

Cinco de Mayo

A Celebration of Hispanic Culture

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Battalion Special Section

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Holiday celebrates Hispanic culture

Historic battle gives focus to national pride

By SUZANNE CALDERON
Of The Battalion Staff

Folkloric dancers will spin and swirl their vibrant sequined skirts to mariachi music across cities in the United States and Mexico on May 5 as the Mexican holiday Cinco de Mayo is celebrated.

Cinco de Mayo is a celebration of Mexican heritage, commemorating the May 5, 1862, battle in Puebla,

"Throughout much of the 19th century, there were a lot of imperialistic attitudes toward Mexico... so a victory over the foreign invader, as with *Cinco de Mayo*, was quite meaningful."

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associate professor
of history

Mexico, where a Mexican army, under the direction of General Zaragoza defeated an invading French army.

Militarily, the battle was not that important, said Dr. Henry Schmidt, associate professor of history and expert on Mexican history.

The importance of the Cinco de Mayo battle is that it was a victory over a foreign invader, he said.

Schmidt explained that Mexico

was in a weakened position in the 19th century, and even after gaining its independence in 1821, Mexico continued to be invaded by foreign powers.

"Throughout much of the 19th century, there were a lot of imperialistic attitudes toward Mexico and some military movements, so a victory over the foreign invader, as with *Cinco de Mayo*, was quite meaningful," Schmidt said.

The victory over the French was important psychologically because it helped the growth of Mexican nationalism, he said. It was important for the Mexican people to feel unified against foreign powers in order to form a national identity, Schmidt said.

"This really is what *Cinco de Mayo* is all about," he said. "The actual victory in 1862 is not so much what it was about, but it's in the growth of Mexican nationalism and how this was one moment in which Mexico stood strong to the foreigner."

Cinco de Mayo has become a celebration of "mexicanness" or *mexicanidad* and is a way the Mexicans have created national pride and identity, he said.

"It's when Mexican-Americans celebrate the Mexican part of their heritage," he said.

Cinco de Mayo is one of the major celebrations of the calendar year in Mexico and is also celebrated in the United States.

Schmidt said *Cinco de Mayo* is celebrated in various degrees of intensity in different areas of Mexico and the United States.



Photo by Penny DeLosSantos
Celebrating *Cinco de Mayo* at the Commons, Carolina Sarabia, junior political science major, strikes the piñata in hopes of reaching the goodies on April 27. The celebration was sponsored by the Department of Student Affairs and various committees.

"Something like this is celebrated in different ways in Chicago, Houston, San Diego or even throughout Mexico," he said.

The tradition of *Cinco de Mayo* is stronger or more developed in some areas than others, he said. How each community chooses to celebrate the

holiday depends on their particular customs, Schmidt said.

"Each community has a different approach to celebrating *Cinco de Mayo*, but they generally feature various aspects of traditional Mexican culture, like mariachi music, a parade, a charro exhibition and a *gran*

baile (grand dance)," he said.

Texas A&M's *Cinco de Mayo* celebration, "A Taste of *Cinco de Mayo*," on April 27 at Sbis and Commons Dining Hall featured a traditional Mexican menu, speakers on *Cinco de Mayo* as well as traditional entertainment.

Un Feriado del Orgullo

Translated by
CHRISTINA DE LEON
Special to The Battalion

En todos los Estados Unidos y México, los bailarines folklóricos danzarán al compás de la música mariachi en celebración del feriado, el *Cinco de Mayo*.

Cinco de Mayo es una celebración de la cultura mexicana que conmemora la batalla librada en Puebla, México el 5 de mayo de 1862, el día en que el ejército del General Zaragoza logró vencer una invasión francesa.

Militarmente, la batalla no fue tan significativa, dijo Dr. Henry Schmidt, profesor asociado de historia y un experto de la historia mexicana.

La importancia de la batalla del *Cinco de Mayo* es que fue una victoria ante un invasor extranjero, dijo Schmidt.

Schmidt explicó que en el siglo 19, México se hallaba débil políticamente y aun después de haber logrado su independencia en 1821, todavía continuaba siendo invadida por potencias extranjeras.

"Por el siglo 19, muchas actitudes imperialistas se veían en contra de México y entonces la victoria del *Cinco de Mayo* fue tan significativa," Schmidt dijo.

La victoria sobre los franceses fue psicológicamente importante porque contribuyó al crecimiento del nacionalismo mexicano, dijo el profesor. Era importante para los mexicanos sentirse unificados ante potencias extranjeras, y así formar una identidad.

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Regent sees mission as student advocate



By MIKE AVILA
Special to the Battalion

When Raul B. Fernandez was appointed to the Texas A&M Board of Regents last year, no one was more surprised than he was.

"When you think about it, I've been preparing for this job all my life," Fernandez said. "Coming into the job was easy. I was familiar with the administrators and had contacts in the Association of Former Students."

Fernandez, of San Antonio, is a builder and real estate investor. He graduated from Texas A&M with a civil engineering degree in 1959. He began his construction career working for H.B. Zachry. Fernandez served as president

of the Association of Former Students in 1980, and now is a member of the Corps of Cadets Development Council.

As a regent, Fernandez views himself as a policymaker, with an emphasis on student advocacy.

"I found there was an inaccurate perception of regents. People thought they were untouchable, and that's not correct," Fernandez said. "Without students, we wouldn't need expanded programs, correct facilities or compensated faculty."

During his first year as a regent, Fernandez has served on the Executive Committee, the Planning and Building Committee and the Audit Committee. He also will chair the Name Selection Committee.

English-only runs into setbacks; court, citizens oppose legislation

By CHRIS VAUGHN
Of The Battalion Staff

After succeeding in wooing high visibility fundraisers and persuading voters in 17 states to adopt an "official" language in a matter of a few years, the English-only movement has begun to run into its first setbacks.

The English-only movement's most telling setback was when a federal district court in Arizona recently ruled that the Arizona amendment was unconstitutional. The court ruled it was "overbroad" and in violation of the Constitution's free-speech guarantees.

But the founder of U.S. English, an English-only organization founded in the early 1980s, didn't help the movement's image when a memo leaked out saying Whites were losing their power to the "more fertile" Hispanics.

Before the legal setback in Arizona, the English-only movement was at a peak of success. Thousands joined either the U.S. English or En-

glish First organizations, including Walter Cronkite and Gore Vidal, who lent their names to the organizations.

The two major English-only organizations helped pass laws in 17 states, naming English as the "official" language, including California, Colorado, and Arizona. Although Texas and New Mexico have resisted English-only legislation, 20 other states are currently legislating it.

The Arizona constitutional amendment was declared unconstitutional by the federal court because it was too restrictive. Arizona's law, which almost completely prohibited foreign languages from being used in government business, was the most restrictive of all the nation's laws.

Most of the other states' laws are much more simple. For example, Indiana's law states, "The English language is adopted as the official language of the state of Indiana."

The Arizona law was brought to court by a bilingual state insurance claims manager, who claimed that speaking Spanish to clients would be

illegal under the law.

Texas A&M entered the English-only versus bilingualism fray recently when the Committee for the Awareness of Mexican American Culture held a debate.

Dr. Herman Garcia, an associate professor of bilingual education at A&M and one of the debaters, said Hispanics will continue to resist the movement toward an official language.

"Yes, we want English to be strong in the minds and tongues of our children," Garcia said. "But not at the expense of being ashamed of who they are, which is what English-only does."

Garcia called the English-only movement "nativist, restrictive, exclusionary, and racist."

Louis Zaeske, Class of '64 and a strong advocate for English as the official language, said the government should conduct its affairs solely through English because it unites the people.

"It is the duty of the government created by the people to promote those things that unite

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Curanderos heal with herbs, belief

A&M anthropologist explains Mexican folklore, folk medicine

By ANGELA TREVINO
Special to the Battalion

Take a pinch of European folklore, spice it up with American Indian tales, stir in aspects of Roman Catholicism and what happens? You get a special blend of ethnic lore and customs that flavor Mexican folklore and folk beliefs.

Curandismo, a popular belief of folk healers, is based on elements of these cultures, Dr. Tom Green, associate professor of anthropology, said.

Curanderos, or folk healers, base their theories about disease causes and cures heavily in Roman Catholicism, Green said. Some curanderos are also appealed to as folk saints, Green said.

The curanderos heal common Mexican folk illnesses, Green said.

"Ailments often described by patients are *mal ojo*, or evil eye, and *susto*, fright sickness," he said.

Mal ojo supposedly occurs when an object that has been admired goes untouched, Green said.

It is customary to touch any object of admiration, such as a cute baby,

he said.

If someone suspects he or she is affected by *mal ojo*, Green said their best bet is to consult a curandero.

The curandero will wash the patient with herbs, make the sign of a cross over the patient with a raw egg, crack it, and leave it under the patient's bed, he said. The egg should become cooked overnight and take

But folk remedies can be helpful, especially if people believe they're going to help them, he said.

In addition to reciting holy words and actions, Green said, folk remedies include herbal cures, which must be prepared according to the curandero's directions.

He said some herbal cures include teas, such as spearmint (*hierba-*

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the shape of whatever influence was in the patient.

The patient awakens feeling better, Green said, which can be attributed to either the power of the curandero or the power of suggestion.

"Just because we call a cure folk, it doesn't necessarily mean that it's baloney," he said.

Folk cures are generally based on different assumptions than those of academic medicine, Green said.

buena), and saffron (*asafran*), which is used to relieve fevers.

"Not all (cures) are necessarily magical or religious in nature," Green said. "Some of it is faith healing or magical, some of it is strictly herbal or botanical, and some of it is a combination of the two elements."

Another aspect of Mexican folklore and culture is the abundance of folk narratives told as true stories.

Told time and time again, the stories contain specific themes, but are localized according to the storyteller, Green said.

The Devil in the Dancehall is a common tale in Mexican folklore, he said. The story begins at a local dance hall, when a handsome stranger chooses a girl and charms her into dancing with him. She has a great time until she looks down at his feet, screams "¡Sus pies, sus pies!" and faints.

The stranger disappears inside the restroom, leaving a strong smell of sulphur. After noticing the man's chicken feet (or goat's hooves), the girl realized she was dancing with the devil.

Green said this story may symbolize the conflict between a youthful longing for freedom and the obedience sought by parents.

He said a similar tale is found in other cultures, such as the Native American contemporary tale of Deer Woman in which the sex roles are reversed and a young man is lured away from others by Deer Woman. He is later found trampled

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