-Peña or any immigrant for that matter, in the image of the eagle-man who holds the serpent as it tries to spit out the fire, or in the small figure underneath the snake, on fire with his hands held up either in a call for help or gesture of surrender.

²⁴ Portillo, p 176.

²⁵ Ibid, 182.

²⁶ Gómez-Peña, p 6.

²⁷ Ibid, 5.

In this screen, the Virgin of Guadalupe steps on the serpent, a highly symbolic gesture. In 1531, an indigenous man Juan Diego claimed that Mother Mary had appeared and spoken to him in Nahuatl, the Aztec language. She told him she came to offer the indigenous people help and protection, and over time Mary has become an important religious and cultural symbol to the Mexican people.²⁸ According to historian Damian Baca, the name “Guadalupe,” comes from the Nahuatl word “coatlxopeuh,” which sounds like the word “Guadalupe.” In Spanish “Guadalupe” means “one who crushes the serpent,” while in Genesis 3:14 and 3:15, God tells of a woman who will crush the serpents head.²⁹ Converting the indigenous population to Christianity was one of the main goals of the Spanish. Thus the Virgin plays a double role of a symbol of salvation, and a “tool of colonization.”³⁰

Mothers and female authority figures are a large presence in the text. When Gomez-Peña writes about crossing the border, he calls Mexico his mother saying, “the departure, La partida [the break/loss] man, qué partida de madres [what a fucking break/loss], my mamita [little mother], my land cut in half with a gigantic blade.” A visual reference to the mother is found in the image of the Aztec Cihuateteo statue on the first spread and the Virgin of Guadalupe on the second. The Aztec Cihuateteo statues represented women who had died in childbirth, and were then deified.³¹ These women were equated with warriors and their statues were regularly worshipped.³²

This theme of war is apparent throughout the *Codex Espangliensis*. It is clear in Gomez-Pena’s text that he sees himself in battle. He references the guns of “La migra,”

²⁸ Baca, 86. See Genesis 3:14 and 3:15, (King James Version).

²⁹ Baca, 86.

³⁰ See Rice, who uses this term in her artist statement for the book, p 3.

³¹ Portillo, 239.

³² Ximena Chávez Balderas, “Death During the Conquest Era,” in *Invasion and Transformation*. p 170.

the Spanish term for border patrol officers, and “los coyotes,” the men that smuggle people across the border.³³ At the end of the piece he wakes up “in a country at war, [and] in a neighborhood at war...”³⁴ Matching this text in the imagery, Chagoya has put Super Woman and the Virgin at war as well.

Red splatters, drips and fingerprints lay across the pages like a bloody trail, while black blocky text cuts through the images. These colors, black, red and white, recall classic colors of propaganda, the subversion of which is another theme at the heart of the *Codex*. The deconstruction, investigation, and reclamation of history are clearly at work amongst Chagoya’s and Gomez-Peña’s compositions. The fact that the history of the discovery and conquest of the Americas has largely been documented by the conquerors does not escape the scrutiny of the artists. In his artist statement Chagoya writes,

History it is said is written by those who win wars. Yet, there is always the other’s history. In this context history is an ideological construction, more than a science. In my *Codex* book concept, I have decided that I am entitled to my own ideological construction. I tell the stories of cultural hybrids, of political collisions, of universal consequences.”³⁵

An example of this strategy is found in another untitled screen on page 12, in which Chagoya questions the history of the conquest of Mexico City by Hernan Cortés, using controversial historical figures such as La Malinche and a page from the *Codex Durán* (c. 1579). The fascinating story of the conquest of Tenochtitlan has been investigated and used as source material by many historians and artists over time. Cortés’ version tells that Moctezuma immediately abdicated his throne upon their first meeting because he believed Cortes was the original Aztec king prophesized to return

³³ Gomez-Peña, 5

³⁴ Ibid, p 4.

³⁵ Chagoya, 2

from the east.³⁶ However, as art historian Louis Burkhart points out, in the *Florentine Codex* (c. 1579) a Nahuatl version of Moctezuma's speech to Cortes can simply be read as a polite greeting, not as an abdication.³⁷ Burkhart explains that it is difficult to know what really happened because both sides cast the events in myth almost immediately; the survivors justified their defeat by blaming Moctezuma for being a weak leader, and the Spanish glorified and thereby legitimized Cortés' actions in order to justify the conquest.³⁸ Whatever the truth may be, the fact that the Spanish killed and abused the native population, razed Mesoamerican cities, and destroyed cultural objects such as codices, has left a scar on the sub-conscious of those of Mexican descent.

Chagoya refers to the violence of the conquest by appropriating a page from the *Codex Dúran* called "The Massacre of the Mexican Nobility," and ironically placing it next to a lithograph image of "La Noche Triste," the night that the Spanish fled the city of Tenochtitlan and were slaughtered in large numbers by the Aztecs. The author of the *Codex Durán*, Friar Diego Durán, is considered one of the earliest and most knowledgeable ethnographers of Aztec culture and he worked closely with native informants who had lived in Tenochtitlan before the conquest.³⁹ In the image from this codex, one of Cortes' captains, Pedro de Alvarado, orders the massacre of a group of Aztec nobles who had been dancing during a religious event.⁴⁰ The latter image of *La Noche Triste* was appropriated from an original lithograph by 19th century Mexican

³⁶ Louis M. Burkhart. "Meeting the Enemy," in *Invasion and Transformation: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on the Conquest of Mexico*. Ed. Rebecca Parker Brienen, and Margaret A. Jackson. 2008. Boulder: University Press of Colorado 2008, p 15.

³⁷ Ibid, 15

³⁸ Ibid, 15

³⁹ Diego Durán and Doris Heyden. 1994. *The History of the Indies of New Spain*. Civilization of the American Indian series, v. 210. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, p xxiii and xxi.

⁴⁰ Serge Gruzinski. 1992. *Painting the Conquest: the Mexican Indians and the European Renaissance*. Paris, France: Unesco.i, p 41.

archeologist Alfredo Chavero called “Yepeuqyaoyotl ycha ciuco ma,” (1891) meaning “now began the war in the house in which Moctezuma was.”⁴¹ In this print, the Spanish are besieged in the center of their chapel while it burns. On top Moctezuma tries to tell his people to stop the attack only to be stoned to death by them. But Chagoya makes one interesting and important change; originally Cortes, his soldiers and La Malinche ride horses, but in Chagoya’s version they are riding in a tank with Mickey Mouse. In much of the *Codex Espangliensis* images and textual references to the European conquest of the Americas is used to criticize western stereotypes of Mexicans and controversial political and economic policies that affect Mexico such as NAFTA. This strategy is evident in the use of the tank instead of horse as a symbol of western power and imperialism. Chagoya also often uses Mickey Mouse in his larger work, as a symbol of American pop and corporate culture.⁴²

The presence of La Malinche is another important element. One of twenty slaves given to Cortés by Mayans, she worked as his interpreter and became his sexual partner, eventually bearing a child. Historically Mexicans have viewed her as a treacherous woman who sold out her own people. To be a “malinche” is to be a “person who sells out to foreign interest and value.”⁴³ Chicano playwright Luis Valdez depicted her as such in his play “The Conquest of Mexico” (1971). Octavio Paz on the other hand, has called

⁴¹ Alfredo Chavero. “Yepeuqyaoyotl ycha ciuco ma,” (1891). http://content.wsulibs.wsu.edu/cdm-all/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/chavero&CISOPTR=14&CISOBX=1&REC=1. Accessed March 22, 2010.

⁴² Patricia Hickson. “Borderlandia Unbound: An abbreviated Guide to the Visual Anthropology of Enrique Chagoya,” in *Enrique Chagoya: Borderlandia*, Chagoya, Enrique. Des Moines: Des Moines Art Center (2007), p 13.

⁴³ Rolando Romero and Amanda Nolacea Harris. 2005. *Feminism, Nation and Myth: La Malinche*. Houston, Tex: Arte Público Press, p 140.

Mexicans “hijos de la chingada [children of the violated],⁴⁴” in his book *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, referring to a common thought that La Malinche is the mother of the Mestizo culture.⁴⁵ He says,

Doña Marina [another name for La Malinche] becomes a figure representing the Indian women who were fascinated, violated, or seduced by the Spaniards. A small boy will not forgive his mother if she abandons him to search for his father, the Mexican people have not forgiven Malinche for her betrayal.⁴⁶

Over time La Malinche has also been defended as a woman who should not have been expected to feel any loyalty to the Aztecs who enslaved her. Chicana feminists quickly adopted La Malinche as the mother of Mestizo culture and as one of the first Mexican feminists. In her essay “La Malinche, Feminist Prototype,” Cordelia Candelaria described La Malinche as having characteristics that were exemplary for Chicana feminists “such as intelligence, initiative, adaptability and leadership,” and, according to Candelaria, Malinche “defied traditional social expectations of a woman’s role.”⁴⁷ Thus La Malinche is an appropriate icon to incorporate into a politically charged book such as the *Codex Espangliensis*. Not only is she the “beginning of the Mestizo nation,” but she also represents a mysterious and controversial piece of the conquest.⁴⁸ Her story and position in history is similar to that of Moctezuma, who has often been blamed for the success of the Europeans in destroying the Aztec culture.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ “Chingada” comes from the root verb “chingar” which is the colloquial verb for “to have sex.” Chingar is not a gentle verb and generally carries a negative or dirty tone, thus “Chingada” is a derogatory word used to describe a woman, roughly translating to “slut.”

⁴⁵ Ramon A Gutierrez, “Community, Patriarchy, and Individualism: The Politics of Chicano History and the Dream of Equality,” *American Quarterly*, Vol 45, No 1, (March 1993) p 51.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 52. Translation by Gutierrez.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ For an example of arguments in Moctezuma’s defense, see Susan Gillespie. “Blaming Moctezuma,” in *Invasion and Transformation* ed. Rebecca P. Brien and Margaret A. Jackson. Boulder: University Press of Colorado (2008).

In another composition, (fig. 4), Chagoya and Gomez-Peña more directly criticize contemporary U.S. policy toward Mexico and the third world, using the conquest as a metaphor. Called “Auctioning the New World,” it was written to be spoken aloud as part of a performance in which Gomez-Peña walks around a map of the United States and Mexico. Gomez-Peña begins with a poetic rumination on the timing of the conquest and then starts the auction, saying

Querrido [dear] waspano, waspito, waspero, waspback, Señorrida Nalgosajona [white woman]⁵⁰, Turista Cultura [cultural tourist], Clepto-Mexican impresario [businessman], Discrubidor de Nuevos Mundos [discoverer of new worlds], we got everything you ever wished to possess... Who said 200?... Who said 300?... Who said 500?...”

He then goes on to sell his wares, including “Pre Columbian condoms in three sizes... The original skull of baby Moctezuna... [and] 3-D photos of the secret sexual life of Christopher Cojelón” [likes to have sex].⁵¹ Later on Gomez-Peña addresses the economic and environmental exploitation experienced by Mexico and the “Third World:”

(I point at audience members) You, him, you, tú [you]. You are on top of the world, at least, on top of the third world. And it feels good... (I pause and then walk into Mexico). Interested in safe investments sin [without] silly environmental restrictions? Land titles from Brazil? Virginal oil wells in Tabasco? Nuclear maquiladoras⁵² in Tecate?... [text obscured] dollars a month, cook, chauffer, lover included!⁵³

⁵⁰ “Nalgosajona” is a play on words between the words “nalgas” and “anglosajon.” “Nalgas” literally means Gluteus maximus,” and “anglosajon” means “anglosaxon.”

⁵¹ Gomez-Peña, 10. The author is referring to Christopher Columbus, but the last name is a play on words between “Colón,” which is Columbus’s last name in Spanish, and “cojer” which means “to get” but in slang also means “to have sex.” By mixing those words, essentially Gomez-Peña is saying the Columbus likes to engage in a lot of sex.

⁵² Maquiladoras are factories in Mexico along the border that import parts to assemble and then re-export the final product under favorable tariffs. The growth of these factories was spurred by Mexico’s Border Industrialization Program that began in 1965 after the U.S. closed its temporary work programs leaving thousands of Mexicans unemployed. Maquiladoras have been criticized for their dangerous conditions, low wages, and lack of benefits for employees, yet they are the only source of employment in many areas along the border. For more information see Robert Huesca, “They are the Experts: A Workers Agenda for Social Change in Mexico’s Maquiladoras.” *Canadian Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, vol 31, issue 62 (July 2006): p 131.

⁵³ Gomez-Peña, 10.

The images that accompany this text include a page from the *Codex Borbonicus* in which the gods Tlaloc and Chalchiuhtlicue rest in their sanctuary on top of a mountain, and an image of Superman flying out of an engraving by Theodore De Bry, in which the Spanish burn and lynch indigenous people.⁵⁴ The page from the *Codex Borbonicus*, called the “Sixteenth Month Celebration,” depicts the Atemoztli or “Falling Water” celebrations of rain and fertility. Chagoya must have been thinking of the myth of the riches of the New World when he chose this image. Early on in the exploration of the Americas, the New World was commonly believed to be a kind of Eden, a utopia of riches filled with gold and having fertile ground for planting.

In this screen, these gods look on as Superman flies out of De Bry’s engraving. This engraving comes from De Bry’s edition of *A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies* (1552), by Bartolomé de las Casas. Las Casas was a priest who lived in the colonies and witnessed horrific abuses of the indigenous population. The publication of his book into several different European languages created the “Black Legend” of Spanish colonial policy, and provided propaganda material for other countries who were trying to claim land in the New World.⁵⁵ In this particular image, the Spaniards have locked a group of natives in a burning house and hang a native princess. The image of Superman, like Mickey Mouse, is another reference to western imperialism, as well as a criticism of the “First” world’s tendency to at once rescue and exploit the “Third” world.

⁵⁴ According to Serg Gruzinski this is a colonial period codex whose date of origination is unknown. Gruzinski, 229.

⁵⁵ Ralph A. Austin, “Human Rights,” in *The Encyclopedia of Western Colonialism Since 1450*, Online Edition. Thomas Benjamin, ed. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA (2007). Available through the University of Miami Richter Library Databases and Indexes Online, history section, provided by Gale Group. http://www.library.miami.edu/search/eresources/makeSubjectGuide.php?subject_id=History. Accessed April 5 2010.

Flemish Engraver and publisher, Theodore De Bry built his business on his book series *America*, which included reports from early settlers such as Thomas Hariot, and engravings of images of the indigenous plants, animals and people.⁵⁶ He modeled most of his engravings in the first three volumes after sixteenth century artists Jaques Le Moyne and John White, each of whom had been present in North America as part of attempts to settle the land.⁵⁷ De Bry travel accounts became so well-known that many European artists began to model their drawings of indigenous Americans after his engravings, eventually creating a homogenized “type” that served to represent the indigenous American in many later representations. This type, beginning with the De Bry style, included idealized physical features reminiscent of Renaissance figures, mannered gestures and expressions and a standardized iconography that included the clubs, bows and arrows and feathered skirts or headdresses, (fig. 5). Often allegorical figures representing the New World also included references to cannibalism, like scalps and decapitated human heads. This standardized Indian type was depicted in books, maps, broadsheets and even costumes, becoming the way Europeans visualized the indigenous peoples of the New World.⁵⁸ However over time representations of the New World plants, animals and people strayed further and further from the ones that John White depicted in the 1580s, which have been said to be the most ethnographically accurate, (fig. 6).⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Paul Hulton, “America 1585: The Complete Drawings of John White.” The University of North Carolina Press and British Museum Publications, p 13.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁵⁸ See Suzanne Boorsch, “America in Festival Presentations,” in *First Images of America, The Impact of the New World on the Old*, ed. Fredi Chiappelli, Michael J.B. Allen and Robert L. Benson. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976, 513

⁵⁹ Hulton.

Embodying this indigenous type, Gomez-Peña's voice is often that of the stereotypical Mexican, such as the 1970s b-movie character "Cheech," played by American actor Cheech Marin. Gomez-Peña accentuates his Mexican accent in the text using repetitive r's and s's to emulate the popular western cliché of the Mexican accent. His use of Spanglish also adds to this voice, since the most common portrayals of Mexicans in the U.S. utilize this "language." For example, in one of his texts he says,

Gunshots in the Pacific Distance. (I do verbal shots). The dead end of western civilization. (I do verbal shots). The end of a million Mexican journeys, and then the northeast, phoenix, Denver, Chicago, the big smoke...bigg sssmoke, biggg Chi-caggo, si...cago [I defecate⁶⁰]...in Spanish still...Ca-gan-do sobre la costra cultural de Gringolandia [defecating all over the cultural scab of Gringoland], sin [without] translation...sin [without] papers...

Just as Cheech Marin embodied a stereotype in order to satirize it and mock those who believed in it, Gomez-Peña becomes the Spanglish-speaking, dirty-mouthed, illegal alien, crossing borders and ironically re-invading America.

The concept of the border is also important to the artists' expression of Mestizo/Chicano identity and for the artists' political concerns. One way Gomez-Peña expresses this is through the use of maps in *El Existentialist Mojado* and *Auctioning the New World*. Early on in the exploration and conquest of the Americas, maps played an important role in laying claim to and separating territory. Maps such as the famous *Codfish Map*, by Herman Moll, often contained images of the natives and creatures from the New World and highlighted its riches and resources, such gold, sugar cane and Brazil wood. After De Bry began publishing his engravings, standard native types drawn from his work were often seen in map cartouches and illustrations representing the Americas (fig 7). However, more importantly, cartography represented a new way for Europeans to

⁶⁰ "Cagar" is a verb for "defecate," however it is a colloquial term that carries a dirty or negative connotation.

think about the world; it was no longer a mysterious infinite space, but a finite globe and its mapping meant it could be possessed and conquered.⁶¹ Therefore, maps as a tool of conquest are an ideal focal point for Gomez-Peña's scrutiny. By using maps in his piece he asks the viewer to think more deeply about territory, borders, and the notion of possession.

Subversion of the "tools of colonization" is often at work in the *Codex Espangliensis*, from the use of a printing press in its creation, to the appearance of Catholic symbols and references to cartography. Yet the most effective subversion of all is how Rice chose to compose Gomez-Peña's text alongside Chagoya's images. Gomez-Peña uses the western alphabet to call into question the validity of Spain's colonial conquest and the supposed positive consequences of westernization.⁶² Aligned with this alphabet are Chagoya's images, which recall a time when Mesoamericans could write without letters, using pictures that were often acted out when spoken.⁶³ The dialectic in the *Codex Espangliensis* between word and image questions modes of communication, interpretation and creative expression. In a way, Gomez-Peña's stereotypical language purposely boxes the reader in, disallowing alternate voices or meanings, so that the reader finds more freedom in the imagery. Gomez Peña undermines Europe's claim to ultimate superiority by contrasting rigid text with fluid imagery, revealing a more intuitive and freer mode of communication.⁶⁴

The *Codex Espangliensis* is a complicated work of art that asks the viewer to delve deep into symbolism, history, and culture. Down to its very construction, amatl

⁶¹ David Woodward, "Maps and the Rationalization of Geographic Space." *Circa 1492* (Washington National Gallery of Art: 1991), 85.

⁶² Baca, 74, 76.

⁶³ Ibid, 69.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

paper reinforced with Japanese shintengujo paper, this book is emblematic of the hybridity and diversity of Mestizo, Chicano and ultimately American culture. And in the form of a codex, it is both homage to Mexico's indigenous heritage and reminder of the conquest. When considered carefully the images and text work in harmony, revealing the untold stories of the conquest of the New World, and the struggles of its people afterwards. But what is also incredible about this book is that although it requires a patient analysis in order to find its many hidden meanings, it also appeals to a more surface reading. Rice has found a way to compose Chagoya's visual style alongside Gomez-Peña's verbal play that creates an engaging interaction with the viewer even at a glance. With its primarily black, red, and white color scheme, collages, and alternative text layouts, the book initially looks like part comic book and part propaganda piece combined into one. It is ironic then that unlike classic propaganda, which limits freedom of thought and works to hide or manipulate the truth, the intent of these three artists is to allow for freedom of interpretation, revealing an alternate and perhaps more factual truth.

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Fig 1 *Codex Espangliensis*
Reproduced from the edition held in Special Collections at the University of Miami



Fig 2 First screen of "El Existentialist Mojado"
Reproduced from the edition held in Special Collections at the University of Miami



Fig 3 Second screen of "El Existentialist Mojado"
Reproduced from the edition held in Special Collections at the University of Miami



Fig 4 "Auctioning the New World"
Reproduced from the edition held in Special Collections at the University of Miami



Fig 5 An image from Theodore De Bry's *America*
Reproduced from the edition of *America* held in Special Collections at the University of
Miami

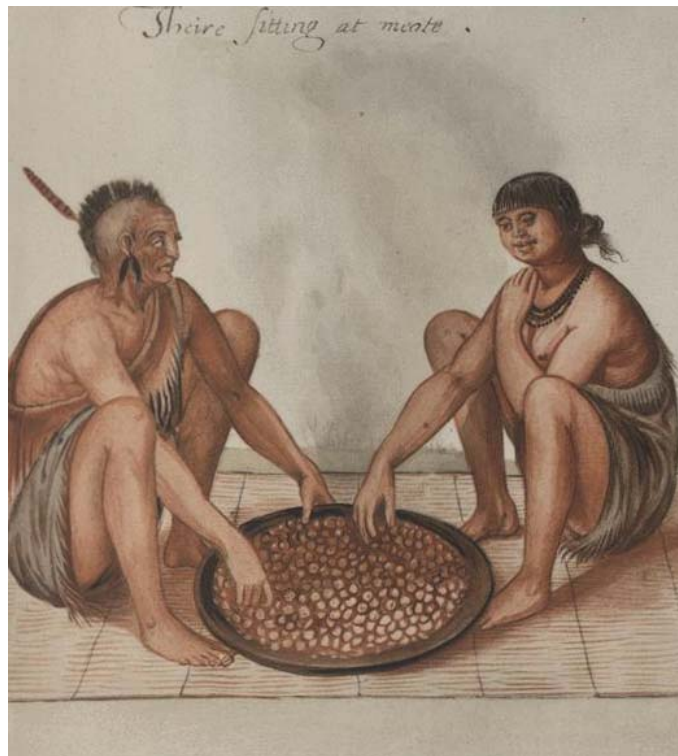


Fig 6 A watercolor by John White
Reproduced from the edition of *America* held in Special Collections at the University of
Miami



Fig 7 Detail of the cartouche from Herman Moll's Codfish Map (1718)
 Reproduced from the map held in Special Collections at the University of Miami