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New Place, Old Story: Public Art, Migration, and History

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Introduction

Richmond, Virginia is a city filled with murals, from the Richmond Mural Project[1] to the Mending Walls Project.[2] This was not always the case. Historically, public art in Richmond referred to the massive Confederate statues looming over downtown, erected to further the “Lost Cause” narrative. Built decades after the end of the Civil War and during the rise of Jim Crow,[3] they were part of a movement to convince people that the Civil War was “was fought to protect Southern states’ rights, not slavery” that slavery was mutually beneficially, and “The South did not commit treason against the United States.”[4] By portraying Confederate generals as triumphant heroes through massive public artworks, they were able to construct a historical memory contrary to the reality of the goals and actions of the Confederacy.

Public art remains heavily relevant in shaping public historical memory, but public art and who the public is in Richmond has radically changed. Richmond murals started going up in 2012[5] and Confederate statues started going down in 2020.[6] In the past 20 years the student body in my school went from 6% Hispanic to 38% Hispanic.[7] The rise in both our Hispanic student population and the rise of murals makes teaching Chicana Muralism an obvious choice in my art room, particularly Judith F. Baca, a central figure in the history of this genre.[8]

This curriculum will specifically focus on her work *Great Wall of Los Angeles*, painted in collaboration with hundreds of young people through her organization Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC). Started in the 1970s, stretching half a mile along the flood wall of the Los Angeles River, the mural depicts the history of Los Angeles from prehistory to present.[9] Her art serves to not only allow my students to see themselves represented in art history, but her work provides context for thinking about Richmond’s history and future in regard to public art.

As opposed to the “Lost Cause” narrative which tells a white supremacist history that excludes both my Black and Hispanic students, the story the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* tells is of a multiethnic society that has always existed and that can inspire a positive future by serving to “encourage the public to imagine a social and cultural possibility never before contemplated-the formation of community,” a community where connections can fight bias.[10] Baca herself describes the purpose of a monument “to bring the past into the present to inspire the future.”[11] In Richmond, my Hispanic students have brought their past to a new place with a history that is being actively reexamined. By applying Baca’s approach to our own examination of Richmond

history, my hope is that we can all be inspired to build a brighter future.

Rationale

Larger regional growth patterns are reflected in the demographic changes in Huguenot High School. According to Fall membership data from the Virginia Department of Education, in 2005 our school population was 6% Hispanic. Of the 2% of students who were English Language Learners, only half of those students were Hispanic. Twenty years later, our student body is 38% Hispanic. Our English Language Learner population, now almost entirely Hispanic, has grown to 22% of the student body.[12]

These English Language Learners are overrepresented in my introductory art classes, out of the belief that the visual nature of art will be easier for them to be successful in while their English proficiency grows. As a result, I often have classes where most of my students have immigrated from countries in Latin America within the last few years and have low proficiency in English.

Old and new legacies of racism affect my new students. In 2013, 50 Latino students, parents, and activists at our school staged a protest over racist treatment from staff and administrators which included being “targeted for searches, threatened with deportation” as well as “substandard English-as-a-second-language instruction and interpretation services that were inadequate to facilitate communication among parents, students and administrators.”[13] This protest was met with repercussions viewed by many as retaliatory.[14]

Despite these hurdles, there have been positive changes. The dropout rate for Hispanic students at Huguenot High School dropped from 71% in 2017 to 26% in 2022 and the on-time graduation rate has risen from 28% to 73% in the same time frame.[15] I also see my students becoming active participants in the work to shape for themselves a more positive future. In January of 2026, the student-led Activist Association organized a school walkout to protest intensifying immigration enforcement. One of the student activists stated to interviewers, “Many people have been abducted by ICE — kidnapped; these aren't legal deportations, ...These are families, who are coming here for a better life, being kidnapped and taken away. And the students of this school feel terrorized.”[16]

That day, I joined participating students, shepherding them to the large plaza where the student organizers wrapped themselves in flags, carried large signs, and gave speeches. The atmosphere was buoyant and supportive as most of the school poured out to join in solidarity. While in this unit I consider Chicana art history, and I consider my Hispanic students, I hold that day in my heart when thinking about what can happen when all students feel empowered to shape their future.

Unit Content

Latin Americans in Central Virginia

The first wave of Latin American immigration to Virginia began in the 1950s, led by Cubans and Dominicans,[17] a demographic change represented regionally in Richmond with the establishment of a

Cuban social club in the 1960s.[18] The 1960s and 1970s brought a second wave of South Americans to Virginia,[19] but within Richmond the community was still small enough that evidence of a notable citywide population would not begin to appear after 1970.[20]

The biggest and ongoing wave of Latin American immigration to Virginia and Richmond specifically began in the 1980s with Central American immigrants largely fleeing civil war and violence. This has led to Virginia at present having “one of the highest concentrations of Salvadoran immigrants in the United States.”[21]

Why move to Richmond specifically? Why move to an area without no prior ethnic enclave?

Survey data published in 2009 showed most Hispanic migrants stated it was due to economic opportunities, whether for job opportunities or the lower cost of living.[22] This study does acknowledge their methods led to a lower representation of undocumented individuals.[23]

Preliminary data from an ongoing Virginia Commonwealth University oral history project, however, states the same economic motivation.[24] There is data to support moving away from ethnic enclaves can translate to more economic and educational opportunities, as due to comprising a smaller portion of the population ethnic minorities are perceived as less of a ‘threat’ by the dominant culture.[25]

According to the census, the Hispanic population of Richmond rose from 6% of the city in 2010[26] to 10% of the city in 2020.[27] The composition of the Hispanic population changed in Richmond as well. In 2010, the largest percentage of immigrants came from Mexico, with Guatemala and El Salvador as second and third respectively. By 2024, El Salvadoreans were the largest group by far, reflecting the large state population. Second and third were Guatemala and Mexico, with Honduras now fourth on the list.[28] However, many Richmond groups working closely with the undocumented Latino population believes they were widely undercounted in the 2000 census, resulting in an artificially lower statistical Latino population growth[29] and I agree. Either I have taught almost every Costa Rican teenager in Richmond or there are similar issues with this data today.

This population change has continued at such a pace that even recent scholarship discussing said change becomes quickly outdated. *Latinos in Dixie* studied the 165% growth in the Latino Richmond community from 1990-2000 and reported the population still small enough in 2009 to warrant “no immediately identifiable ethnic neighborhoods.”[30] This is no longer the case, as someone who lives and teaches in the southside of Richmond, which was identified in 2020 as one of the largest concentrations *statewide* of Virginia’s 10.6 % Hispanic population.[31]

To summarize the migration pattern represented through this data, within the last few decades a large and rapidly changing Hispanic community has been established in Richmond. They are mostly Central American, and largely first and second-generation immigrants. Coming mainly from countries profoundly affected by violence, many of them originally choose to move away from traditionally Hispanic communities for economic reasons, although this data most likely does not fully represent undocumented migrants.

Judy Baca

Background

Judith F. Baca is a Chicana painter, muralist, and scholar. Born in Los Angeles in 1946, her love of art started early. Forbidden from speaking Spanish when she entered school, she was allowed to paint instead. She went on to study art in college, earning her MFA in 1979.[32] At first invested in the contemporary style of modern

gallery art, Baca changed her thinking after her grandmother questioned what her art was “for”. This drove her to reflect on her Eurocentric education and shifted her focus to creating art for her community.[33]

Baca’s career has been defined by and begun with her work with young people. As she reported in a 1986 interview, she was hired by the city to teach art at city centers in 1970. She noticed both the complete lack of youth programming and the young people’s talent for graffiti. She began planning a mural with those youth, one that would become *Mi Abuelita*. She stated “They were already painting on the walls. It was a kind of natural step.”[34] Originally funded through the city, the political and personal subject matter of the murals began to attract detractors as well as supporters. In 1974, in order to get more freedom unavailable to them while operating as a city funded project[35] “Baca founded the City of Los Angeles’ first mural program, which produced over 400 murals and employed thousands of local participants, and evolved into an arts organization known as the Social and Public Art Resource Center (SPARC).”[36]

Chicana Muralism

Baca’s work bears visual and ideological similarities to Mexican muralism, a style of murals born from the Mexican Revolution that served as a visual mode of advocacy and inspiration towards political action.[37] However, she states that when she began painting murals she hadn’t heard of Los Tres Grandes[38] (the three major artists of Mexican Muralism, David Alfaro Siqueiros, Diego Rivera, and José Clemente Orozco[39]). She would later read their manifesto at a Marxist study group[40] and would attend a workshop in Mexico led by David Siqueiros,[41] one of Los Tres Grandes considered by some to be most responsible for telling history from a revolutionary lens.[42] Siqueiros would prove a huge stylistic influence as Baca would utilize his “musical ratio” of visual space in later murals.[43]

Her work must be understood against the broader political movements of the time. Judy Baca joined the Chicano Moratorium (a march against the disproportionate Chicano cost of life in the Vietnam war, which ended in state violence against protestors)[44] and has cited its influence on her life.[45] The Chicana/o Art Movement which followed “can be seen as a cultural expression of this spirit of resistance” with muralism as one of the movement’s key art forms, seeking to “center questions of place and belonging, cultivating a symbolic language of autonomy.”[46] All this took place against the broader Chicano movement, which started in the 1960s as a fight for equal rights by Mexican Americans (Chicanos), and included the United Farm Workers of America’s fight for better wages and working conditions.[47]

Great Wall of Los Angeles

This curriculum will be focusing on her work the *Great Wall of Los Angeles*. The mural, the longest one in the world, is “located in the Tujunga Wash drainage canal in the San Fernando Valley.”[48] The project began in 1974 when the Army Corps of Engineers sought to work with Baca in transforming the floodwall into something other than an eyesore. Originally planned to feature California history from prehistory to 1910, the work has expanded to cover subsequent decades. Unique in the project is her historical narrative: the mural is “history seen from the viewpoint of California ethnic groups: Their contributions and their struggles to overcome obstacles.”[49] The ongoing project represents strongly her philosophy of community engagement, “employing more than 400 youth and their families from diverse social and economic backgrounds, artists, oral historians and scholars.”[50] The 80 youths that worked with her as well as a team of artists and historians the first summer were all referred from the criminal justice system. She supervised the design and direction of each artist and team.[51]

While my students need significant background knowledge on Baca’s historical context, the environmental

context makes perfect sense to them. Los Angeles and Richmond are urban areas. Working in an urban Los Angeles is part of Baca's self-definition. As well as a muralist and a public artist, she has defined herself as an "urban artist, because so much of what I try to do is really associated with an urban environment" Continuing to define what she meant by the term environment, she said "I use that term really loosely, because I think about the environment including the social situation as well as the physical situation." [52] Nick Earhart sees this specifically in *Great Wall* saying that it "reflects an environmental dimension of the Chicana/o Art Movement." [53] The lack of amenities my students in the urban center of Richmond have access to and how affected they are by climate change compared to richer and whiter outlying suburbs have been acknowledged by the city as environmental racism, and the city of Richmond is working to address it. [54] While Baca does not use the term environmental racism in any of the sources I found, I see this thinking in her consideration of the environment on her work.

Judy Baca speaks often about the relationship between the *Great Wall* and the fact it sits on the flood wall of a river that was purposely concreted. She compares it to an atrophied and hardened artery, saying that the *Great Wall* "is a tattoo on a scar where the river once ran." [55] I feel this connection keenly in thinking about the James River, the major river Richmond has always depended on for life, named for kings both before and after European colonization. [56] It floods as well, yes, but if it were concreted, I would not think it progress.

Historical Corollaries

The end goal of this Unit is to adapt the *Great Wall* for Richmond, using the stylistic and narrative choices Baca did to tell the ethnic history of Richmond. My goal with this project is for students to learn to think broadly about history as a long timeline (we will be covering more than 500 years of history) and narrowly about history as specific to place (how is Richmond history different than history in other places?). In doing so students will be required to research heavily, especially using primary sources, and in doing so they will fill gaps in both their knowledge of historical events and in who participated in them.

Because the *Great Wall* has taken more space and time than available to the average art teacher, I have selected only 5 sections that I felt like I could draw strong corollaries between Los Angeles and Richmond history. My criteria were based on gaps in my student's historical knowledge, areas of representation I knew would be of strong interest for them, and an even chronological spacing. I also considered the subdivisions made by SPARC in their online tour. [57] I additionally considered what could be adapted for almost any other art classroom in the United States – every state has an indigenous history, every state has a history with colonization, every state experienced war, every state has been a battleground of civil rights activism.

Indigenous History

The Great Wall begins the history of humans in California with the migration of people over the Bering Strait, and representations of the Indigenous Chumash people and their origin myths and culture. [58] Rooting our exploration of history and art the same way is essential for my students, whose knowledge of Indigenous Virginia past and present often begins and ends with Pocahontas. Virginia has been occupied by humans for tens of thousands of years [59] and so this history is extensive, and so much like Judy Baca focuses just on the Chumash, we can narrow our focus to the people of Tsenacomoco. Known to the English as the Powhatan Confederacy, after their leader Powhatan, this was a political alliance of different Algonquians groups from the region [60] including the local Mattaponi and Pamunkey tribes.

Here is where we must be specific to place. The Chumash would have lived different lives than the Plains Indians, than the Algonquins. Baca depicts the Chumash 'ap dwelling, aloe, golden poppies, yucca, the

rainbow bridge that brought the Chumash to the mainland, the relatives that fell off and became dolphins, and Chumash animal spirits.[61] Coastal Virginia indigenous origin stories involve the work of The Great Hare making water, making land, making sacred deer and filling the world with people.[62] The people of the Powhatan Confederacy would have hunted with atlatls, farmed corn, squash, beans, and tobacco, and buried their dead in earthen mounds.[63] They would have worn necklaces of carved shells[64] and richly woven turkey feather mantles.[65] They would have lived not in tipis, as my students often assume thanks to movies, but instead in *yi-hakan*, oval shaped houses with a wooden pole frame and covered in woven mats.[66] All these artworks, animals, and stories have motifs students can use in planning a mural featuring the pre-colonial history of Virginia.

Judy Baca begins her representation of European colonization with a white hand reaching out to grab a naked brown body, SPARC describes this as “a metaphor for the cruelty and devastation colonization would bring.”[67] They then go on to subtitle the following section “The Myth of Discovery”, immediately dispelling the notion that America was ‘discovered’ by Europeans, since after all, Native people already lived here. This “announces the aim of the mural, rejecting narratives of discovery and myths of peaceful exchange.”[68]

This section features the arrival in Los Angeles of Gaspar de Portolá’s 1769 expedition. The mural features him chasing “visions of gold and of Califa, the fictional Black warrior queen for whom California may be named”[69] The following panel is titled “Indigenous Perspective”, showing communities regarding the incoming ships with unease. Then, “Junipero Serra”, founder of the deadly Mission system and at one time revered, is depicted as part donkey, masterfully using cultural associations to immediately visually discredit Serra. Viewers are shown these events through the eyes of Native people, and even those without historical background knowledge would come away with the understanding they were destructive. And they were - the Native population of California is estimated to have been at 310,000 in 1769 and would plunge to between an estimated 12,000-16,000 at the end of the 19th century. Much of this could be attributed to illness brought by European colonizers, but “Forced labor and poor nutrition, as well as unsanitary conditions under the Spanish Mission system further worsened the situation.” Today, Indigenous people represent only 1.7% of California’s population.[70]

The Indigenous people of California and Virginia faced different European colonizers in different circumstances at different times, but both interactions had devastating effects. In Virginia, Tsenacomoco ranged from a population of 13,000 – 22,000 directly before the arrival of Europeans.[71] Virginia was the site of Jamestown; the first permanent English colony started in 1607. Much like in Los Angeles, violence towards Indigenous people from colonists followed. The Powhatan Confederacy would collapse after intermittent warfare as they sought to drive colonists off their land.[72] After, “Many died from disease and starvation, after being forced from traditional homelands by colonists seizing land for farms. Others died in direct conflicts with the English. Constant small-scale murder and skirmishes were interrupted by occasional large-scale wars, including major uprisings in 1622 and 1644 and brutal suppression during Bacon's Rebellion in 1676.”[73]

Today, only 2% of Virginia’s population today is Indigenous.[74] At our school, indigenous students are well represented only within our growing population of Latin American students. The Valentine Museum affirming this by reporting that after Spanish-language mass in Richmond “one can hear several speak indigenous dialects such as Mixteco (Mexico) and Quiché (Guatemala).”[75]

Despite this, the cultural, political, and physical absence of Native people contributes to my student’s belief in the myth of the “Vanishing Indian” a “pervasive myth that there are no more Native Americans.”[76] Part of the absence is demographic - many indigenous people were killed by disease and colonists. However, part of

the absence is based on political power. If *contemporary* Indigenous art, stories, knowledge and history are not prioritized to enter libraries, museums, classrooms, and media, then it seems as though they “disappeared”. After all, “Historical narratives are premised on previous understandings, which are themselves premised on the distribution of archival power.”[77] The only time I have seen a Native person represented in public art in Richmond is ridiculously inaccurate statues of Pocahontas.

The Mattaponi and the Pamunkey still provide a treaty-mandated[78] tax tribute of deer to the Governor of Virginia every year as they have for 350 years. The Mattaponi[79] and Pamunkey both still hold their reservations in Virginia, with the Pamunkey tribe stating of their reservation that “This peninsula is possibly the only land left on the East Coast that has never been ceded and is still a home for Pamunkey people and knowledge.”[80] By weaving Indigenous history throughout the entirety of a Richmond mural project, we can counteract this myth of the “Vanishing Indian” the same way Baca does as she returns to Indigenous history multiple times after European contact.

European Colonization

Virginia was one of the original 13 colonies and thus incorporated into what became the United States of America immediately.[81] At the same time, California was part of the Spanish Empire and then later part of Mexico. SPARC’s description of the *Great Wall* panels depicting the establishment of Mexican California, they conclude “Mexico’s promise that missions would return land to Native people remained virtually unfulfilled.”[82] Baca shows once again her commitment to history as a narrative of intersecting experiences, not separating Indigenous and Latino History but rather acknowledging them as interacting. California would not become part of the United States until it was ceded as part of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hildago in 1848.[83] This ended the Mexican American war. In the Mexican American War panel on the *Great Wall*, the battles between Mexicans with rifles and mounted Americans with sabers does not glorify war, instead the horses trample through the California Republic flag and directly into a pan of gold. This is followed by panels depicting major African American leaders in early American California.[84] By depicting them at the same size, Baca is saying that the work of these individuals in abolition and diplomacy is of equal importance to a major geo-political event, which again intersects different histories: showing how the start of American California history is African American history.

There is no shortage of representations of the beginning of American Virginian history in a state nicknamed “The Birthplace of America”[85] An easy way to represent this period in Richmond through a mural would be to portray Patrick Henry’s “Give Me Liberty and Give Me Death” speech. Given by a local delegate at a local church, the speech is impassioned and represents the turning point where colonists realized reconciliation with England was not possible, and instead they must raise money and arms to fight. The Revolutionary War would start less than a month later.[86] The visual language is compelling: a central figure, a dramatic speech, themes of freedom, and beautiful architecture.

However, this breaks with Baca’s portrayal of history of focusing on the underrepresented, history as an ongoing narrative rather than specific moment. Michel-Rolph Trouillot underscores the issues with this when discussing the issues with the reality of choosing 1492 as the definitive start date of European colonization. “First, chronology replaces process” He states. Equally, I would prefer my students to understand cause and effect rather than be able to memorize a list of dates. “Second, as intermingled processes fade into a linear continuity, context also phases out.” The goal of this project is to return the context of all the actors involved in history, not just major figures. Finally, “The isolation of a single moment thus creates a historical ‘fact’.”[87] Students can state “Patrick Henry gave a speech in Richmond in 1775.” But do they know what that means? I

would rather them be able to articulate relational meaning.

For this section, it is vital to use Baca's philosophy of developing the visual language alongside the communities[88] and young people[89] she worked with rather than dictating it. How do my Black students, whose ancestors were not included in the Thomas Jefferson's promise of freedom approach this period? How do my newly arrived Latin American students, hearing the story for the first time rather than having absorbed the mythologization of it through United States public life, approach this period?

The 19th Century

In the *Great Wall's* panel titled "California Gold Rush", a white man panning for gold is depicted as equal size to a large block of text reading "white only" with the Confederate battle flag[90] in the background. SPARC explains, "Though California entered the Union as a free state, forms of enslavement, racial discrimination, and violence persisted." [91] Baca does not let us think of the Gold Rush and the Civil War as events separated by time and geography, reminding us that racism and support for racism persists in all parts of America, even outside the battlegrounds of the war. Baca also firmly depicts a multiethnic society, showcasing Chinese immigration despite bans and violence, as well as in the last section highlighting "The invaluable contributions of immigrants, often historically dismissed." [92]

This violent history is inescapable in any representation of Richmond history, being the capital of the Confederacy itself.[93] This legacy of this history is also present in the experiences of both my Black students and my Latin American students, as the vast majority of enslaved Africans were taken to Latin America rather than mainland North America, specifically to Brazil and the Caribbean.[94]

While many visual representations attempt to communicate the horror of slavery to counter the Lost Cause narrative, I know simply representing Black pain without any agency will not interest my students. Instead, the Richmond panel for this section could feature Gabriel's Rebellion of 1800, the Union spy Mary Bowser, and the businesswoman Maggie Walker.

Gabriel's Rebellion was one of the "most extensive slave plots in American history, a conspiracy known to hundreds of slaves throughout central Virginia." Aborted by a massive storm and then by involved slaves informing their masters, the original plan organized by "a charismatic blacksmith named Gabriel" was to "enter Richmond with force, capture the Capitol and the Virginia State Armory, and hold Governor James Monroe hostage to bargain for freedom for Virginia's slaves." [95] Despite its lack of success, it demonstrates a long, organized resistance to slavery.

Mary Bowser was born enslaved to the Van Lew family in Richmond in 1846. De jure rather than de facto enslaved thanks to the peculiarity of inheritance law, Elizabeth Van Lew sent her to Philadelphia to be educated. She would then later return to Richmond, where she leveraged others assumptions about her to serve as one of the most successful members of Elizabeth Van Lew's spy ring, to the point where, in a quote of Van Lew's diary cited by Encyclopedia Virginia states that Van Lew wrote "When I open my eyes in the morning, I say to the servant, 'What news, Mary?' and my caterer never fails! Most generally our reliable news is gathered from negroes, and they certainly show wisdom, discretion and prudence which is wonderful." A struggle in representing this part of history in our mural will be that, thanks to the reality of spy rings, much of Bowser's work was obscured. In fact, the fact that she was a spy at all was confirmed only in 2013.[96] As Michel-Rolph Trouillot says, "Silences are inherent in the creation of sources, the first moment of historical production." [97] Balancing this reality with the benefit of the primary sources will be a crucial part of student research.

Maggie Lena Walker was born in Richmond towards the end of the Civil War. Her mother was enslaved and worked during the war for the same spymaster as Mary Bowser. In 1903, Maggie Lena Walker would found and serve as the first president of the St. Luke Penny Savings Bank, becoming the “first African American woman to charter a bank in the United States” She was also a celebrated political activist, organizing the local chapter of the NAACP and serving at the national level.[98] By representing the resistance, agency, and success of Black history during one of the darkest centuries in Richmond history for racial equity, we will echo Baca’s philosophies towards telling an expansive and community rooted history.

The 20th Century[99]

The “Forebears of Civil Rights” panel of the wall feature nationally known figures like Martin Luther King Jr, and Rosa Parks. Visible through the bus window next to Rosa Parks is police violence against LGBT people in the panel “Gay Rights” and a multi-racial group sits at the table for a “Daughters of Bilitis” meeting and at the bar for the “Mattachine Society”. Again, Baca does not partition histories – LGBT people and people of color are not distinct groups of people, their history and communities overlap.

An excellent option to represent this period in Richmond is the work of Barbara Johns. Frustrated by substandard segregated education facilities, supplies, and treatment, Johns and two others organized and executed a school walkout and strike in Farmville, Virginia. When the district did not meet their demands for an adequate school building and demanded they return to school, strike organizers contacted Richmond NAACP lawyer Oliver Hill, who took the case. The NAACP took up the argument, calling for the integration of Prince Edward County altogether, rather than the prior demand of simply an adequate but segregated building. This case, combined with others, would “set in motion the legal challenge that would become part of *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which ruled school segregation unconstitutional.”[100] This would be blocked in Virginia with “Massive Resistance”, years of legal challenges where districts would close schools rather than allow integration. Prince Edward County schools closed from 1959 to 1964 rather than allow Black students to attend with White students. White students were allowed to continue their education in private schools; Black students had no such option.[101]

When my students look through yearbooks from this time in our school library, it takes only minutes for them to notice and ask, “Why are all the students white?” Although the order to integrate our schools was lifted in 1972[102] , the fight continues. Integration has not been realized - in 2022, our school district had the highest level of segregation between white and Hispanic students statewide, a rate that has drastically risen in past decades.[103]

There is still positive motion, as seen when “in 2020, Virginia chose to replace a statue of Confederate General Robert E Lee with one of Barbara Johns in the United States Capitol’s National Statuary Hall Collection.”[104] The narrative of history constructed by public art in Richmond is broadening to celebrate those that worked towards a more just society, rather than those that worked to preserve slavery. This curriculum works to enable even my newest newly arrived students to be part of that movement.

Teaching Strategies

Digital Murals

While this curriculum envisions a mural painted traditionally, digital art, collage, and more can accomplish the same goal in a more transportable way. Student art can be projected on walls, or disseminated in a virtual space. Digital art has been a huge part of Baca's process, so much that since 1996 she has led the Digital/Mural lab as part of a collaboration between UCLA and SPARC.[105]

Gabriela Rodriguez-Gomez argues this as type of digital art can "transport the community experience of Chicana/o/x, Mexican American, and Indigenous peoples from local to global audiences." [106] Alma Lopez, another Chicana muralist and contemporary of Baca, utilized digital copies of murals to allow them to circulate when the physical copy was destroyed.[107] Digital art software can allow students to paint digitally in the style of Baca.

Community Engagement

Oftentimes my students are used to the art classroom as a place of free expression. However, as they develop the illustrations for this project, they should be seeking community feedback and consensus as much as possible. While Baca spearheaded the design and implementation of the *Great Wall*, she also worked closely to ensure the mural represented the desires of the community, as discussed above, rather than her own design. This forum can change depending on where the mural is painted – this may involve seeking feedback from the school community through physical or digital public comment, or physical or digital meetings. The teacher ought to support the students in distinguishing how to listen to feedback: not every critique is valid, not every criticism must be internalized, but this *public* art must reflect the *public* as much as the artist. Often students are taught to *give* critique, here they should learn to *take* critique.

Classroom Activities

Students will be drafting and painting a mural. The following activities were designed for an afterschool group to paint a wall inside the school, but in my experience libraries and community centers are equally amendable to this type of work. The benefits of working with an afterschool group is more control over the numbers: 30+ students cannot all work on the same panel, as well as more control over the students that join: the level of research asked of students is easier for students with grade-level reading skills, which is usually a minority of my classes.

My population in mind for this project is students who are at or above grade level but are not given as much attention during class as I scaffold for the majority of students below grade level, and so this project is an opportunity for them to dive deeper into art than they can during the day.

This project is designed for around 15 students meeting 2 hours a day once a week over 9 weeks, with work due in between meetings. I recommend an application process for students to join the afterschool group, not to limit access to interested students, but to ensure students participating are committed to the whole project.

Week 1

As a group, students will be introduced to the history of the Chicano/a arts movement (resources to do this can be found in the annotated bibliography) the broader social context, and Judy Baca. Being geographically far from the epicenters of these movements, students may have little prior knowledge except for their prior knowledge of similar struggles for civil rights by Black Americans in the South in the 1960s, and thus the teacher should bridge these understandings. After establishing the context, students should explore the *Great Wall of Los Angeles* both visually and historically. Students should analyze the style, and how the visual choices help tell the story. Students likely have a range of prior knowledge of the events depicted in the *Great Wall*. For the events that had international significance and they may know well such as World War II, they can compare how Baca portrays the event versus other portrayals they may have seen. For events they know less well, like the Mission System, they can guess on what the event was based on how it is portrayed and analyze how Baca made them think that. Students will be introduced to the overall project of creating a similar ethnic history but of Richmond and within the school over the course of 9 weeks. Students will discuss the steps they will need to take to start and finish a large group project in a reasonable timetable. Students will analyze the Indigenous California section of *the Great Wall* and be given resources to research about Indigenous Virginia. Students will be asked to come next week ready to begin drafting designs based on what they read, and so should be told to pay attention to plants, animals, artwork, architecture, fashion, and other visual elements of the information they read.

Week 2

As a group, students will explore the “Musical Ratio” present in Siqueiros and Baca’s work. Students will identify how visual elements such as shape and color create dynamic compositions and show depth of field. The teacher should collect student research from the prior week and demonstrate how to create a draft based on the research, and ask students for feedback, modeling a collaborative process. Before splitting from the group, students should review the steps of the mural process and establish norms for collaborative work. In my experience students often struggle painting someone else’s design or struggle with sharing the work. The first step is to allow the students to develop norms to hold them accountable for sharing the work throughout the painting process.

Students should be split into groups, switching halfway through to underscore the importance of collaborative work.

In the first group, students should prepare all mural materials on an easily stored cart, loading it with brushes, paint, drafting tools, tape, drop cloth. Students in this group should then tape off the wall, lay down drop clothes, and prime the wall. Students should then divide it into the 4 different sections of the mural. When the whitewash has dried, students will use rulers, measuring tape, and levels to divide the wall into a grid of one foot by one foot, lettered and numbered (for example, square 1A, square 2A etc.) to transfer the paper design.

In the second group, students will create different drafts of the Indigenous Virginia section based on collected student research from the previous week and provided teacher research. Students will use rulers draw a one inch by one inch grid on their draft, lettering and numbering it so that they understand square 1A on their gridded drawing will go in square 1A on the wall, despite the different size between one foot and one-inch squares.

In the last 20 minutes, all students will make sure the mural supplies are completely cleaned up and put away. Then, students will come together as a group to provide feedback on wall designs, with the teacher modeling

the critique process to underscore it must be a community approved design, rather than the sole work of an individual.

However, it is still the teacher's responsibility the wall looks good, so after students leave the teacher should prepare a final draft based off student work. Make multiple copies of it for students, with the same grid as the mural panel. Students should be assigned homework to research the Colonial period and bring their research to the next meeting.

Week 3

As a group, students will review their research and drafting expectations. Students will be introduced to outlining expectations, and how to use the grid method to transfer the design square by square in order to ensure proportionality. Students will then review the process of creating the design based off research, discussing what was easy and what was hard.

The students will divide into groups, the first creating a pencil sketch of the mural design for the Indigenous Virginia section while the second drafts the Colonial Virginia section. The groups will switch, and when pencil outline sections of the mural are approved they can be gone over with a dark paint marker for a higher contrast draft. Students should be reminded to only do the outline for now.

The same as last week, students will clean up, come together at the end of their time together to discuss their designs and the teacher will create a final draft to be given to students next week. Students should be given the list of historical figures from the 19th century mentioned in the research above and asked to read about them before next week so they come ready to discuss.

Week 4

As a group, students will discuss their reading, their feelings around their reading, and how to represent those figures. Where have they seen slavery and abolition represented in art before? What was it saying and how did it use art to say it? Students should review the relevant sections of the *Great Wall* and talk about how Baca shows the featured abolitionists and other Black leaders. Students will discuss how to use visual elements to show progress from slavery to freedom, and how to represent this thoughtfully for their peers.

Students will split into groups, one drafting the Colonial Virginia section of the mural, the second using given research about the 19th Century in Richmond to draft their designs, including typical fashion and photos of relevant landmarks. Students will come together in the last 20 minutes to go over designs and approve them before next week. Students will be asked to read about Barbara Johns and come ready to share, teacher should take care when finalizing the 19th century design.

Week 5

As a group, students will discuss their prior knowledge and emotions about Barbara Johns. Students who have families who have lived in the area for a long time likely have personal family history with the matter. Many of our students immigrated from Latin America have experienced interrupted schooling or school loss due to poverty. Almost all our students experienced being out of school for COVID-19. How will personal experience influence our artwork?

Students should split again, working some on outlining and some on drafting the 20th Century section. The

Massive Resistance Oral History Project conducted by Virginia Commonwealth University from 2011-2012[108] is a wealth of primary sources for students to listen to as they consider how to represent this time. The teacher should finalize the design for next week and prepare a guide for the flat colors of the mural, represented for students like a paint-by-numbers sheet. This has been a successful student mural technique in the past for me, as it allows for corrections without painting over too much detail and allows for consistent color mixing and application given drying times.

Week 6

As a group, students should reflect on their work thus far. Students should review the community-oriented nature of their work and review some of Baca's community involvement techniques. Students should draft their own ideas and format for receiving feedback from the school community on the mural in progress. These ideas should be implemented by the teacher over the next week, in a format that can allow the teacher to screen for inappropriate responses.

The teacher should introduce the concept of painting flat colors first before adding details to a mural. The teacher should introduce the paint-by-numbers technique mentioned above used to create a cohesive color scheme and allow a large group of different people to fill in a large area. Students should review earlier agreed upon norms of collaborative work, as in my experience any minor interpersonal fight during a mural quickly becomes a major paint fight.

Meanwhile, the students should split into groups. Some should outline the 20th century section; others should begin to paint the flat colors of the mural.

Week 7

Students should meet as a group to discuss feedback from the school community and decide where and how to change the design if needed. Students will complete the flat color of the mural and clean up.

Week 8

Students will use paint markers to draw over the flat color of the mural with details. After cleaning up, students should meet as a group reflect on their work and to discuss the ways Judy Baca and SPARC present the *Great Wall* to the public. How do they talk about their work? What kind of signs can we hang up to explain our work to people passing by? Students will begin to brainstorm ideas individually or in teams and come together at the end to share ideas. The teacher should collect the ideas into a shared document for next week.

Week 9

Students should reflect on their progress so far and finalize their ideas for education surrounding their artwork. Most likely this will be plaques or essays describing the visual element choices, research, personal feelings and personal experiences. Have the students sign the work and take pictures to promote school wide to promote a feeling of accomplishment and celebration within the school community.

Annotated Bibliography

Oral history interview with Judith Baca, 1986 August 5-6 in the Smithsonian Archives of American Art

Readily available online, this interview with Baca is an excellent background for teachers, an excellent example for students of the power of a primary source, but also a good resource for art-career minded students to pursue as a very honest look at Baca's career.

Chicano and Chicana Art: A Critical Anthology edited by Jennifer A. González, C. Ondine Chavoya, Chon Noriega, and Terezita Romo

Focused more on the philosophy and the practice than a history textbook, and with chapters by Baca and other major artists and scholars, this is an excellent resource for teachers with only a passing understanding of Chicano/a art.

Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History by Michel-Rolph Trouillot

This book is an excellent exploration on more meta questions of historiography: what makes it into the archive and the narrative and what doesn't, and how does power come into play?

Imagined Communities by Benedict Anderson

While this curriculum is about a specific community, this book broadly explores how ethnic and national communities are formed, especially in the modern era. A good starting point for teachers examining the *why* of much of post-colonial Latin American history and how it impacts migration to the US.

Latinos in Dixie: Class and Assimilation in Richmond, Virginia by Debra J. Schleef and H. B. Cavalcanti

Having been published in 2009 much of the statistics are outdated as the Latino community in Richmond continues to grow. However, their rigorous exploration on how class, race, national origin, religion, gender, and more impact the formation and expression of ethnic identities is a good resource for thinking outside the homogenization that can occur under the "Hispanic" umbrella.

Harvest of Empire: A History of Latinos in America by Juan González

This book is my most recommended primer for any teacher without a political science or history background seeking to understand why your classroom demographics are as they are. Many chapters chart the history behind the migration patterns of specific countries to America, and the different ways immigrants from these places were treated by America depending on the particular crosshairs of Cold War era interventionism they found themselves in. This book was most helpful in answering my question as to why Virginia has such a large El Salvadorean population, and what precipitated this migration.

Smarthistory.org

This website is full of resources I would recommend for introducing Mexican Muralism more broadly to students. It compiles videos, essays, photos, and more resources by Art History experts and introduces and summarizes in a way scaffolded for student understanding. Much of the resources are geared towards the AP Art History curriculum, and you may need to scaffold the essays for students who are less fluent readers.

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This curriculum meets the Virginia Department of Education Standards of Learning for the Visual Arts for Art 1 in multiple ways.

This curriculum meets standard A1.3 concerning student analyzation of how visual organization communicates ideas by requiring students to analyze both *Great Wall* panels and their own draft panels for the Richmond Great Wall in order to determine how Baca uses limited space to depict a complicated and long event, and how to emulate her choices.

This curriculum meets standard A1.2 concerning student exploration of a diverse range of artists and art movements and their cultural context by exploring Judy Baca and the Chicana art movement.

This curriculum meets standard A1.17 concerning student creation of artwork [109]in response to art history by having students create their own mural in the style of Judy Baca.

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