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### Sombreros, Margaritas, and Racist Stereotypes

America is a country that is founded by immigrants, hence there is the common trend of adopting traditions from different cultures. To celebrate the holidays of other cultures has positive attributes, it connects people and it opens minds to learn about cultural backgrounds different than their own. However, by adopting these traditions there is a line that gets distorted and what can be a good way of recognizing a culture can easily turn into cultural appropriation or racism. Misconceptions of traditions such as Cinco de Mayo have created a racist holiday in America. Those who celebrate it do not know what “el cinco de mayo” stands for, its history, and the cultural significance it has in Mexico. Ignorance has turned this ‘Mexican Holiday’ into an excuse to get drunk of Margaritas, wear sombreros, and eat nachos, all of which are not even Mexican.

The difference in how Americans celebrate Cinco de Mayo versus Mexicans is very apparent. Americans believe Cinco de Mayo is the equivalent to the “Fourth of July”. This is not even close. Cinco de Mayo is not Mexican independence day, that would be September 16. For the majority of Mexicans, aside from those who are from Puebla, “El Cinco de Mayo” is truly just another date; it truly is just May 5th.

Something historical did happen on May 5th in Mexico, but its importance to Mexico is rather irrelevant. In 1862 the American Civil War was hurting the French economy. The North was blocking the South from selling cotton to other countries. France was hurt due to the lack of cotton, hence Napoleon III made the decision to send troops to Mexico, specifically the town of Puebla. Mexico owed France \$2 million mexican pesos due to the Guerra de Reforma 1957, the equivalent to around \$230 million mexican pesos today. In terms of american dollars, today it

would be equal to around \$12 million. The war was caused when the liberals went against conservatives. The liberals wanted to prevent the constitution from reinstating the Mexican military and from giving the church privileges that they had previously lost with 'las leyes de Reforma.' The liberals won this war and Benito Juarez became the first president of Mexico in 1961.

Napoleon III used this debt as an excuse to send troops to Mexico, stating that their mission was to collect the debt from the Mexican government. However, historians have speculated that his real motive was to set up a military base in Mexico to support the South and put an end to the Civil War, that would reinstate the cotton market and improve the French economy. Napoleon's III plans fail when his troops encountered the 'Ejercito de Oriente', a Mexican 'military' group.

In Mexico, "El Cinco de Mayo" is called 'La Batalla de Puebla', which translates to Puebla's battle. Puebla is the only place in Mexico that actually celebrates this holiday, due to their victory against the French. This victory is important to Puebla because Mexico had all the odds of losing. France sent 6 thousand troops, well equipped and trained, to Mexico. Conversely, Mexico only had 2 thousand men fighting, they were a mix of troops and indigenous people who lacked training, their weapons were limited to knives, and lead by general Zaragoza, who had no military experience. Yet, Mexico was victorious and defeated the French. Puebla celebrates this by having military parades or recreating the battle. For the rest of Mexico it's just another date in the calendar.

This battle influenced the outcome of the American Civil War because the defeat of the French aided the North to be the winning side and prevented the South from gaining power. If

“El Cinco de Mayo” was celebrated due to this reasoning, then the holiday should be about the influential outcome Mexico had in the American Civil War, and the holiday would not be considered cultural appropriation or racism.

Cultural appropriation is what makes this holiday racist. According to the Cambridge Dictionary, cultural appropriation is “the act of taking or using things from a culture that is not your own, especially without showing that you understand or respect this culture,” this is done without permission or consent of those who belong to the original culture. Those who culturally appropriate are the ones that belong to the dominant culture, hence it becomes “exploitative because it robs minority groups of the credit they deserve,” according to Fordham University law professor Susan Scafidi. What is harmful about cultural appropriation is that those appropriating the culture have not endured the obstacles and disadvantages that come from being part of that culture. Therefore, they have no right over celebrating cultural traditions of that culture.

In the case of Cinco de Mayo which is culturally appropriated in the USA, white people are the main contributors for cultural appropriation. They only pick and choose what they want from a culture, and turn it into whatever fits their agenda. This often results in a celebration that lacks respect, meaning, and cultural value. If Americans wish to continue to celebrate Cinco de Mayo it should be for the right reasons. The majority of Americans are unaware of the history and use Cinco de Mayo to get drunk and use Mexican culture as a costume wearing sombreros, fake mustaches, and some even put on a fake accent.

The celebration of “El Cinco de Mayo” started as a way for Mexican-American laborers to reclaim their culture. It raised popularity in the Chicano Civil Rights Movement. The activists wanted to achieve unity since they felt discriminated and rejected by both Mexico and the USA.

According to CNN, “activist in the 1960s claimed [“El Cinco de Mayo”] as a symbol of ethnic identity.”

Quickly, capitalism found a way to market the event and aim towards Latino consumers. The reason why “El Cinco de Mayo” continues to be such a big holiday in America is due to consumerism. Cinco de Mayo makes a lot of profit for those businesses that cater towards it. The commercialization of this holiday started in 1989, when Mexican beer ad campaigns marketed the event. After that Cinco de Mayo became full of racial stereotypes and its true meaning was lost. College students became a big market for this event and fully degraded the true meaning behind it. Theme college parties with insensitive names such as “Cinco de Drinko” have been going on for decades. Mexicans themselves avoid the holiday, and would rather not address its existence at all. According to the New York Times in 2013 “Americans bought more than \$600 million worth of beer for Cinco de Mayo, more than for the Super Bowl or St. Patrick’s Day.”

The American holiday fosters offensive racist stereotypes. To highlight the extent, President Donald Trump made a tweet saying “Happy #CincoDeMayo! The best taco bowls are made in Trump Tower Grill. I love Hispanics!” which included a picture of him eating the mentioned taco bowl. For starters, taco bowls don’t exist in Mexico; second, he used the celebration tweet as a way to advertise his own restaurant; third, “El Cinco de Mayo” is a holiday which appropriates Mexican culture, hence the word hispanics is wrongly used; fourth, Trump culturally appropriates this holiday yet keeps rigorously fighting to build the wall. This is a clear showcase of Cinco de Mayo being purely consumerist.

To put it into perspective and show the American equivalency, journalist Raul A. Reyes said in his opinion column for CNN, “just consider how it would strike us if we saw another country marking the Battle of Gettysburg with binge drinking and Uncle Sam hats.” Celebrating Cinco de Mayo is okay as long as it is being celebrated respectfully for the right reasons. To fix this racist stereotype problem, Americans need to get educated and celebrate the contribution Mexico made towards the Civil War. Stop the cultural appropriation. Stop using the culture as a joke wearing sombreros, drinking margaritas, and shaking maracas. Stop using Cinco de Mayo as a sloppy drunk ‘fiesta’. Start acknowledging it as La batalla de Puebla and understand the date’s actual historical significance.

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