

The Concentration

For this project I drew from two different ethnographies: *Fresh Fruit Broken Bodies* by Seth M. Holmes, and “Coming of Age in the Concrete Killing Fields of the U.S. Inner City” by Phillip Bourgois, et al. While the subjects of each anthropologists’ work are quite different, the expressed purpose of their research is essentially the same: To give voice to the silent suffering of oppressed communities and force the public to acknowledge their full humanity.

The big anthropological question of “Why does anthropology matter?” is one that can, just like all the rest, be answered in many different ways as there is no ‘right’ way to interpret it. However, there is one answer that, to me, rises above all the rest, and that is the use of anthropological research in fostering empathy and solidarity in those who are exposed to it. Additionally, I believe the question of “Why does graphic design matter?” could be answered in a very similar way, hence why I chose to combine these two concentrations for my capstone project.

The first of my posters draws its inspiration from the lives and suffering of Triqui workers as described in Seth Holmes’ book *Fresh Fruit, Broken Bodies*. This ethnography takes place between 2003 and 2004 and follows Holmes as he accompanied a group of Triqui migrants during their arduous journey across the U.S.-Mexico border. Further, by working with them on American farms, Holmes bore witness to the vast landscape of challenges faced by his Triqui companions, including a lack of healthcare, genuine respect, proper education, or basic human rights such as the right to dignity, fair wages, and individual agency. The biggest thing that stuck with me after reading this book was the normalization of this suffering, or rather the idea that, in a capitalist economy, certain groups must suffer in order for the rest of the population to benefit from a free market system. This is true, of course, due to the structural violence inherent within classist hierarchies, but that doesn’t make this way of thinking any less flawed, let alone any less damaging to those at the bottom. What it does do, however, is numb the public to very serious instances of injustice, something that can only begin to be undone by powerful methods of protest which, if done right, can serve to disillusion the public of internalized biases and subsequently foster genuine empathy, which is painfully difficult for us to ignore.

My second poster is based on the hyperincarceration of young men and boys in the Puerto Rican Inner City neighborhoods of Philadelphia, which Phillip Bourgois and his colleagues studied between the years of 2007 and 2013 and subsequently documented in the article entitled “Coming of Age in the Concrete Killing Fields of the U.S. Inner City.” This ethnographic article explains in painful detail the generational suffering caused by the chronic imprisonment of young men and the tragic, long-term effects of punitive humiliation, demasculinization, and isolation that inevitably result. A primary focus of the narrative is the story of Tito and his little brother Leo, who, due to profound structural inequities both find themselves in a cycle of incarceration, serving unconstitutionally long sentences for low-level or even accidental crimes as a result of police racism and the failings of our (in)justice system. Similar to the Triqui migrants, the suffering of these boys would otherwise have gone unnoticed if it hadn’t been for the work of anthropologists and activists such as Bourgois who worked to

spread awareness through their research in the hopes that the nuance and humanity presented in their work would help change the hearts and minds of previously unsympathetic individuals.

The Medium

Next year I will be pursuing a graphic design major in university; I am going into this knowing rather little about the field because although I have many years of fine arts experience under my belt, I have only had one semester of a graphic design class from which to pull. This being the case, I wanted to use this project as an excuse to learn more about the history of graphic design, particularly when it comes to the fascinating world of protest campaigns.

Back when I was doing research for my visual arts extended essay, I learned about the work of Emory Douglas, who worked with the Black Panther Party as their 'Revolutionary Artist' and 'Minister of Culture' from 1967 until the group disbanded in the 1980s (Steinberger, 2023). What really stands out to me about his work is his distinctive and confrontational graphic style, which is reminiscent of traditional block printing. By placing historically oppressed and continually ignored peoples at the center of his work, and by employing visual elements that are difficult for viewers to ignore, Douglas is fighting the widespread invisibility that his subjects often take on in the eyes of the public. Further, he claims to base much of his work on personal, real-world interactions--conducting interviews with and taking inspiration from people who were so often left out of the public record. This felt very reminiscent of the manner in which anthropologists conduct themselves and thus made Douglas' work even more relevant to this project, at least in my opinion. Lastly, in an attempt to combat the common misrepresentation of Black subjects in the media, Douglas prided himself on producing work which uplifted his subjects with "empathy and dignity"--this made his style the perfect basis for my poster focused around the lives of Triqui migrants, whose economic and social position strips them of both of these foundational human needs.

For my second poster, which is based on the suffering and hyper criminalization of Puerto Rican boys in Philadelphia, I took inspiration from Kemba Earle, a contemporary graphic designer out of South-London who does a lot of work with the Black Lives Matter and modern Women's Rights movements. Earle intentionally formats much of her work so that mimics the look and feel of newspaper headlines--e.g., her bold serif font and halftone effect--which are inherently eye catching. She is particularly focused on the use of powerful words and bold typography in her work, elements that I tried to emulate in my own design. Her use of brightly colored backgrounds are another element which serves to attract viewers attention, while also creating an interesting juxtaposition between the heavy-hitting subject matter and the more upbeat (for lack of a better term) color palette.

When asked about the role of art and particularly graphic design in regard to protest, she said something that really stuck with me: "Art has the potential to make complicated issues more understandable and allows people to connect with the issue on a personal level... graphic design plays a big role in protest and spreading the message of a movement, especially when

using typography. Activism is all about dialogue--from speeches to campaigns to public demonstrations--and words can be bold, impactful, and thought-provoking" (Levenson, 2023).

Works Cited

Bourgois, P., Hart, L. K., Karandinos, G., & Montero, F. (2019). Coming of Age in the Concrete Killing Fields of the U.S. Inner City. In *Exotic No More: Anthropology on the Front Lines* (pp. 19–41). essay, The University of Chicago Press.

Holmes, S. M. (2013). *Fresh fruit, broken bodies: Migrant farmworkers in the United States*. University of California Press.

Levenson, J. (2023, April 18). *The power of protest with graphic designer Kemba Earle*. It's Nice That.

<https://www.itsnicethat.com/articles/kemba-earle-project-graphic-design-politics-180423>

Steinberger, S. (2023, August 29). *In California, a legacy of political protest through graphic design lives on*. PBS SoCal.

<https://www.pbssocal.org/shows/artbound/in-california-a-legacy-of-political-protest-through-graphic-design-lives-on>

Word Count (excluding citations): 1147