

# The Day of the Dead Holiday in exile.

## More relevant than ever

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The Day of the Dead Festival, to be held in late October and early November, acquires today a tremendous importance for the communities of Mexican origin established in the United States. This festival, is a contribution of Mexico to Universal cultural wealth, appreciated and celebrated by open - minded people who accept to share different cultural traditions than the ones they are used to. Mexicans not only come to take and receive. Mexican migration creates wealth with their work, not only economic but also cultural wealth. The Day of the Dead Holiday is one of the most beautiful and most important examples of this cultural richness that the Mexican presence has brought the United States.

Observation and preservation of the Day of the Dead Holiday has taken place in the United States for a long time, going from the home to schools, museums, and community centers. Thus, this festival has gradually become an instrument of social change which is necessary to maintain and promote as a way to counteract discrimination and racist attitudes against the Mexican community living in migratory exile as a result of the rise of Donald Trump to the forefront of politics in the United States. The presence, character and relevance of the population of Mexican origin, whether undocumented migrants, "dreamers", legal residents and even citizens has been challenged, attacked, and put on alert as the Trump administration has been very clear in denying many of the rights and aspirations won through social struggle and political bargaining, threatening that these rights are not guaranteed, and creating hysteria, distrust and loss of faith in the aspirations and eligibility of Mexicans to the process of assimilation and naturalization known as the "melting pot".

But if they say, "Mexican is not afraid of death," much less afraid of Trump. We will continue to celebrate the dead, hoping that the living can coexist with each other.

The dates of the celebration of the Days of the Dead are:

OCTOBER 31 - Install the offering and wait for the little dead ones (little angels)

NOVEMBER 1 - The dead arriving.

NOVEMBER 2 - The day they leave.

The Day of the Dead Holiday is a celebration of Mexican culture with universal character, it's a showcase of the best of Mexican traditions, it is a bursting of crafts, music, food, yearnings and feelings. This festival makes possible the coexistence of what "was," with what still "is"; of who is not here anymore, with the "here I bring what you used to like"

A result of the historic merging of pre-Hispanic traditions and indigenous beliefs with elements of Catholic religion and cosmology, the Day of the Dead has been celebrated in Mexico for a long time. With origins in the pre-Hispanic beliefs, the celebration of the dead was later modified with the adaptation of European medieval traditions that were imposed through conquest, colonization, and religious conversion of the indigenous population.

Fast forward several centuries later, we find out that the celebration of the dead has spread beyond geographical boundaries to take root especially in those places where communities of Mexican origin they have established, but not exclusively, and that is because this celebration appeals to the universality of death as a common denominator in which all cultures and ethnicities meet at the end of the road. We all go there, and there we will all see each other. Death as the great equalizer.

# La muerte igualadora

La muerte nos iguala a todos, sin distinción entre ricos y pobres, jóvenes y viejos, clérigos y seglares. Lo podemos ver en la Danza general de la Muerte (s. XV)



Michel Wolgemut. (1493)  
*Crónica de Nuremberg. Danza macabra*

Esos reyes poderosos  
que vemos por escrituras  
ya pasadas,  
con casos tristes, llorosos  
fueron sus buenas venturas  
trastornadas;  
así que no hay cosa fuerte,  
que a papas y emperadores  
y prelados,  
así los trata la Muerte  
como a los pobres pastores  
de ganados.

Jorge Manrique

Without a doubt, the celebrations that take place in Mexico, have an incomparable wealth. From the humblest ones made in the towns and places of great craft tradition, to the monumental celebrations that take place in art galleries, museums, and public squares, with special mention, of course, of the great metropolis: Mexico City.



In recognition of the importance of this celebration, the Days of the Dead have been officially considered in Mexico as an official holiday. Historically, traveling during those days requires a great deal of effort from people who observe the tradition and who try to reach their places of origin, to create their offering, “yje ofrenda”, and to visit the cemeteries where their loved ones are resting. The bus terminals, railways and roads are filled with travelers. But even when you cannot travel, the memory and the presence of those you wanted so much is recreated and maintained when your memory is honored with an offering, “the ofrenda”, no matter how small.



Over time, and as traditions are updated to the rhythm of contemporary modernity, the Days of the Dead is celebrated in new ways but no less creative than the traditional ones, with the result that the celebration has become very strong, even though not so many years ago people would complain that the tradition of the Day of the Dead was being lost to the Halloween celebration. But that seems no longer to be the case because the celebration has been maintained, takes place and is recreated in many forms and activities that appeal to all ages. People dress up, and dress in great detail. Festivals, music concerts, theater shows, “ofrenda” building contests, bicycle races, and of course the culinary demonstrations offered to the dead and the living.



And again, it is of great importance to mention the fact that the celebration of Day of the Dead has been adopted in the United States, and other countries, by individuals and organizations with an open mind, who are sensitive to the *raison d'être* of this celebration and who usually are involved in the arts, education, and humanities, give great support to the maintenance of this tradition. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the festival of “Dia de los Muertos” received in 2008 by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization) an appointment as Intangible Heritage of Humanity.

That's why the Mexican communities have found in the celebration of the Day of the Dead a binding motif and pride with which a spiritual link is maintained with the family and cultural roots that left behind, way South of the border. Often these celebrations take place with the support of Mexican cultural institutions,

but the most important force behind these festivities is always the community, who organizes and creates the possibility of keeping that tradition, even if one is found, as the Mixteca Song says, "far away from the land where I was born." The Feast of the Days of the Dead, of ancient historical origins is so relevant today, perhaps more than ever, for me a perfect illustration of that famous proclamation of José Vasconcelos: "through my race the spirit will speak" (1925 c.).