



❖ WRITING THE BOOK ON LATINO POPULAR CULTURE ❖

Once a year, America's streets teem with youngsters masquerading as ghastly ghouls, green-faced ogres, and witches in pointy black hats—their sights set on capturing as many treats as possible. ❖ Aside from counting and carefully dividing their tasty loot into mini-mountains, most trick-or-treaters don't give much thought to the holiday. And even fewer understand its origins—or its connection to Latin American culture. ❖ Scholars at Arizona State University are working to change all that. Assisted by colleagues from around the country, professors at ASU's Department of Chicana and Chicano Studies (CCS) compiled, wrote, and edited a brand new encyclopedia. The end result is *The Encyclopedia of Latina and Latino Popular Culture in the United States*. The publication will highlight North America's Latina/Latino cultural, ethnic, racial, and historical diversity. ❖

BY MELISSA CRYTZER FRY

One of the entries is focused on *Día de los Muertos*. Some Americans mistakenly tie the day to Halloween, probably because of its calendar proximity to All Saints Day and to Dia de los Muertos. ❖ The United States is a nation of many cultures. Americans borrow bits and pieces of cultural traditions to form a series of their own hybrid celebrations. Halloween is a prime example. The day blends traditions from Celtic, Roman, Christian, Irish, and Aztec cultures. ❖ The Mexican celebration of Dia de los Muertos is different. November 2 is a holy day set aside to remember and pray for the souls of deceased family members. The Encyclopedia reports that these Mexican celebrations include the construction of altars laden with pictures of the departed, calaveras (skeletons), candy, and ritual foods. The food is prepared in tribute to the deceased. Skeletons and candy. Sound familiar?

INSTALLATION BY BRENDA RASCÓN, JOHN C. PHILLIPS PHOTO

Cordelia Candelaria says that creating an encyclopedia is much like preparing a holiday feast. "You know it will all come together and everyone will be delighted in the end," says the executive editor of *The Encyclopedia of Latina and Latino Popular Culture*. But—much like a dinner party—the making of an encyclopedia requires a great deal of pre-planning, strategy, and teamwork. "You may get tired along the way, but you're doing it because you want to," Candelaria says.

Once the need for a Latino culture reference tool was clearly articulated and accepted by Greenwood Publishing Group, the team of ASU scholars faced a formidable task. They had to create an inclusive multi-volume encyclopedia with limited pages, hundreds of contributors, and a tight deadline.

Planning: The team took inventory of the tools, people, time, and financial assets needed to begin the project. When they determined that the proper resources were available, they assessed the publisher's proposal, and narrowed the project's scope to fit the audience.

Choosing Participants: A board of distinguished advisors with expertise in Latino culture was selected from around the world. Their cultural knowledge proved invaluable in reviewing content, writing regional entries, and fact-checking. A call for entries was targeted to scholars across the globe. Students who participated in two Chicana/o Studies studio workshop courses also served as writers and editors. They all earned publication credit.

Guidelines and Standards: Although it was tempting to include every culturally-relevant entry imaginable, daily team

meetings were scheduled to discuss the who, what, and why of entries. The writing and editing of the volumes required a regimented series of checks and balances to ensure accuracy. Once entries were assigned, each section editor reviewed submissions, then forwarded them along to the other editors for final approval.

Building the Book: With thousands of submissions, multiple drafts, and staggered deadlines, the project required strict attention to detail. Editors used Excel spreadsheets to track all entries in-progress, their due dates, and categories. *Melissa Crytzer Fry*



ANONYMOUS SAN JUAQUIN TILCAJETE, THREE DAY OF THE DEAD SKELETONS, C. 1970S, OAXACA, CARVED WOOD, COLLECTION OF THE ASU ART MUSEUM; GIFT OF MARY AND EDWIN SCHEIER



CORDELIA CANDELARIA

ARTURO ALDAMA

PETER GARCIA

ALMA ALVAREZ-SMITH

JOHN C. PHILLIPS PHOTOS

A Peek Inside

SPECIFIC CATEGORIES WITHIN THE THREE-VOLUME *ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LATINA AND LATINO POPULAR CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES* INCLUDE CRAFTS AND TECHNOLOGY, FOLKLORE, LITERATURE, LABOR, ACTORS AND PERFORMERS, GEOGRAPHY AND PLACE, SPORTS, FILMS, AND POLITICS.

IN POP CULTURE:

DESI ARNAZ Born in 1917 in Santiago, Cuba. Immigrated with his family to Miami, Florida when he was 16. Co-star of *I Love Lucy*, with wife and actress Lucille Ball and major innovator of television film techniques.

ROBERTO CLEMENTE Born in 1934 in Puerto Rico. In 1966, National League baseball's MVP and first Latino to win the National League batting championship. Died in a plane crash delivering supplies to earthquake victims in Nicaragua.

CAMERON DIAZ Born in 1972 in San Diego, California. The daughter of a Cuban-American father and an Anglo-German mother. Popular Films: *The Mask, My Best Friend's Wedding, There's Something About Mary*.

IN POLITICS:

DENNIS CHAVEZ Born in the New Mexico Territory in 1888. First native-born Hispanic elected to Congress in 1931. Champion for minorities, chairman of the Public Works Committee and the Defense Appropriations Subcommittee, and trailblazer of public service until his death in 1962.

The first definition for **TORTILLA** in most Spanish language dictionaries describes an egg dish cooked with potatoes, seafood, and other ingredients and served in pie wedge slices. The familiar thin, flat, round bread tortilla of the Americas is the cousin of this pie-like food of Spain. The name is borrowed from Spanish and native South American Indian customs. Early Spaniards who conquered Mexico in the 1500s named the flat corn bread a tortilla when it was filled with other ingredients. The name stuck.



The South American **MOLCAJETE** is a utensil found in many homes and restaurants in the United States. From the Nahuatl language, the word is derived from *molli*, meaning salsa, and *caxitl*, meaning bowl. The molcajete is a mortar made of volcanic stone. A bowl with three short legs, it is used with a pestle or mano, made of the same stone material. The molcajete is used to pound or grind spices, chile, and other herbs.

“It will meet the needs of classroom teachers, students, policy makers, journalists, health professionals, law enforcement, and social service professionals on a daily basis.”



The population of Hispanic groups in North America is growing rapidly. The Year 2000 U.S. Census reported a 25 percent growth among combined Hispanic groups. They now total 35 million and constitute the largest ethnoracial minority group in North America.

But Cordelia Candelaria says the Hispanic population is still misunderstood, even among Hispanics. Candelaria is the chair of CCS and a professor of English and American literature. She is one of three ASU professors who spearheaded the mammoth Encyclopedia project, along with specialist co-editors Arturo Aldama and Peter Garcia. The editors say that the growing size of the Hispanic population in the United States, coupled with the scarcity of current Latino culture information, makes the Encyclopedia a necessity.

Teachers interact with Mexican-American students on a daily basis. Physicians treat Latino patients. Journalists cover Mexican culture. Businesses want to reach Hispanic consumers. All of these groups would likely benefit from an easy-to-use reference tool like the Encyclopedia.

Candelaria is executive editor of the project. She says that several local teachers and policy makers requested copies of the manuscript before it was sent to press. The three-volume Encyclopedia is being published by Greenwood Publishing Group. It is expected to be available in 2004.

Scholars at CCS field dozens of queries each week. Callers want to know the definitions of Spanish concepts. Others want to know about the origins of Mexican traditions—like *Cinco de Mayo*. Still others seek information about Hispanic founding fathers of Arizona towns or the birthplaces of famous Latinos. The questions pour in.

“We are specialists in Latina/Latino studies,” Candelaria says. “The Encyclopedia’s editors are frequently called upon to serve as human dictionaries, atlases, and all-purpose almanacs of Hispanic information. Our work is a needed reference tool. It will meet the needs of classroom teachers, students, policy makers, journalists, health professionals, law enforcement, and social service professionals on a daily basis.”

Arturo Aldama thinks that the Encyclopedia also serves Latino children.

“A great deal of curricular material about Latino culture taught in today’s schools is stereotypical at best,” he says. “As a result, many Latino children don’t have a sense of cultural self-esteem or cultural historical awareness.” Aldama thinks the Encyclopedia will help bridge this gap. It will provide factual cultural information to teachers who reach both Latino and non-Latino students.

The ASU scholars contributed and managed entries within their own areas of specialization. They are responsible for nearly 1,000 alphabetical entries. They also supervised more than 125 contributing writers from across the nation and other countries.

Candelaria was responsible for sports, literature, and general topics.

Aldama is an associate professor of ethnic studies. He wrote and edited entries about media arts, including film, television, and theater.

Peter Garcia is a musician and assistant professor of ethnomusicology. He was responsible for sections on music, folklore, and religion.

ASU students participating in studio workshops also contributed as members of focus groups, researchers, fact checkers, and contributing writers.

Alma Alvarez-Smith also played a key role in the project. The ASU doctoral student coordinated project logistics. She tracked submissions, revised drafts, and maintained communication between team members.

Team members completed the majority of work within their own fields of study. However, they admit to having learned a great deal about Latino and Pan-Latino culture outside their specialties.

Aldama was surprised when his research uncovered the racially-charged comic book culture of the 1920s. Latinos were routinely portrayed as dangerous villains who were often slain in the cartoons. During that period, comic books were a main form of entertainment, he says. They were very influential in shaping cultural attitudes toward Latinos.

While Garcia didn’t discover any startling new information, he did expand his knowledge base as a result of the project’s Pan-Latino focus. Garcia studies Latin American music and its cultural implications. “But when it comes to Cuban, Puerto Rican and South American folklore, I relied heavily upon colleagues and our expert advisory board.”

Garcia emphasized the linkages of the project to the long historical tradition of encyclopedia development. That tradition stretches back to the French Enlightenment period of the 18th century. He says the editors also link the history to the learned traditions of native Mesoamerican record-keeping through storytelling, art, and architecture.

The completed work is the first-ever comprehensive Pan-Latino popular culture encyclopedia. The reference tool includes Chicano, Mexican-American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, related Caribbean, and South American cultural forms. All have contributed to the fabric of American society.

Condensing so much critically important information into just three volumes proved to be the biggest challenge. “We could have produced a 10-volume encyclopedia and still not cover everything,” says Aldama.

Team members echo that sentiment. Some have begun research projects that are direct spin-offs of initial Encyclopedia research. Garcia and Candelaria’s next joint effort is a video documentary on mariachi music—a topic that, when researched for the Encyclopedia, revealed a scant body of existing information.

The Encyclopedia is just one of a series of CCS research projects designed to illuminate Latino American culture and its impact on everyday life in the United States.

THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF LATINA AND LATINO POPULAR CULTURE IN THE UNITED STATES IS SUPPORTED BY GREENWOOD PUBLISHING GROUP AND AN ANONYMOUS DONOR. FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT CORDELIA CANDELARIA, PH.D., DEPARTMENT OF CHICANA AND CHICANO STUDIES, 489.965.9426. SEND E-MAIL TO CCSGREEN@ASU.EDU