

'La Raza' Exhibit at Autry Shows 60's Equal Rights Issues Still Relevant

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Walking through the “La Raza” display that just opened at the Autry Museum of the American West, the photos could be a recent DACA or immigration reform march. Mostly, it is the clothes and cars that reveal the 50-year gap. The ‘La Raza’ exhibit at Autry shows very clearly that the 1960’s equal rights issues and social activism are still relevant.

The exhibition explores photojournalism’s take on the social and political concerns of the era’s Chicano Rights Movement. It is presented at the Autry as part of the Pacific Standard Time LA/LA panoply of Latino art. It also celebrates the 50th anniversary of the founding of Los Angeles-based bilingual periodical La Raza (which translates to “the race”). Between 1967 and 1977, the publication participated in and captured for posterity the struggle for Chicano social justice as it unfolded across Southern California and beyond.

The Autry presentation includes about 200 powerful and compelling images in black and white that convey the emotions, turmoil, and resilience of Mexican Americans (called Chicanos during the period) striving for better treatment in schools, by police, etc. The photos are part of an archive of over 25,000 images recently gifted to UCLA's Chicano Studies Research Center, which co-produced the exhibit.

Current Relevance

Other movements for civil and legal rights as well as social equality during the time period, like the African-American efforts, inspired the Chicano Movement. "We are proud to share this powerful, first-hand account of an important yet under-represented movement in the Civil Rights era," noted Autry President and CEO W. Richard West, Jr.

Many photos show people of all ages walking down a long dusty road waving banners and placards. They walked to Sacramento to lobby for improved conditions for farm workers, better schools, and an end to police brutality. The images are jarring in their current relevancy.

West noted that the mission of the Autry is to bring "together the stories of all peoples of the American West, connecting the past with the present to inspire our shared future." Pointing out that the exhibit was actually planned several years ago before the current political maelstrom, he added, "It shows that nothing is truly frozen in time. We look at history and make it instructive in the language of today."

Exhibit Sections

The Autry presentation is divided into six main sections:

- The exhibition opens, appropriately with "Introduction: The Photographers and the Newspaper."
- It segues to "Action, Agency, & Movement," featuring photos of marchers in the streets juxtaposed shots of combat-ready policemen. It also shows how photography conveyed the revolutionary ideas and documented events such as massive school walkouts in 1968, the 30,000 participants in the Chicano Moratorium of August 29, 1970, and the 1,000 mile "La Marcha de la Reconquista."
- "Portraits of a Community" reflects the multigenerational participation with images of seniors, adults of all ages, and children in various roles. They reflect the thick social ties underlying the desire for political change.
- Shots of riot-gear-clad police as undercover cops fill "The Other and the State" grouping as La Raza photographers turned lenses on the L.A. Police Department demanding accountability for their actions.
- "The Body" displays the forceful tactics employed. It includes images of systemic, abusive behavior towards Chicanos during the period providing evidence to the movement's claims.
- "Signs of the Times" shows how protest signs, poster, graffiti, and other messages visibility displayed functioned as a messaging mechanism, broadcasting Chicano demands to those reading or watching the news.

While the exhibit only features 200 framed images on its walls, the Autry incorporates an interactive touchscreen table to enable visitors to explore over 12,000 images from the La Raza archive. The digitized images included in the La Raza exhibit at

