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### Visual Analysis of The Chicano Mind (1973)

In this essay, I will analyze the mural *The Chicano Mind* (1973) painted by Guillermo Martinez. The purpose of this essay is to take a closer look at the visual messages and conceptualize the components of the mural. I will interpret the impact of its visual elements and the relevance to me and the students of Pasadena City College who view this mural.

One of the major elements in the mural is the depiction of a man bound by the hands and forcibly stretched. This part of the mural is the focal point, and it's the first thing the viewer sees when ascending or descending the stairs it was placed near. When I first viewed the mural, it drew my eyes to the several sets of hands aligned with the man in the middle. However, if you take a closer look at the main set of hands, his right hand is being pierced by a nail. The other hands could represent that all Chicanos are also experiencing the metaphoric shackles binding them. I interpreted this small detail as an allusion to Catholicism; in the Bible, Jesus was nailed to the cross for his crucifixion as a result of his "treason" and "blasphemy." During the time of the Chicano Movement, they were being deported, discriminated against, segregated, and murdered for their race and culture. The allusion to the Latino/Hispanic figure being nailed in the mural could symbolize the alienation Chicanos experienced from their oppressors. Being forced to hide their culture and traditions because they were deemed "too foreign" for gabachos.

Another important element in the mural is an Aztec calendar in the background. This symbolizes the connection of Chicanos to their ancestors and correlates with the Catholic symbol

of the man being nailed to the cross. The Catholic symbolism alludes to the Aztecas and Maya who were colonized, essentially being forced to give up their cultural and religious practices to be converted to Catholicism. Although our ancestors experienced such travesties, Catholicism has become a vital part of Latino/Hispanic culture. People place so much hope and solace in Catholic figures, and the shift to Catholicism has now become the norm. Latinos and Hispanics alike should know the origins of our central religious beliefs because although now deemed the positive and standard to us, it comes with so much history. It is vital in our culture to honor our ancestors and never forget our roots, which is why it is a component of the mural.

In addition to the man in the middle, there are several other heads in the mural, which may represent important people who contributed to the Chicano Movement. Although the heads seemed ambiguous, I recognized two faces out of the faces of what seemed like farmers, obreros, soldiers, Aztecas, and Mayas. One of the faces, I believe, is Miguel Hidalgo, a Catholic priest also known as “The Father of Mexican Independence” for his part in rallying the people with the speech, “The Grito de Dolores,” which called for the end of Spanish colonial rule. He was a symbol of freedom in the eyes of many, which may be the reason he was added to this mural. Another face I recognize is Caesar Chavez, who was known as a civil rights activist for laborers who rallied workers to protest and boycott the working conditions of farm workers. Chaves led so many to spark change and create a better future for Chicanos. Although I do not recognize the other faces in the mural, they are nonetheless essential and were included to represent the pioneers that have led us to this point in history.

Drawing attention to two intertwining elements in this mural is a coat of arms above the shackled man, which features details from the Mexican flag. Additionally, below him, it reads, “VIVA LA RAZA.” The purpose of the coat of arms is to pay homage to the Mexican-American

warriors who aided the United States during the Vietnam War. Adding the coat of arms, also known as the Escudo Mexicano, was to pay tribute to those who lost their lives fighting for a country that, in return, was oppressing them. It is a symbol that represents the resilience and warrior blood Chicanos possess from their ancestors. The coat of arms on the mural depicts the Aztec legend of an eagle and a snake, which was a significant symbol in the establishment of Mexico City. This legend represents the establishment of Mexicans, marking the end of their search for a home and the creation of a community. This sign of unity is used to embellish the mural with the same message for Chicanos who have dispersed from their ancestral homeland. Moving onto the words “VIVA LA RAZA,” these words mean “Long Live the Race,” a representation of the fight against racism. This phrase is still commonly used among many Latinos because it had such a profound impact. The phrase was a cry against discrimination and racism against Chicanos, Latinos, and Hispanics. The erasure of Chicanos in the U.S. was what the Chicano Movement was fighting against; Viva La Raza was a call for the preservation of their culture, tradition, and their people. The use of these symbols on the mural represents the connection between Chicanos and their roots, how their roots are being washed away by racism against Mexicans in the United States.

Additionally, what stood out to me when I observed this mural was the use of colors. The color palette features darker colors with subtle hints of vibrant hues to accentuate specific details in the mural. The symbols and colors used in the mural billow outwards as if almost coming to life. The colors used in the stripes may be an allusion to the United States flag, given the use of white and red, with white stars positioned near the center of the mural. The way the flag is being portrayed makes it seem like the man in the middle is being swallowed up by the flag, a metaphor for Chicanos being cast away in the United States.

Above all, the Mural was made by a Latino during a very vital time in the United States for Mexican Americans. This mural was created during the Chicano Movement and expresses a Latino's attempt to convey a message. With all the components of the mural added together, it conveys a message to viewers that, despite oppression, Chicanos can make a change, just as the Mexican pioneers of the world have made it a better place for many.

To conclude, the mural is situated in a high-traffic area, making it accessible to many students. Sometimes, when I have the time, I like to detour and walk by the mural and observe the complex colors and details of the faces. It is a vital piece of art that encapsulates the time it was created and the events that occurred during its creation. It serves as a reminder that we were built on the hard work and sacrifices of many people who came before us. The placement makes me hopeful that students will also be reminded of the founders of our freedom and civil rights. On any mundane day, they might walk down the stairs and glance at the vibrant colors that captivate them enough to take a moment and delve into the rich history of the mural. Viva La Raza.