



About the “El Movimiento de la Serpiente”

This was a collaborative research project about non-human and human migrations. It was created in a collaborative rhizomatic process focused on Mesoamerican cultures and ecosystems.

It was made, designed, painted, stitched, cut, folded by many others, including you.

Text by:

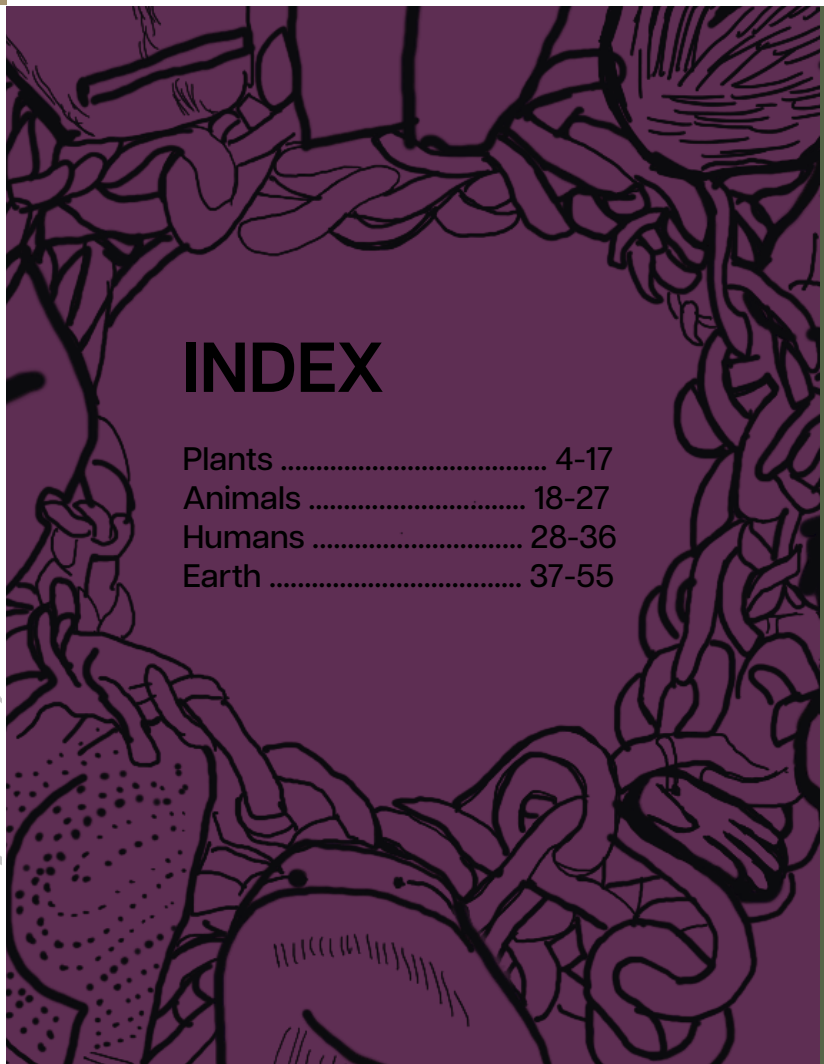
- Beatriz Cortez
- Douglas Carranza
- Karla Aguiñiga
- Tanya Aguiñiga
- Natalie Godinez

Design by:

Karla Aguiñiga

Drawings by:

Natalie Godinez & Tanya Aguiñiga



PLANTS



Corn

Approximately 9,000 years ago, Teocintl or Teocintle was nurtured into becoming the most sacred plant for Mesoamerican cultures: corn.

This collaboration between humans and teocintle also gave birth to deep forms of spirituality for which corn is central. In ancient sacred stories, humans were created from corn.



Mayan creation mythology. Illustrated here is grandmother Xmucaneí and grandfather Ixpiyakok. Xmucaneí is grinding corn to create the first humans.



Samples collected by Dr. Ariel Álvarez, in Erongarícuaro, Michoacán; Photo: J. M. Hernández.

Beans

The combination of corn and beans was central to the diet that enabled the emergence of great Mesoamerican civilizations. The combination of corn and beans allowed ancient Mesoamerican peoples to nurture their bodies and to absorb protein. Corn is a tall grass and beans grow in a vine, together they are stronger, they grow together in corn fields called Milpas.



One beautiful garden that teaches us so much about ancient forms of agriculture is located in Joya de Cerén, northwest of San Salvador, El Salvador. In this place, a volcanic eruption froze in time a regular day in the life of a small Mayan village, and it preserved their fields and gardens. This is how we learned that ancient plants were grown together in diversified gardens and these included great varieties.



Joya de Cerén Archaeological Site image copyright of © Colimac

Squash

Squash was domesticated before corn and beans. Similar to beans, squash grow on vines, squash grow on the Mesoamerican polycultural cropping system, which means multiple crops are grown together on the same land. They are not only nourishing for plants, they also regenerate the soil as they grow together. This idea of polycultural cropping spread through the Americas by 1,000 AD, a practice that has continued to flourish beyond the Americas.

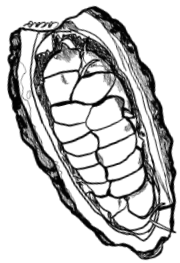


Codex Mendoza, fol 63r (portion). Priest performing the nightly tozhuatlil ritual with a silt-drum, while another priest carries an incense ladle. Image by A. Both

Squashes, pumpkins and gourds are dried and hollowed to make musical instruments such as flutes, shakers, trumpets, and drums; in addition to functional domestic objects like bowls and cups. Gourd trumpets and flutes played an important role in Mayan ceremonial life, many examples of these have been found in deposits.

Cacao

The Olmec domesticated cacao around the year 1900 BCE. It is believed that fermented alcoholic drink made from cacao produced in visions. It was consumed in rituals during ancient times by the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, Toltec, and Incas, among other groups.



Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonies began planting cacao using Indigenous and African slave labor. Slowly, European chocolate production became more and more specialized as cacao was ground and refined and mixed with butter and sugar. Starting with the early 20th-century, chocolate has been advertised as an important element of European culture.



Advertisement of Peter's Swiss milk chocolate in The West China Missionary News (vol. XI, no. 1, January 1909). Chentu, Szechwan Province.



Amaranth is one of the oldest grains in the Americas. It arose in what is now southern Mexico and Central America, approximately in 2000 B.C.E. In ancient times it was a sacred grain, especially among the Aztecs. In addition to its spiritual dimension, amaranth has a combination of carbohydrates, protein, and minerals, making it important in the nourishing of bodies and the development of culture. When the Spanish arrived, Amaranth was prohibited for these same reasons, but it survives and it continues to cross borders.



Amaranth

Potatoes



Potatoes are a tuber and grow under the ground. A symbol of French, Dutch or Irish cultures, potatoes are not native to Europe. They migrated there in the 1500s as a result of European colonization of the Americas. Originally, potatoes were grown in the Andes in ancient times. According to the Potato International Center, which preserves potatoes' biodiversity, over 4,000 varieties of potatoes continue to exist in the Andes. Potatoes have migrated all over the world. Today, potatoes are grown as far as China, the United States, Ukraine, India. However, the greatest variety of potatoes continues to exist in Peru. Potatoes were the first vegetable grown in space, at the International Space Station.

Avocado

Avocados are a source of vitamins and minerals as well as non-saturated fat. They originated in Mesoamerica, particularly what is now Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras as well as in central Mexico. Avocados were also grown thousands of years ago in some parts of South America. Their name derives from the nahuatl word *ahuacatl*. In Mexico and Central America it is known as *aguacate*, in South America it is known as *palta*, a word derived from the Quechua.



Avocados were brought from what is now El Salvador and Guatemala to California by the United Fruit Company and other efforts to bring crops for profit to California. Avocados are the state fruit of California today. Today, almost half of the avocados produced in the world are grown in the mountains of Michoacán. The production of avocados as a monocrop in this region has greatly impacted the environment, producing deforestation in the mountains of Michoacán, reducing biodiversity, polluting the environment with pesticides, etc.

Avocado exports produce millions of dollars annually, and as a result, production and trade has been linked to organized crime.

Other natural remedies from ancient knowledge

- **Verbena** for postpartum aches
- **Lanthen** for burns and delivering mothers
- **Salvia Santa** for headaches
- **Apasote** for amoebas
- **Estivia** for diabetes
- **Orosus** for cough
- **Inojo** for gastritis
- **Guanaba** for diuretics
- **Jilomacho** for kidneys



Calendula
Calendula calms your nervous system

Ceiba Trees

A ceiba is a large tree that is able to store water, forming a belly in its trunk. It has large thorns throughout its entire body. It is lush and beautiful and its seed pods shed cotton-like fibers that can be used for pillows and blankets. The root system of a ceiba tree is also large and it expands deep into the earth. For this reason, since ancient times people in



Mesoamerica believe that a ceiba is a portal to the Underworld and a way to reach the sky. A Ceiba is a sacred tree for the Maya and other ancient Mesoamerican cultures, and there are representations of a ceiba tree in ancient ceramic, in stone, and in codices.

In contemporary times, ceiba trees grow all over Los Angeles, they were brought here from places as far south as Brazil and also from Central America and southern Mexico.

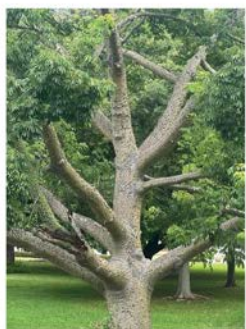


Photo by Beatriz Cortez

Romero

Romero alleviates stomach aches, helps the body relax, and might prevent hair loss.

Romero, Calendula and Maria Luisa at Huerto Kozijay, Chimaltenango Photo: Douglas Carranza



Maria Luisa or Yerba Luisa helps to relax. It can be stored for tea for up to two years.

Maria Luisa

Photo: Douglas Carranza



Healing Plants and Rituals

In the experience of the original people of Abya Yala mother earth, animals, and plants have nurtured everyone. Plants have provided healing and powers of resistance in difficult times. Knowing about curing and restoring our bodies is an experience of thousands of days, and multiple communities sharing the precious understanding of how to restore life. The practice of community healing requires the comprehension of the healing properties of many plants.

Medicinal plants can be found in community gardens or huertos in the original communities of Central America and Mexico, but also in immigrant and working class communities in the city of Los Angeles.

Recipes are not static; they can be modified depending on the need.



Altamisa & Nahuatl Pipil Altar (Nahuatlco, El Salvador) Photo: Douglas Carranza

Oranges

Oranges were brought from India and other regions of the world to California as part of a program called Agricultural Explorers created by the US Department of Agriculture. Historic orange plantations still exist in the San Fernando Valley as well as in the San Gabriel Valley today.

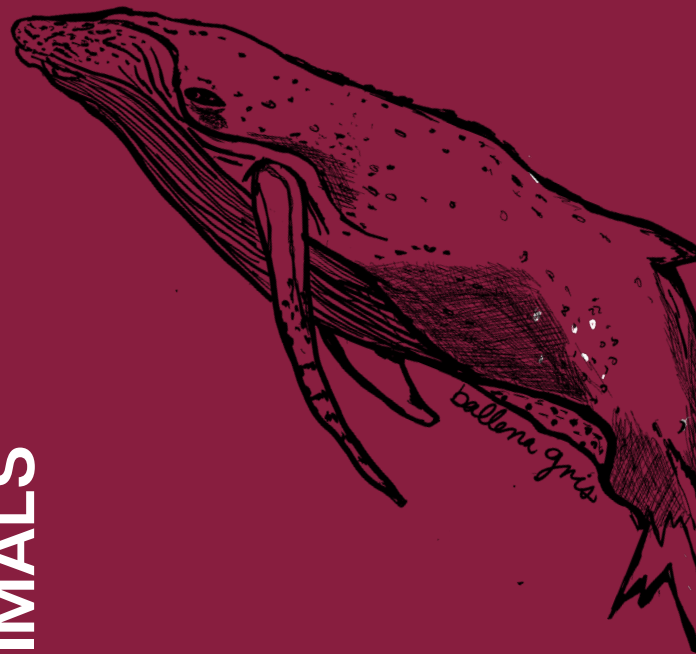


Dates

Dates are native to the Persian Gulf area of the middle east, where they have been cultivated for at least 6000 years, longer than many other fruit crops. Date plantations were established in the Coachella, Indio, La Quinta, and 29 Palms as part of an effort to bring new crops to California for profit. 95% of all date harvesting in the United States happens in the Coachella Valley in the Southern California desert.



ANIMALS

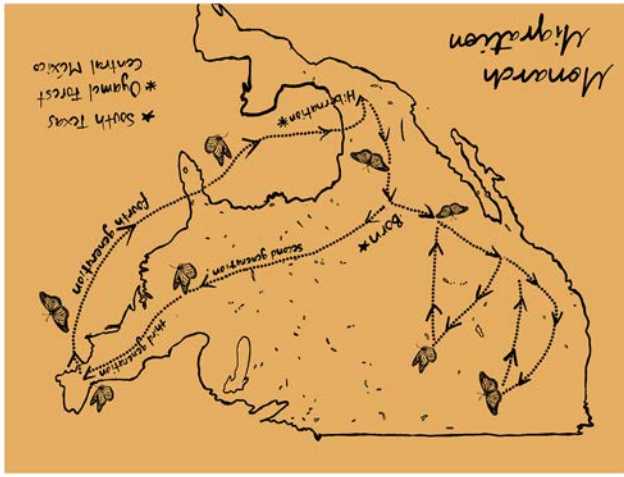


One example is the tea that Maya peoples use to alleviate some of the symptoms of Covid 19 both in their places of origin and also in their places of migration. One example of this tea contains the following ingredients:

- *Orusus, eucalyptus, ginger, garlic, lemongrass and mint*
- *Orusus, eucalypto, jengibre, ajo, zacate limón y menta*

Medicinal plants and remedies have migrated along with people across many borders. They have also comforted migrants in different environments and have become medicinal remedies for illnesses that did not exist in ancient times.

Covid 19



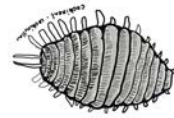
Perhaps one of the most emblematic symbols of migration, a particular type of monarch butterflies migrate yearly from a central and southern Mexico, from the mountains in Michoacán to different locations in the north. Along the way, the butterflies lay eggs for the next generation, but how do they know where to go? Do they have cultural transgenerational memories that they carry with them?

Monarch Butterflies



Teotitlan del Valle, Zapotec cochineal farm
Image by Tanya Aguiliga

Cochineal surrounds us in Southwest, with few people knowing its history. It is still an important source of red for people of the Americas. The Navajo Nation and Mesosamerican ceremonial and sacred life.



Cochineal

Before the Spanish conquest of the Americas, a true red pigment did not exist in Europe. The Spanish desire to control and export red, helped fuel the colonization of the Americas as cochineal became as valuable as silver. The Spanish tried to hide the insect's true origin by calling it "la grana cochinita," in Spanish, which translates to "cochineal the grain."

Owls

Unlike in Western traditions, where owls are a symbol of death, owls in Mesoamerica carry positive meanings of life and survival. They are considered messengers with a deep connection to the spiritual world.

Owls migrate in different patterns. They cross borders all the way from the Arctic across Canada and the United States and into Mexico and Central America. Some types of owls migrate searching for warmer weather. Other types of owls have periodic migrations, every 3 to 4 years. They migrate further south for reasons unknown.

Owls often migrate at night.



Mayan ceramic owl figure from Chiapas

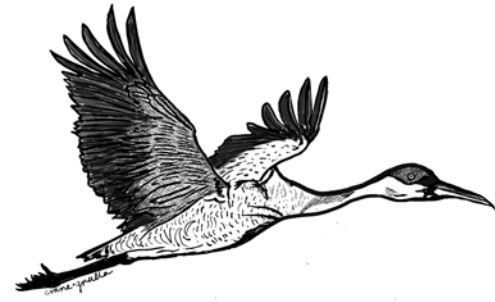


Teocolote (owl) from Codex Borgia

Cranes

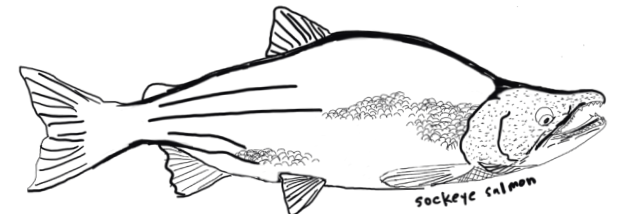
Each year cranes from all over the Americas gather in Nebraska. It takes more than one generation to make the journey there. The information and coordinates for the journey are transmitted from generation to generation, making visible the role of intergenerational memory in the process of their migration.

Cranes fly over borders, seeking their place of gathering with thousands of other cranes on the banks of the rivers in Nebraska.



Salmon

The annual reproduction of Salmon's is celebrated in many indigenous Pacific Northwest cultures. Salmon undertake long and strenuous journeys during their migrations from freshwater to the ocean. Some salmon travel thousands of miles during their lifetime. Sockeye salmon from the Pacific Northwest might swim up to 4,000 miles round trip from the ocean to their spawning grounds. They navigate long distances to return to the exact stream or river where they were born to reproduce. This ability to find their way home is not completely understood but is believed to involve a combination of geomagnetic cues, sense of smell, and memory. After reproduction salmon often die, and their carcasses provide important nutrients to rivers ecosystem.



sockeye salmon



Jaguar

Jaguars played a multifaceted role in Mesoamerican culture, representing power, spirituality, and the interconnection between the natural and supernatural realms. Their presence was woven into the fabric of daily life, art, and religious practices, leaving a lasting legacy in the archaeological and historical record of the region.

In Mayan, Olmec and Aztec cultures, the jaguar was believed to have a strong connection to the underworld. It was seen as a guardian of the underworld and often depicted as a deity or spirit guide that could traverse between the realms of the living and the dead.



Ocoelil Cuauhtlicalli, Mexico
carved sculpture, 1250-1500 AC
Museo de Antropología, Mexico

Whales

Whales migrate in pods. They have vocal chords and it is believed that each pod has a certain type of language or form of communication. The song of the whale moves through the water forming networks of communication and long distance conversations as they travel south to north and north to south.

Whaling became a practice that could be defined as the genocide of the whales. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whales were killed in massive numbers in order to use their blubber to provide heat and to light up entire cities in Europe and the United States. During the industrial revolution whale oil became a common lubricant for machines. Whaling is now illegal in most countries around the world. Whales survived their genocide.



Remnants of beluga whales in the Arctic Circle. Photo by Beatriz Cortez.



It is believed that there is a whale of interspecies nature that sings at 52 hertz, outside hearing range for all other whales. This whale, also known as 52 Blue or 52, has been recorded traveling the oceans around the world. It is believed to be alone because no other whales can hear its call. To this day, no one has seen it or determined its migration patterns.



There is much that we can learn from monarch butterflies. Monarchs migrate north to different locations in the Eastern and mid-western United States, as well as southern parts of Canada. Each of these butterflies lives approximately 6 weeks and it takes three generations to make the trip north. The fourth generation lives much longer, up to 9 months, and travels over 3,000 miles south.

Other populations in the western and central parts of the United States and Canada migrate south to California for the winter. Have you seen them?

On November 16, 2009 three caterpillars were placed aboard spaceshuttle Atlantis and were sent to the International Space Station. The caterpillars were placed inside a "micro gravity butterfly habitat" and all three butterflies emerged on Dec 3 and 4, 2009. They had difficulties expanding their wings without the Earth's gravity, but two of them did.

The Maya

2000 BCE - the present

The Maya emerged around 500 BCE, it is possible that they emerged as a result of different groups coming together, including the Olmec migration. The Maya formed great civilizations organized in independent city states. The ancient Maya flourished in Mesoamerica all the way to the Yucatan Peninsula from the first millennium before our era to the 1500. The contemporary Maya continue to live in their regions of origins in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Belize, and to migrate.



Original photo by Juan Carlos Garcia, Wikimedia Commons. Modified.

The Maya developed a civilization that produced spiritually, a deep understanding of time, precise calendars, one of the most complex writing systems in the ancient world, as well as monumental forms of art and architecture.



Image: Anuska Sampedro, Getty Images

The city of Teotihuacan was the largest Mesoamerican state of its time. The city was planned, and there was a great migration to the urban center, at some point the population was 125,000. Many of the people who built the great city of Teotihuacan, the Teotihuacan style of art, and its culture migrated to other landscapes and impacted other cultures and art styles. The nahua moved to other parts of southern Mexico and to what is now Nicaragua, where they became the Nica- and Teotihuacan style of art and the impact of Teotihuacan in southern Mexico and the northern half of Central America). By the year 200 CE the people of Teotihuacan were trading with the Maya in sites today located in Guatemala, for instance Kaminaljuyu.

Teotihuacan

1000 BCE - 600 CE

The Olmec

2500 or 1800 BCE - 100 or 400 CE

Olmec people emerged (in what is now Veracruz and Tabasco) and moved from there to other places, especially to trade. The Olmec worked in large basalt stones and small jade and other precious stones but they also made wood carvings and worked in painting. Their most ephemeral paintings did not survive but some of their cave paintings did. Olmec ideas about the cosmos or about the underworld, the sacred nature of a jaguar, or the movement of mountains, as well as forms of art including facial features, carving stone stelae, making thrones and altars in stone, making headdresses in feathers and other precious materials, have been found in Teotihuacan, in Tenochtitlán (today Mexico city) and in



San Lorenzo Monument 1, an Olmec statue carved from basalt between 1200 and 900 B.C., being installed in front of the Seagram Building in Manhattan. The statue is now in the collection of the Xalapa Anthropology Museum in the state of Veracruz, Mexico. May 18, 1965. Credit: Eddie Hausner/The New Times

Maya art. The Olmec traveling ideas and forms of art are evidence of their migration. The Olmec had trade routes along the Pacific coast all the way to Chalchuapa, in what is now El Salvador, this is more than 500 miles away from the Olmec heartland.

Some of the Olmec monuments have also migrated, sometimes out of their context, sometimes against their will.

The Chorotega

800 CE

The Chorotega migrated south and settled in the Pacific coast of Nicaragua and what is now Costa Rica's northern province of Guanacaste.

The Chorotega had interactions with neighboring indigenous groups, such as the Pipil in El Salvador and the Nicarao in Nicaragua. They also had contact with other Mesoamerican cultures, including the Maya and the Aztec, through trade and cultural exchange networks.



Chorotega, Pot (Olla), c. 300 - 799 BCE. From the Minneapolis Art Institute Art of the Americas Collection



Chorotega, Figure, c. 300-799 CE. From the Minneapolis Art Institute Art of the Americas Collection

HUMANS

Lake Ilopango. Photo: Douglas Carranza



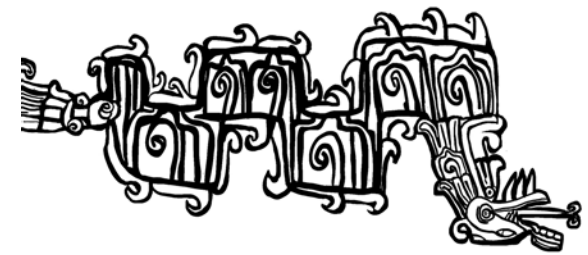
Approximately in the year 536 CE the Ilopango volcano erupted in what is now El Salvador. Its particles traveled for over 18 months, floating in the atmosphere, darkening the sun. They landed all over the planet, especially in the northern hemisphere. At the site of the volcano the cone collapsed into a caldera forming Lake Ilopango.

Volcanoes

All over the Americas there's numerous volcanoes sending particles of the underworld to the surface of the earth. Their names are many: Popocatepl, Cotopaxi, Ilimatepec, etc.

On the surface of the Earth, the San Andreas Fault crosses the US / Mexico border. Below the ground, great tectonic plates move as the San Andreas Fault forms the boundary between the Pacific and the North American plates. The Earth also moves following the movement of different plates further to the south. Since ancient times, in Mesoamerica, it was believed that a snake of massive proportions lived in the Underworld, under the ground, and that the mountains were the turns of its massive body. It was believed that the snake was in constant motion.

Earthquakes



African forced migrations

1521 - 1863

For the most part, Black migrations were not voluntary, they were forced and were a result of the enslavement of African peoples. While slavery was eliminated in other territories much earlier, in the United States, slavery was abolished in 1863 through the Emancipation Proclamation.

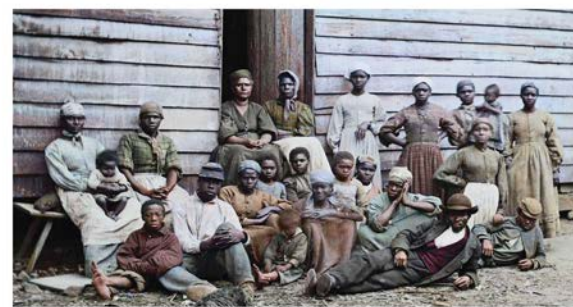


Image from Equal Justice Initiative

The Spaniards, Portuguese and French

1492 - 1821



Casta painting containing complete set of 16 casta combinations (racial classifications in Spanish colonies in the Americas). Oil on canvas, 148 cm x 104 cm (58 1/4 inches x 40 15/16 inches). Museo Nacional del Virreinato, Tepotzotlán, Mexico

The Europeans arrived with ideas about nobility and considered labor a sign of inferiority so they tried to enslave as many people as possible. They also brought ideas about purity of the blood, which created hierarchies and was the foundation of a system of racism that survives until present times all over Latin America and among immigrants in the United States. During this period the Europeans colonized, destroyed, and enslaved Indigenous peoples in the Americas in the name of Catholicism.

The Wind

The wind, often represented in ancient codices and in buildings as a void, a perforation in the shape of a large letter 'T'. It has been considered sacred for centuries. The wind is the representation of our breath, of the air we need to live, of the atmosphere. The wind is always on the move, and it carries with it particles of many lives and many temporalities.



Image by Karl Short



Plumed Serpent illustration from Dresden Codex

Hurricanes move periodically across the planet, crossing the Earth rotating a powerful storm around a calm center. In the Popol Vuh, the Earth was created by Hurricane and the Plumed Serpent.

The Toltec

550 CE or 100 BCE - 1100 CE

The Toltec emerged in what is now Central Mexico, they spoke Nahuatl and are the ancestors of the Mexica. They established the great city of Tula and practiced the cult of Quetzalcoatl. They migrated to the south east, impacting the ideas, art, and architecture of many sites, but especially Chichen Itza, where the stone warrior columns from Tula are replicated.



Columns in the form of Toltec warriors in Tula

The Mexica (Aztec)

1300 C.E. - 1523 - present

The Mexica migrated, according to their own story of creation, from Aztlan, which is believed to be located in today's state of Nayarit, in what is now Mexico. They established an empire, the great city of Tenochtitlán in central Mexico over lake Texcoco, and they grew an empire that expanded all over Mesoamerica. The Aztec traded, and labored in different territories in order to maintain this empire.



as Clinton's 1993 "Operation Hold the Line" implemented in El Paso, Texas and "Operation Gatekeeper" in 1994, thousands of migrants have died trying to cross the borders and via the Rio Grande at great human losses. State of Texas installed floating razor wire buoy systems to stop migrants in 2023. The buoy barrier covers 1,000 feet of the middle of the Rio Grande, with anchors in the riverbed which will increase the number of immigrant deaths along the Rio Grande.

Migrants in August 2023 walk by a string of buoys placed on the water along the Rio Grande border with Mexico in Eagle Pass, Texas. Photo by Suzanne Cordeiro / AFP via Getty Images



The Rio Grande / El Río Bravo

The Rio Grande is one of the longest rivers in the Americas and different communities have been nurtured by its fertile lands for over 12,000 years. Its waters are considered sacred for Native American peoples. They flow in lowlands and in high elevation mountain regions, and they flow long distances. The Rio Grande is the main water source for several states in what are now both Mexico and the United States. It has played an important role in trade and transportation, and in navigation. However, since the mid 19th century the Rio Grande (Rio Bravo) has become a marker for the US/ Mexico border, becoming a symbol of segregation, persecution, violence, and death. Thanks to anti-immigrant policies such

The US / Mexico border was created when Mexico and the United States were established as modern nations in 1821 and 1776. After the United States invaded Mexico, the border migrated from its original location to its current location in the year 1848 and it continues to move. However, this region is a region of transborder traditions, cultures and the border has not always existed.

The US/Mexico Border

Tecate border wall by Gina Clynne. AMBOS project documentation



The Colorado River / El Río Colorado

The Colorado River (El Río Colorado) is a 1450 mile long river that flows through seven US and two Mexican states. For at least 8000 years, the river basin has been home to Native Americans. Dammed by the US in 1935, the Colorado River ends in the US at the All American Canal, at the base of the US Mexico border wall in Calexico, CA. Running parallel to the border, the canal creates deadly rip-current conditions where over 500 migrants have perished upon entering the US. The All American Canal and its systems are the largest irrigation canals in the world, bringing water to farmlands in an area previously one of the driest on earth. The agricultural runoff from the canal feed into the Salton Sea, considered by most to be the largest environmental disaster in California history.

The Colorado River and its neighboring Rio Grande are currently considered one of the most controlled and disputed river systems in the world. After the 1944 treaty between the US and Mexico, the US allocated 1.5 million acre feet of water, or 9.1% to Mexico each year. In 2018, Constellation Brands, the third largest US Brewer threatened to use the majority of the allocated Mexican water for American's beer as they built a massive plant in the Mexican border city of Mexicali. Heavy protests over the years have led to the plants' planned relocation to the interior of Mexico in 2023-2026.

More recently, on June 22, 2023, The US Supreme Court ruled that the US did not have any treaty obligation to allocate Colorado River water rights to The Navajo Nation.

Civil wars and regional displacement of millions of people in Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras.

Military dictatorships in Central America forced the regional migration of entire communities to work in the Panama Canal, banana plantations and coffee farms. Nicaraguans, More than 20,000 members of the Nahuat and coffee farms. Nicaraguans, More communities were assassinated in El Salvador forcing the erasure and modification of the cultural identity of the original people.

1930 -1945

The leader of the Pipil people, Feliciano Ama, moments before he was hung from a tree in January 1932



The creation of the banana plantations (1880-1998) in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, relocated thousands of workers from the Caribbean and modified the future workforce in the Central American and the Caribbean.

1880-1998

The XX century Central American Migrations (people's movements)

More about Borders



The French government abandoned the canal project, and the workers were left in the future republic of Panama.

Between 1904- 1914, the US constructed the Panama Canal and supported the creation of the new republic of Panama that also brought more people from the Caribbean and the United States to work and finish the most destructive ecological project in the region during the XX century.



Image by Douglas Carranza



From the Palenque Museum in Chiapas, Mexico. Polychrome stucco panel from Temple XIX with the face of the ruler U Pakal K'inich, who governed from 736 to 742 CE © 2004 Mary Ann Sullivan Buitton University

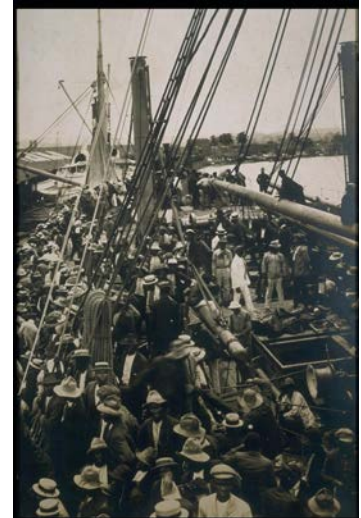
Irrigation is the ability to control the movement of the water in order to produce food and to nurture life. Ancient peoples were able to build complex systems of waterways. One example was in the ancient Maya city of Palenque, Palenque, under the leadership of King Pacal, was known for its ability to move the waters, that is, to irrigate in order to produce enough food for all the people who lived in Palenque. The ancient Maya of Palenque constructed complex subterranean waterways with locks that allowed them to flood the fields and even to grow the flower that was the symbol of King Pacal's power: the water lily.

Irrigation and waterways

The Panama Canal

The construction of the Panama Canal required the destruction of the northern tip of the Andes using dynamite. It also required leveling two oceans that at this juncture are not at the same sea levels. The construction of the Panama Canal required the construction of a series of locks capable of elevating and lowering cargo ships in order to accelerate global trade at the cost of human casualties.

This passage and the control of global trade was desired by the Spaniards since the 1500s and the French in the 19th century. The construction of the Panama Canal by the French brought thousands of Jamaicans, and Caribbean workers as well as large numbers of Chinese construction workers. Over 20, 000 workers died in the process.



The leader of the Pipil people, Feliciano Ama, moments before he was hung from a tree in January 1932



1930-1945
Military dictatorships in Central America forced the regional migration of entire communities to work in the Panama Canal, banana plantations and coffee farms. Nicaraguans, More than 20,000 members of the Nahuat El Salvador forcing the erasure and modification of the cultural identity of the original people.



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The creation of the banana plantations (1880-1998) in Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Guatemala, relocated thousands of workers from the Caribbean and modified the future workforce in the Central American and the Caribbean.

The XX century Central American Migrations (people's movements)

More about Borders



Photo by Douglas Carranza

1961-1990
Civil war in Nicaragua that ended the Somoza family dictatorship in 1979. More than 125,000 Nicaraguans were killed, and hundreds of thousands migrated mainly to the US.

1970-1992
The civil war in El Salvador was the result of people asking for better social and economic conditions. They were repressed by the military dictatorship where more than 80,000 were killed. The Salvadoran population migrated to neighboring countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico, and Belize. But the majority migrated to the US, today almost 3 million Salvadorans live in this country. They also migrated to Spain, Sweden and Italy where today represent almost 225,000 people living in those countries. There is also a large colony of Salvadorans living in Australia.

Central American Migrations in the XXI century

1998-2002.
Thousand fled to the US due to environmental hazards such as the case of hurricane Mitch in 1998 that devastated Honduras and Nicaragua destroying the banana plantations and killing almost 30,000 people. In 2001, El Salvador was hit by two powerful earthquakes that added uncertainty to the fragile economy of the population.

2008-2023
Massive migration mainly to the US due to gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Families joined massive concentrations of people that together marched in caravans through Mexico toward the US.

2018-2023
Tens of thousands of Nicaraguans fled the country due to political instability.



Nahuat School, Nahuizalco, 2023
Photo by Douglas Carranza



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Central American migrations to Mexico and the United States

The massive migration of Central American peoples to the United States began in the 1980s as a result of the civil wars that took place in El Salvador and Guatemala. These wars, which were largely funded by the United States, turned civilian populations into targets of disappearances, human rights violations and murder. The majority of the immigrants who came in this decade and in the first few years in the 1990s were escaping these wars and were traumatized by the violence they had endured. They worked hard to bring their families and also to turn their homes into safe havens for other immigrants who continued to arrive. After the wars ended other reasons generated the continued migration of

immigrants: the need for family reunification, but also poverty and other forms of violence.

In more recent decades immigrants from Central America continue to leave their countries of origin searching for opportunities, safety, the reunification of their family and escaping gang and institutional violence. In Mexico and in the United States they other forms of violence: sexual assault, organized crime, drug violence, and kidnappings. Immigrants are often turned into commodities and their lives and their well-being are traded for profit.

Mexican migration to the United States

Mexican people also migrate to the United States. People from all over the country but, especially, from poor, rural communities in the southern part of the country. They migrate escaping the violence. Since 1848, people from Mexico were trapped within the new US/Mexico border and were forced to initiate a process of family exchange and communication from both sides of the border. As a result, often times their identities were recreated. The Mexican revolution of 1910 also generated a massive migration that culminated in the resettlement of many families in the border cities in the US and beyond. In the 1942 an arranged agreement between the governments of the two countries created the Bracero Program that



Photo by Leonard Nadel. Bracero workers being fumigated at Hidalgo Processing Center, 1956. From the National Museum of American History

mobilized millions of Mexican rural workers to US and was extended with legal modification and restrictions until 1964. The economic disparity in southern Mexico has forced the movement of entire indigenous communities to the US. Today hundreds of thousand Zapotec, Mixtec, Maya, Purepecha, Coca, among others continue to migrate and establishing a transnational movement that has become permanent.

Large numbers of Central American and Mexican immigrants continue to live today unprotected because they lack documents and they lack a path to legalization that will give them access to basic human rights such as healthcare, job security, food, education, or political participation. Immigrants are not only owed reparations for being forced out of their countries by war and economic violence but also for the treatment they receive in the United States: family separation, cages, immigration detention centers for profit, human trafficking, worker exploitation, etc.

Solidarity

Immigrants have faced enormous obstacles but also numerous acts of solidarity, support from known and unknown others, they fill the hearts of immigrants with gratitude and joy. Examples are:
- The Central American solidarity movement
- Artist Call against US intervention in Central America
- Las Patronas

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Printing

- Print on tabloid size paper: 11 x 17 inches
- We recommend using a regular printing paper and not cardstock
- Print pages: 1 - 7
- Print pages single-sided
- Remember to print the pages as landscape and not as portrait
- Select “fit to page”
- After printing follow the folding instructions
- Stack all folded spreads to make one large book
- We invite you to stitch or alter your book in your own way.
- Send images of your finished book to: ambosproject@gmail.com

